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Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo
stevensa@ptd.net

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Austria-Hungary 1914: Nationalisms in a Multi-National Nation-State

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“Austria is disunity and partition into petty states, darkness, Jesuitism, reaction and the whorish way of doing things of the patriarchal rule of the police.”
- Ludwig Bamberger, Radical German émigré, 1859

“We shall have a little parliamentarianism, but power will remain in my hands and the whole thing will be adapted to Austrian realities.”
- Emperor Frantz Josef, 1861

“…civilized states by and large have adopted that organization which, in the whole continent, rests on historical foundations only in Hungary.”
- Ernő Nagy, Nagyvárad Law School Professor, 1887

Introduction

“Austria is disunity and partition into petty states, darkness, Jesuitism, reaction and the whorish way of doing things of the patriarchal rule of the police,” wrote Ludwig Bamberger, an early radical, in 1859. Yet, four decades later on the eve of the 20th century, the Austrian Empire enjoyed an economic prosperity that was the most impressive in Central Europe. Vienna became a world-recognized center of scientific and cultural achievements featuring personages like the Moravian-born Jewish physician Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) in the new science of psychology and the Pole, Carl Menger (1840–1921) in economics. Who doesn’t know of Franz Liszt (1811–1886), born in Hungary and who performed in the salons of Paris and Vienna? The Strauss waltzes by Johann (1804-1849) the father and his sons made Vienna synonymous with refinement, renowned for its cuisine and fashion in the gay ‘90s. Operettas like “The Merry Widow” by Budapest transplant Franz Lehár (1870-1948) provided the bridge between the 19th and 20th centuries while celebrating Austro-Hungarian genius.

In 1914, the nation’s borders sprawled north to Poland and Russia and west to Germany, Italy and the Mediterranean. Austria-Hungary in the 1910 census was less than a quarter German (23.9%) or Magyar (20.2%); the two combined did not account for the majority of the nation’s population that also numbered Czechs (12.6%), Croats (5.3%), Italians (2%), Slovaks (3.8%), Serbs (3.8%), Slovenes (2.6%), Ruthenes (7.9%) and Romanians (6.4%).

The Empire had provided legal emancipation to more than a half-million Jews earlier than any neighboring country and the Roma, commonly known as Gypsies, had contributed immensely to the popular culture in spite of stubborn social prejudice against them.
Yet, the Great War that began in 1914 was ignited by separatist nationalism that assassinated the Empire’s Grand Duke in Serbia. It was left to post-war treaties to dismember this multi-national state into a puzzle of competing nationalities that have yet to re-establish the stability and prosperity of 1914 when the country was whole.

The questions I raise are these: Was the multi-national nation-state of Austria-Hungary a historical aberration surely to be avoided? Or, rather, was it an imperfect but prophetic expression of today’s European Union?” Hence my title for Austria-Hungary in 1914: “Nationalisms in a Multi-National Nation-State.”

1. Nationalisms and Civilizations

The word play invoked in the title for this presentation cries out for some definitions.

“Nation” is the root term and its historical variants are encumbered against a historical backdrop. The Italic root is “NAT-”, indicating “birth” or “origin;” whence “nativity” and “nature.” We often think of “nation” as the place where one is born, but for most of human history, birth was into a relationship rather than to a place. With that relationship came a common heritage of historical existence, inherited cultural norms and, of course, language. The primary meaning of “nation” is relational to social belonging within a specific group: “place” enters the definition only derivatively and more recently.

We cannot completely discard, however, the role of location in consideration of nationality as a relationship. Social relationships are anchored by time and place as people of the same nation adapt to circumstance and environment. Hence, history gives us “Ostrogoths” and “Visigoths” as defining terms of “eastern” and “western” to the Goth nation.

The technology of travel and communication also alter the application of “nation.” Compact interrelated groups may be nations, but a small size defines “clan” or “tribe” rather than “nation.” Contrariwise, modern communications summons groups in Diaspora to a common identity with movements such as “Pan-Germanism” or “Pan-Slavism.” Migration forced by material need is perhaps the major reason for evolution and differentiation among linguistic nations, but the imposition of alien nationality by military intervention is no less important. In fact, the definition of “empire” leans heavily on the notion of “disparate nations under a single ruler.”

The topic of Austria-Hungary in 1914 and its nationalisms, therefore, does not contradict the idea of a multi-national nation-state, since this definition presumes that the different national identities are not only alive and well, but simultaneously balanced and harmonized.

