

For the gathering Austrian anti-Semitic movement the role of Magyarised Jews in the new Hungary only further enflamed anti-Magyar sentiment. Prejudiced stereotyping did pick on one feature of Magyar ruling-class politics which really existed, namely its powerful national drive, strengthened by the ability of traditional social leaders to infuse their values into broad sections of the developing middle class. If in some respects Dualist Hungary was becoming less different from the rest of the Monarchy than before, its dominant mentality was as distinctive as ever – and all the more resented.

Magyar Hegemony – a Unique Socio-ethnic Structure

The key to Hungarian distinctiveness in the Dual Monarchy was the stronger position of the Magyars as a dominant group, compared to the Austro-Germans. Here history and geography interacted. The thousand-year-old Hungarian state was a geographical unit, consisting of the Danube basin and its mountain rim, with semi-autonomous Croatia, a later addition, stretching between the rivers Drava and Sava towards the Adriatic in the south-west. Ensnared in the central plain, the Magyars had been able to maintain their historic hegemony over the non-Magyar periphery despite their reduction to a minority of the total population under Turkish rule.

In the Dualist period substantial assimilation to Magyardom took place through urbanisation, as towns more strongly bore the impress of a Magyar-orientated state. Their population grew from two and a half to three times faster than the countryside's, so that by 1910 just over a third of Hungarians lived in settlements of more than five thousand. Budapest was a particular magnet for the whole country. The great bulk of its growth between 1850 and 1910 (from 206,000 to 1,109,000 in its modern boundaries) came from in-migration. Yet despite the very varied origin of incomers, over the whole period the proportion of Magyar mother-tongue speakers in the capital rose from a third to 80%. The hundreds of thousands of Magyar identifiers who returned themselves in censuses as bilingual in Magyar and some other tongue give a clue to what was happening; very many of these people were former non-Magys, or their children, who on moving to a town had opted for a Magyar identity. Besides urban assimilation, other processes worked to swell the Magyar proportion of the population, whether by absorption of scattered non-Magyar settlements in the central plain (Petőfi, born Petrovics, had

sprung from one of these) or the comparatively high Magyar birth rate and lower rate of emigration than non-Magys. The result was that an overall Magyar minority of 46.6% in 1880 had become a majority of 54.5% by the census of 1910.

The great bulk of this Magyar population was congregated in two blocks, the major one being the core area in the Danube basin, the minor one the Szekler-inhabited language island in eastern Transylvania. There, in 1890, Magyars constituted 7.4 million out of 8.4 million inhabitants. Another 900,000 Magyars lived outside these areas among 7.7 million non-Magys, making up barely 3% of the six most strongly Slovak counties of the north-west. Yet even there Magyarisation made strides. In 1880 Slovaks had been the absolute majority in nine of the fourteen leading towns of what is now Slovakia, and the highest Hungarian percentage had not exceeded 28%. Thirty years later, there were five Magyar and only four Slovak majorities.² The Romanian case further illustrates the importance of towns to Magyar dominance. The nearly three million Romanians (1910) were the largest of the non-Magyar nationalities and formed an absolute majority in Transylvania, but their highest proportion in a town of any size was only 29% in Braşov, where 12,000 Romanians lived.

Altogether probably over a million people were assimilated to Magyardom after 1880. The matter has not ceased to be controversial, with Hungarian historians defending a distinction between voluntary and forced Magyarisation (*magyarosodás/magyarosítás*) which is quite correct in general terms. Undoubtedly, most assimilation occurred as a result of people's adaptation to a social milieu rather than political fiat, and for Jews and German speakers, who made up the bulk of the assimilees, it was generally seen positively, as an aspect of modernisation and/or Hungarian patriotism. Yet it is equally true that the social milieu was shaped in part by a specific dominant culture, whose attractiveness state power saw it as its duty to foster. This is why assimilation cannot be separated from the ideological intentions of the Dualist ruling class. Magyarisation was both its goal and, to the extent that it occurred, its legitimisation. Whereas the Austro-German Dualist elite justified its role in terms of a vague and somewhat arrogant claim to *Kultur*, its Hungarian counterpart had a clearer and in its way less elitist goal: to make Hungary fully what it already was in the Hungarian language, Magyarland (*Magyarország*). Quite what role this left for the non-Magyar 'nationalities' (the term by which they came to be known) was a matter on