The starting point for my analysis requires a quick excursus into how Sir Arnold Toynbee treats of multi-national states in the history of civilization. He links the Hellenist era to the
Roman Empire in a continuous civilization. Both represent a break with more ancient civilizations such as the Egyptian and Persian which incorporated subject nations differently.

Previous to the Hellenist policy, nationality was summarized in religious symbolism: since the conquering ruler was divinely ordained, fealty required the conquered peoples to honor the Emperor with worship. The Pre-Greek ancient civilizations looked not so much for the “divine right of kings,” as it for “the right of divine kings.” The Hellenist approach was to syncretize a nation’s deities with those of Hellas, so that worship of any patriarchal deity such as Amun-Ra or Ba’al Samen was simultaneously adoration of Zeus; similarly, Aphrodite was also honored as Isis (Egyptian) and Ishtar (Babylonian).

This Hellenist religious syncretism may not have been universally successful,¹ but it proved a more palatable religious accommodation than outright repression. It certainly permitted the Hellenist hegemony for commerce and law that made Greek Western civilization’s lingua franca. Successor state Rome was more interested in commerce and domination than in religious syncretism or even than in the Latin language. A considerable respect was afforded conquered nations under the legal construct of “lex gentium.”

In effect, the Roman Empire created two levels of law. The most local law followed established religious customs for worship, inheritance, marriage, and contracts and was faithful to the existing law of the conquered people. At a higher level, one that required tribute to Rome and ensured commerce and transit within the Empire, were the Roman statutes. These statutes were not designed to interfere with local practice, but only to regulate practices that competed with public order under Roman rule. While Rome considered itself the hegemonic “gens/people” it recognized that other nations although subjugated were also “gentes/peoples.” Providentially, even when the Julian emperors began to demand worship as gods, the lex gentium exempted the Jewish religion in which such worship would have caused rebellion.²

This Roman concept allowed the Empire to outlast its pagan origins, since the same concept of lex gentium became the operative concept behind the creation of a Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne in the year 800 AD. One notes that in history this proved to be neither holy nor Roman nor an empire, but with the rise of the Hapsburg dynasty in the 15th century, the country now known as Austria was a featured contestant in the struggle to use the title of Holy Roman Empire as a lever of power.

1 The “abomination of abominations” was reportedly the statue of Zeus placed in the Temple of Jerusalem to be syncretized with the Hebrew, Yahweh.

2 The lex gentium did not apply to Christians, since their religion soon included believers from different nations besides Jews. Christians would be persecuted because their creed lay “beyond the bounds” (super stitio from super-stare) of any one nation. This is the justification for the persecution by Domitian, last of the Flavian dynasty.
2. The Hapsburgs and Austria from Napoleon to the Ausgleich

The Napoleonic age rendered this imperial fiction meaningless and after the Battle at Austerlitz on 6 August 1806 the last Holy Roman Emperor Francis II abdicated that title, contenting himself as Emperor of Austria (Eastern Germany) alone. For the next half-century, Austria and Prussia wrestled for hegemony as the principal German state unifying the congeries of duchies and principalities into a single nation. Religion played a major role as Prussia in the north favored the Lutheran and Reformation creeds, while Austria remained mostly Catholic. Following its defeat in only seven weeks in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, and the cession of its Italian provinces around Venice, Austria began to look south to the Balkans and eastward to Hungary for opportunities of expansion.

This historical background suggests that nationalisms can be separatist and centrifugal or unifying and centripetal. The phenomenon of Austria-Hungary 1867-1914 exemplifies the interaction of both tendencies within nationalism.

Abandoning the struggle of Austria against Prussia as the hegemonic power in a united Germany, Austria-Hungary was created as a multi-national state by signing a treaty or Ausgleich or historic merger of Austria and Hungary as two countries under one monarch. The Emperor, Franz Josef (regnum 1848-1916) was ruler at the beginning and was to be there at the end in 1914, with a reign of 58 years that demonstrated his ability to survive as much as his ability to rule.

The connection to Hungarian sovereignty had begun much earlier when King Louis II of the Jagiellonian dynasty had lost his life in battle against the Turks at Mohács in 1526. But that relationship was based on the necessity for Hungary, once invaded and divided by Ottoman Turks, to rely on a Catholic protector for its Christian population.

The Turks had utilized the Catholic-Protestant theological divisions to establish a Calvinist-dominated sub-province in the northeast sector of Hungary near contemporary Debrecen. Taking advantage of the conflicts during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), the Ottoman appointed ruler, Prince Gábor Bethlen of Transylvania, successfully attacked the Austrian-supported Catholic Hungary in 1619, and laid claim to the Hungarian throne, i.e. the Crown of St. Stephen. This history is very complicated and includes Bethlen’s renunciation of the title of king based on a condition of enlightened decree of freedom of religion (1621) before that from any European country. Although the Prince of Transylvania’s aspirations to be monarch of Hungary were thwarted by other European powers, France eventually supported one of Bethlen’s successors, Ferenc II (Rákóczi). The idea was to use Hungarians as French pawns to resist Austrian Catholic domination. Seeing through these deceptions, Rákóczi opted to declare total Hungarian independence, issuing an unenforceable devolution writ from the Hungarian crown to the Austrian monarch (Josef I) in 1707, an action for which Rákóczi is much admired in Hungarian history. Defeated in battle in 1708, he was forced into exile, first to Poland where he was offered the crown at the machinations of Russian Tsar, Peter I. He eventually settled in the Turkish dominions after 1717, where he gathered leading dissenters from Austrian domination. A melody reputed to be one of his favorite musical pieces was orchestrated by Franz Liszt in “Rákóczi’s March,” as part of Hungarian Rhapsody, Number 15 and served as unofficial anthem of Hungary until the 19th century.

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With the catastrophic loss of Austrian prestige and the crushing of its aspirations to lead a united Germany after the 1866 war, the decision to create a dual monarchy with Hungary seemed the salvation of a bad situation for both defeated Austria and sovereignty-deprived Hungary. The Emperor was famously to have quipped: “We shall have a little parliamentarianism, but power will remain in my hands and the whole thing will be adapted to Austrian realities” (Molnar: 207). But his wife, Empress Elizabeth, loved in Hungary as “Sissi,” had prepared Hungarians to view the Ausgleich quite differently: “What Vienna gave the Magyars as a punishment, the Hungarians received as a gift” (Molnar: 210). It is more telling, therefore, to view the nationalities’ project through the Magyar lens, rather than the Austrian one because the former was innovative, while the latter was merely temporizing.

3. The Nationalities Law of the Hungarian Experience

The new Hungarian Constitution affirmed in law most of the reforms sought in the 1848 convulsion led by Lajos Kossuth, the dashing advocate of total Hungarian independence within an imagined Danubian Confederation (Lendvai, 256 ff.). The premature republic sought by Kossuth collapsed and he left his homeland for exile. The pieces were picked up by Ferenc Deák (1803-1876) who also had played a key role in 1848.

The heart of innovative reform was in the Nationalities Law that was essentially an 1868 reiteration of Law VIII promulgated on 28 July 1849 in the southern Hungarian city of Szeged. It guaranteed equality to every citizen “with equal rights, to whichever nationality he belongs.” (cited in Lendvai, 294, fn. 23).

While Austria may have pretended that its concessions had left it as the ruling power and the Hungarian partners of secondary importance, the legal basis for the entire Empire was closer to the Hungarian aspiration. Despite fealty to the same monarch, each country had its own independent parliament, used its own currency (although each was acceptable to the partner) and shared little more than an integrated army and a common foreign policy.

The 1868 Nationalities Act conferred on the Croatian Assembly or Sabor the same autonomous power as Hungary because Croatia was recognized -- as were Bohemia and Moravia for Austria -- as historically pre-existing nations now freely joined within the multi-national nation state for mutual protection and progress.

Deák accepted that the Dual Monarchy had not brought complete independence to Hungary, but he was willing to accept compromise based on the insight of the great Hungarian patriot, Baron Istvan Széchenyi (1791-1860): “If the Hungarian earthenware were to knock against the German and Slav iron pot, it would soon be shattered.”

Recognizing the Realpolitik of the moment, Deák wrote of 1867:
Most European powers are so great and have at their disposal so much power that Hungary could not exist in their midst as a single, independent country without an alliance offering secure support. Fate has placed our country in the midst of Great Powers, each of which could undoubtedly sweep us away with its superior armed force if it believed that we stood in the way of its wishes and plans. (Cited in Lendvai 281.)

The logic that a small nation needed to merge with a larger, more powerful one to preserve its identity would become the reason both for expansion of the Empire and for its undoing.

Offering itself as defender of Christianity against Ottoman persecution, the Empire moved southward to absorb recalcitrant Balkan provinces such as Bosnia and Herzegovina under its protection (1878) and eventual annexation (1908); or north where Bohemia and Moravia had been aligned with Austria against Prussian dominance. The Magyars fostered a similar expansion into Transylvania, transitioning from a province under the Ottomans (1571) to liberated Christians a little more than one-hundred years later (1687) and finally as participants in the multi-national empire. Such also was Croatia’s status. The southern Polish province of Galicia (1793) was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the third partition of Poland since it had survived the Napoleonic restoration of Poland as its Baltic provinces.

Technically there was not one country by the name of Austria-Hungary but a multi-national “Cisleithania” (Hungarian: Ciszlajtánia) or "Lands represented in the Imperial Council." Law required all documents to be published in 8 official languages. To govern this diverse, multi-national government, the principal partners, Austria and Hungary, divided responsibilities towards the smaller nationalities. Then each of the partners created an executive committee of 60 members who met with their counterpart to discuss joint matters once a year, meeting alternately in Vienna and Budapest. From these yearly meetings came laws for all of the Empire “by means of the Emperor’s confirmation” (Lendvai 285).

No doubt, placing this structure on top of the sovereign decisions by each country as well as by their constituent members created a confusing and inefficient apparatus. The delegations could only rehash decisions already made by their separate and equal national assemblies but without the power to change them. Writing in The Man Without Qualities, a historical novel about this period, the Modernist author, Robert Musil (1860-1942) assessed the experience of supra-national government this way:

4 “German: Cisleithanien, also Zisleithanien, Hungarian: Ciszlajtánia, Czech: Předlitavsko, Polish: Przedlitaivia, Croatian: Cislatanja, Slovene: Cislatanja, Ukrainian: Приділітатія, transliterated: Tsysleítâtânia) was a common yet unofficial denotation of the northern and western part of Austria-Hungary, the Dual Monarchy created in the Compromise of 1867—as distinguished from Transleithania, i.e. the Hungarian Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen east of ("beyond") the Leitha River.” At times the Ukrainians were designated as “Ruthenians” and Rumanians were included as the Transleithanian Province of Transylvania. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cisleithania.
...the national movements...were so violent that they jammed the machinery of government and brought it to a dead stop several times a year, but in the intervals and during the deadlocks people got along perfectly well and acted as if nothing had happened.” (Musil 30-31).

The Hungarians developed a legal theory for these autonomous nations based on the notion that the Magyar nation originated not from the will of a monarch, but of an Estates General consisting of nobles who elected the ruler. Bizarrely, a 19th century legal professor, Ernő Nagy (1853-1921), mystically linked possession of the 11th century Crown of St. Stephen with the right to national sovereignty based on the sentiment that “the Holy Crown is the same for the Hungarians as the Lost Ark is for the Jews.” Moreover, Nagy considered the Hungarian model to be the fundamental progressive basis of all Western civilization.

While these paeans of praise from the Magyars were clearly exaggerations, the material reality of Hungary after 1867 was truly transformational. The economy of Hungary expanded fivefold between 1870 and 1910. The traditional agricultural base underwent an industrial phase of food and grain preparation, based on scientific principles of cultivation and marketing.

Scarcely a generation after the Ausgleich, Budapest had grown to a metropolitan area of over a million persons and was the largest milling center for grain in Europe, outsized only by Minneapolis, Minnesota (Kontler 309). The Ganz machine works was “a main workshop” inventing the transformer (1885) and producing the first electric locomotive. The carburetor for combustion engines was invented by János Csonka at Ganz (1891) and the first subway in Europe was built in Budapest in 1896.

Hungarian Jews enjoyed emancipation as nowhere else in Europe and constituted a quarter of Budapest population, earning the sneers of Austrian anti-Semites that the city was better called “Judapest.” The public educational system was free and excellent. Six of Hungary’s eight Nobel Prize winners went through the system, as did other notables such as composers Béla Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly, with philosopher-sociologists György Lukács, Károly Mannheim, and Károly Polányi (Kontler 306).

5 "De sacra corona regni Hungariae ortu, virtuti, victoria, fortuna... brevis commentarius. " Baron Péter Révay de Szklabina et Błathnicza: 1613.

6 It was joked that Hungarian was the language spoken by the physicists for the Manhattan Project, speaking English only when Oppenheimer was in the room.
4. **Undermining Multi-Nationalism with Centrifugal Nationalisms**

The success of the multi-national state in many important socio-economic matters, however, was not without its contradictions. This legal establishment of multi-national diversity was not always honored in practice, as nationalistic forces in Austria and Hungary tended to see their own nationality as hegemonic within the Empire and able to direct policy unilaterally. Ultimately these forces undermined political stability and, once the outcome of the Great War was settled, led to the dismemberment of the Empire.

The dissolution process for multi-national states is addressed by Sir Arnold Toynbee in *A Study of History*, his multi-volume masterwork of civilizational analysis. In a chapter (XVIII) entitled “Schism in the Body Social” Toynbee analyzes the role of nationality and religious minorities within empires. I would add that his Hellenic prototype of internal proletariats fits the Austro-Hungarian experience. (Somervell Abridgement, Vols. 1-VI: 375 ff.).

According to his analysis, the effort to incorporate national minorities requires the education of elites drawn from the non-hegemonic minorities. These recruits are placed within social administration of the state and initially perform the tasks of integration. But with the passage of time, these persons become aware that they have not achieved equality with the dominant group.

They become “a large and ever larger floating population of ‘stateless’ exiles,” writes Toynbee (376), who viewed the effort of assimilation as “the cruel process of ‘deracination.’” This elite possessing considerable organizational and professional skills is reduced to functions as a proletariat at the mercy of exploitation.

These first recruits had been disinherited in the first instance by being robbed of a spiritual birthright: but of course their spiritual impoverishment was often accompanied, and was almost always followed, by pauperization on the material plane, and they were soon reinforced by recruits from other classes who were material as well as spiritual proletarians from the start.” (Ibid, 377-78).

Initially, these nationality elites believe in their prospects for successful upward mobility as a nationality minority. However, they encounter mounting frustrations and eventually realize that what was a promising future is a disguise of perpetual inferiority. The consequence is disillusionment with the hegemonic power and bitter rejection of the assimilative ideal. In other words, the internal proletariat of the subordinate nationality group moves from a nationalism that is centripetal, favoring union with the larger and dominant group, to a centrifugal expression that seeks separation from the metropolitan center.

Toynbee finds an example for this type in the Jewish Maccabees’ rejection of Hellenist assimilation.
When we come to examine how these victims of injustice reacted to their fate, we shall not be surprised to find that one of their reactions was an explosion of savagery which surpassed in violence the cold-blooded cruelty of their oppressors and exploiters. (Ibid, 378).

Given Toynbee’s classificatory genius, the assassination of the Archduke by the Serbian nationalists in the Black Hand is not a surprise. To be clear, the assassination was the beginning of the First World War that spelled the end of the Empire, but it was a culminating act against decades-old misguided policies, rather than an unexpected rupture of normality.

I would like briefly to sketch the competing visions of the Empire for its internal proletarian nationalisms and why for both Austria and Hungary the post-war dismemberment was self-inflicted.

5. Austria’s German Bias

Austria’s policy towards nationalism reflected Vienna’s obsession with 19th century power games. With the amputation of its aspirations to lead all of Germany, Austria no longer was one of continent’s “great” powers at the beginning of the 20th century: that status had been relegated to Germany, England, France and Tsarist Russia. Austria offered itself as the necessary protector of small territories and cultures against Muslim Turkey.

Its foreign policy after 1878, when awarded Serbia as a protectorate by the Congress of Berlin, was to compete with Russia in accumulating the frayed ends of the Ottoman provinces. Thus did German Austria seek to preserve its sphere of influence and prevent Russian penetration into the Balkans.

Carrot and stick are tools of empires. Seeking to pacify rising Serbian nationalism, Austria-Hungary allowed Serbia to assume sovereignty as a kingdom within the Empire in 1882. This “bought time” while the economic ties took hold. Austria’s industrial and commercial bases were constructed upon exploitation of the underdeveloped Balkan territories. For instance, railroad lines linked Serbia to Vienna and the establishment of commercial credits for Serbian agricultural products built up a mutual dependency that delivered 84% of Serbian exports to Austria-Hungary at the beginning of the century.

This economic dependency might have been broken if Serbia had been permitted to follow a natural expansion of its borders into Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would have provided Serbia with an Adriatic coastline among its kindred Balkan Slavs professing Orthodox Christianity.

But taking advantage of a revolt against Ottoman rulers in Turkey in 1908, Austria instead formally annexed both Bosnia and Herzegovina, keeping itself as intermediary for economic development.
The annexation simultaneously thwarted Russia’s appeal as the great power protector of Pan-Slavic nationalism and those professing Orthodox Christianity and propped up an increasingly unpopular German hegemony.

Austria often justified its imperial aspirations by arrogant expressions of German superiority to Slavic backwardness. Vienna viewed itself as a more enlightened and progressive master of the Serbs, Bosnians and other Balkan peoples than the retrograde Russian Empire.

This prejudice, however, undermined the foundation stone for the multi-national state which rested on legal equality for all nationalities. It produced a propagandistic downward death spiral because the more Austria deprecated Russia as Slavic, the less appeal it had as legitimate government for Slavs in the Balkans. The more the educated Slavic Balkan elites protested, the more they were repressed. The more repressed, the more violent became their resistance. The more violent their resistance, the more savage was Austrian reprisal.

6. Magyarization and its Consequences

Hungarian policy towards nationalities had its origin on a higher plane and more noble political premise of equality. The eclipse of the liberal generation of 1848, however, gave power to conservatives, most notably Kálman Tizsa (1875-1890), the longest serving Prime Minister in Hungarian history.

Key to understanding the regression away from the enlightened Nationalities Law is the attitude towards Croatia. Déak in 1861 had stressed that Croatia was equal to Hungary as a nation-state and not merely as a nationality in diaspora. It became “Hungary’s Achilles heel,” however, because of a refusal to allow the Croats to assemble their own parliament, or Sabor, as had been promised. Simultaneously, the country’s nationalities suffered from the Magyarization of public service and the school system, notoriously culminated by the Lex Apponyi under a Minister of Education by that name (1906-1910).

As in Austria, the natural elites of the nationality minorities chaffed under the repression that violated multi-ethnic promises and the spiral of resistance followed a similar dark path.

7 “Croatia possesses its own territory. It is in a special position: it was never incorporated into Hungary, but was our associate, sharing our rights, our duties, our good times and our hardships.” Déak, 1861: cited in Lendvai, 297, ftn. 24.
8 Gusztáv Gratz, former Hungarian foreign minister, writing in The Era of Dualism (1934) cited in Lendvai 298, ftn. 25.
9 “In 1910, 96 per cent of civil servants, 91.2 per cent of all public employees, 96.8 of judges and public prosecutors, 91.5 of secondary school teachers and 89 per cent of medical doctors had Hungarian as their mother-tongue. Similar percentages were found in the staffs of libraries, publishing houses and newspapers” (Lendvai, 301, ftn. 5). This elite representation compares to the slight majority of Hungarian speakers in the population (54.5%).
We can perhaps absolve Hungarians for believing that linguistic Magyarization was an antidote to the siren of Pan-Slavism, Croatian separatism or Polish unity. With the 13th century devastations from the Mongols, ethnic Magyars had been virtually wiped out.\(^{10}\) For centuries, the unity of the region had been based, not upon blood descent, but upon adoption of the Hungarian language.\(^{11}\)

What cannot be forgiven is the wanton perpetuation in 19th century Hungary of its top-heavy social structure, affording hereditary privileges to noble families despite the obvious contradictions of this feudal practice to the liberalizing spirit of the reconstituted monarchy. Moreover, the resultant social distance of an anachronistic class structure was magnified by the practice of *latifundia*. The concentration of landed property in the hands of so few distinguished Hungary in negative ways from all its European neighbors except Romania. Nearly 200 of the nobility each possessed lands of more than 15,000 acres and one alone, Prince Móric Esterházy, owned a quarter of Hungary’s agricultural fields himself. Kontler notes:

> Hundreds of thousands of peasant families literally vegetated on plots of a few acres. These were utterly incapable of any sort of modernization; and whereas most of the major landowners successfully participated in the capitalist economy, these successes contributed to the consolidation of the economic power and social prestige, and the preservation of much of the political influence and value system, of the traditional elite. (Kontler 305).

Faced with such a punishing future, the poor peasants of the Hungarian plain, or *puszta*, desperately sought passage to America in the two decades immediately before and after the turn of the century. They worked in the mines of Pennsylvania and its steel works; they toiled in the textile mills of Philadelphia and the iron works shops of New York and Newark, usually hoping to earn enough money to return to Hungary and buy land.

The exodus put even greater burdens on those left behind, with harder work and longer hours. The remedies for workers were membership in unions and the organizing of strikes for better conditions, but these were distant from the rural areas and every manifestation was brutally repressed.

Meanwhile, life in the city offered scant relief, especially for the other nationalities. Magyarization reserved influence and privilege to those with Hungarian names and long-standing national identity. Thus, along with the Germanic hegemony in the Austrian

\(^{10}\) See Kontler, 78ff.

\(^{11}\) “Anthropologically and even culturally, ‘Hungarian’ is an extremely mixed phenomenon, so that no such a thing as ‘pure stock Hungarian’ in this sense has existed since time immemorial. As a result the only criterion to establish the continuity of a Hungarian people is language; the history of Hungarian origins is the history of a community whose genetic composition and cultural character has been changing, but which has assuredly spoken Hungarian or its predecessor language for the last few thousand years.” Kontler, 34.
counterpart, the Magyarization in Hungary reduced the aspiring other-ethnic elites from full participation in society. The internal proletariat created by these biased policies mobilized the migrant communities in exile towards more radical political change. These exile groups became Toynbee’s “external proletariat.” They agitated on the continent and from America for redress of the endemic ethnic inequalities that had become part of the social and political structure of the Empire.

Finally, we must register how scarcity and economic downturns stimulated rebellion against the status quo. Toynbee wrote:

The radiation of any civilization may be analyzed into three elements—economic, political and cultural—and, so long as the society is in a state of growth, all three elements seem to be radiated with equal power, or, to speak in human rather than physical terms, to exercise an equal charm. But, as soon as the civilization has ceased to grow, the charm of its culture evaporates. Its powers of economic and political radiation may, and indeed probably will, continue to grow faster than ever, for a successful cultivation of the pseudo-religions of Mammon and Mars and Moloch is eminently characteristic of broken-down civilizations (Toynbee: 405-406).

Mars was definitely the major player in the dissolution of this multi-national expression of civilization after 1914.

7. Aftermath

This paper is not about the Great War, but a few items merit comment here. First, the military effort of Austria-Hungary on the eastern front against Russia was largely successful, especially after the Bolshevik revolution took Russia out of the war. Moreover, Austria’s other traditional enemy, Turkey, was on the same side.

Second, when it was apparent Germany was going to lose the war because of the American entry in 1917, the prime ministers of both Austria and Hungary unsuccessfully sought a separate peace with the Allies.12

Third, Wilson’s fourteen points, upon which the peace treaties were based, called for autonomy of the Empire’s ethnic minorities and not for full independence. It was largely because of the pressure of the exiled minorities in Paris, London and New York that small independent states were carved out of Austria-Hungary. Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and Austria surrendered what became Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

12 Austria’s treaty was different from the Treaty of Versailles signed with Germany: Austria made peace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, while Hungary was forced to accept dismemberment in the Treaty of Trianon.
Lastly, the West foolishly presumed that independence would bring about liberal democracies as an inevitable consequence. They were wrong. Moreover, in the victims of the dismemberment, nationalisms grew as touchstones of revenge and restoration, of anti-Semitism and militarism. This opened Austria to fascism, culminating in the Anschluss with Nazi Germany (12 March 1938). Hungary under the dictator, Admiral Miklós Horthy, sided with the Axis in order to briefly regain territories lost after the World War I.

8. Conclusions

One can question whether the multi-national state has proven to be either a success or a failure, based on the historical experience of Austria-Hungary as viewed retrospectively from 1914, one hundred years ago. This paper does not pretend to resolve that sticky problem; however, I venture my opinion that any judgment ought to originate from the premise that Austria-Hungary did not show the respect for nationalisms promised in the 19th century when the Dual Monarchy was established. In other words, it offers a vision of what a multi-national state may look like, but not enough of consistent policy to make itself into a model of multi-nationalism.

The second question is whether the Austrian-Hungarian model anticipated in any way the current multi-national cooperation of the European Union.

I begin by suggesting that the genesis of the European Union was very different from the political opportunism of the 1867 Ausgleich. Nonetheless, the issues such as common defense, language variation, coordinated policies of public services and a host of commercial and business practices were essential elements of the convivium invited by the Empire. These same features figure in other multi-national states that have followed in history. The most notable of these imitators was Yugoslavia that federated five nationalities, including those previously in the Empire.

However, we must additionally note that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was also designed as a multi-national state. Since the breakup of the USSR into constituent nations, it has become fashionable to consider it to have been a failed state. However one may view communism as a socio-economic system, one of the positive results of the Communist Revolution was the creation of several nations with notable tolerance and intermarriage among different nationalities. While Chechnya illustrates the limitations of this tolerance, the larger picture suggests a relatively successful integration of various nations.

Certainly, the most likely point of comparison of 1914’s Austria-Hungary is today’s European Union. In the contemporary European Union, there are clear signs that cohesion has been achieved by the centripetal force of most nationalisms.

To repeat the effect of this nationalism, I would suggest the following. In order to achieve a greater prosperity generated by international trade and commerce while avoiding division, the participating nations of today’s European Union, like those in the 19th century Austro-Hungarian Empire, gain by belonging to the greater whole. Croats and Slovenes today, like
Croats and Slovenes within the Empire of the 19th century, view membership in the larger European community as providing advantages that isolation as separate entities would not.

I would also suggest that the dominance of centripetal nationalisms does not eliminate the functionality of centrifugal nationalisms. I infer, instead, that the two opposing forces of nationalisms balance each other.

The desire to benefit the local community is centrifugal nationalism, arguing that each of the peoples must think of themselves first and foremost. However, the need to extend commerce and share technological progress persuades the members of the EU to continue as parts of the larger whole. This is my definition of centripetal nationalism, pulling the disparate parts toward the unifying center.

When in the Austro-Hungarian Empire the smaller nationalities failed to see advantage to membership within the Empire for their peoples, the centripetal nationalism was overwhelmed by the centrifugal forces that culminated in the establishment of small separate nation states. We do not yet know if this will be the ultimate fate of the EU, for there are certainly centrifugal nationalisms throughout Europe.

Nonetheless, the dominance of the centripetal or centralizing force does not negate the co-existence of separatist tendencies.

Another factor in creating balance between the two types of nationalisms may be the role of the supra-national parliament. In Austria-Hungary this joint council was terribly inefficient, yet it served as safety valve to blow off tensions between the partners. In a similar way, the current European Parliament for the Union has many new nationalistic, viz. centrifugal, representatives. But while they reflect the desires to nullify policies imposing uniformity, their dissent is contained within structures for dialogue.

Thus, a balance is maintained between the centrifugal and centripetal nationalisms. I suspect that the separatist trends in Scotland against the United Kingdom and in Catalonia against Spain are balanced with the centripetal nationalisms in both places that seek admission to the European Union as compensation for independence from the metropolitan power.

A final reflection on nationalisms within a multi-national nation-state concerns the United States of America. Here, one need distinguish between multi-culturalism and nationalism. Multi-culturalism is a result of liberalism which accedes to individuals the choices of membership in different social groups. Nationalism, race and religion are all surrogate choices within the framework of liberal democracy.

To these, I would add a new regionalism that shadows the 19th century division between the northern states faithful to the constitution and the southern confederate states that claimed the power to nullify the laws passed by a majority population. It is worrisome that those
rejecting the democratic will of the majority today base their dissent upon a claim to more authoritatively represent the “real” America and sometimes merge their political activism with white supremacists, militia groups armed with military weapons, and anti-scientific religious theories that justify bigotry and racism. These trends also marked the Austrian Anschluss once a balance with multi-nationalism went unneeded.

The nationalisms within the United States of America that are comparable with the issue under discussion concern the states conquered and annexed after conflicts with Mexico in the 19th century as well as the island of Puerto Rico, an American colony. Canada has a similar conquest origin for its multi-national diversity as both English and French, as well as immigration that creates a multi-cultural dynamic in addition to the nationalisms.

America’s strong tradition of multi-culturalism for immigrants has historically overshadowed matters related to the Hispanic nationalism in Puerto Rico and the Southwestern states. It is not uncommon in American culture to lump these conquered peoples with immigrants who voluntarily chose the United States as a new country. At present, the only significant revanchist nationalism with centrifugal impact is in Puerto Rico.

However, the rise of an internal proletariat composed of qualified professionals from these colonial groups and the racial minorities does offer a parallel to the factors that ultimately undid the Austro-Hungarian Empire. An effective analysis of the American future, I would think, requires the prism of Toynbee’s civilizational process. Learning from the Austro-Hungarian Empire one hundred years ago is the place to start. And the deciding voices may come from among Mammon, Mars and Moloch.
WORKS CITED


