

Szőnyi László Gyula

## **Resolution of Post- War Social Conflicts: The Case of Törökbálint**

*The passenger who comes to Budapest from the West would not think that this most-developed, “occidental” region of Hungary went through the fires of adversity in the decades following World War II.*

*The population in the Swabian-majority settlements was forcibly relocated and substituted, only a part of them remained, and most of their houses were taken by migrated Magyars – evicted people from Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, wartime (or post-wartime) refugees, cottars from Eastern Hungary (due to the “democratic agrarian reform”) and people who had to leave their motherland as a result of the Czechoslovak–Magyar Population Exchange Agreement.*

*Our theme treads on extremely sensitive ground in Central Europe, as well as in Hungary. Across the border it gets under the skin of the Germans, Magyars, Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians and nationals of former Yugoslavia. And on this side of the border we might encounter their descendants’ fear and anger – wounds together with offences by Magyars from Eastern Hungary and from across the border, as well as the Swabians. It is apparent that the conflicts were and are not only between nations and ethnic groups, but also among Magyar circles.*

### **Swabians in Hungary**

The settlements of Budapest’s Western sector were almost completely destroyed during the time of the Turkish Conquest (XVI–XVIII<sup>th</sup> centuries), and the great majority of them were resettled by Germans (referred to as Swabians), who inhabited several villages: Budaörs, Budakeszi (where the current German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joschka FISCHER comes from), Zsámbék, Etyek, Nagykovácsi and Törökbálint. A small proportion was resettled by Slovaks, eg. Sósút, Tárnok; also Magyars; and Serbs in Érd.

While the majority retained their national (primarily German)

character, by the turn of the century their “Magyarisation” had accelerated. This process continued in the first part of the XX<sup>th</sup> century as well.

Before a large population began streaming into these villages, there were three groups in the village: “original” German-conscious Swabians; “original” Magyar-conscious Swabians, and relative newcomers who nevertheless had been living there since some decades.

In Törökbálint the second and third groups were considerably stronger (than eg. in Budaörs), and this had an effect on the scale and the width of relocations and settlements. In Budaörs almost the complete population was German-conscious, so ninety per cent of them were relocated and their houses stood empty, waiting for new inhabitants; hence there the conflicts were rather amongst the newcomers themselves (and not between Swabians and Magyars).

## The Impact of World War II

Among the Central European peoples, perhaps it was the German nationals who had the most difficult task of defining and identifying themselves culturally and politically in the years of World War II, answering the questions “Who are we?” and “Where do we trend towards?”

Since the significant proportion of the Magyar Swabians had committed themselves to the Nazi-allied “Volksbund” movement, taking a more active part in World War II and declaring the Swabian-populated area’s secession from Hungary, the majority of Magyar society identified them with the Nazis in regards to patricide.

“The Swabians have to share the Germans’ fate just now!” appeared to be the mood and judgment – tantamount to declaring a desire that they quit the country. This demand was formally permitted by decrees of the Allies’ conference in Potsdam (August 1945).

Simultaneously in the neighbouring states not only the Germans but also the resident Magyars were held responsible for the injuries and collapse. In the re-united Yugoslavia 30–40 thousand Magyars were put to death; in Czechoslovakia they were deprived of citizenship, together with the Germans (ie. the state dismissed Magyar public servants, cut off pensions, confiscated Magyar landed properties, closed down the Magyar schools, placed Magyar possessions under government control and froze bank deposits) and many thousands of Magyars were deported to North-Western regions.

Romania in turn took wind of the anti-Magyar massacres, so that the public administration at first had to submit to the Soviet mili-

tary administration provisionally, but afterwards proceeded with internments and fugitive-declarations. On account of revenge campaigns, approximately 60–80 thousand refugees arrived in Hungary.

## Democratic Agrarian Reform

Already in the last days of the war (March 1945), agrarian reform was announced, and the government parcelled out large estates as well as the lands of war criminals and Volksbund members (thirty-five per cent of Hungary’s area) to the paupers and landless agricultural labourers.

In Eastern Hungary (ie. the Great Plain) there was not enough landed property to expropriate; but “war criminals” were readily available in Western Hungary and the Swabian villages (including Törökbálint and its environs), so the masses of people arriving at about this time constituted the first major population shift in Törökbálint.

Thus the deluge of people evicted from neighbouring countries and people desiring land from the agrarian reform paradoxically boosted the proposed solution of compensating with Swabian lands and houses.

The agrarian reform, however, did not succeed without many problems. The new lands’ average extent was less than seven acres, and the occupants often had no implements for production, nor draught animals, seed grain or credit opportunities.

The “price scissors” opened out (the gap between prices of agricultural and industrial products, to the detriment of the former); the state meddled extensively in the areas of production and distribution; a terrible drought prevailed during the first years; and the Magyar people, until August 1946, lived through the steepest inflation in world history.

In “Swabian” villages, moreover, these days were gravely aggravated by conflicts between the two unsuccessful strata. As some of them said, “Our work was not effective, because the resident Volksbund members and others tried to inhibit us from carrying out the distribution of land by spiriting off the boundary indexboards.”<sup>1</sup> The same memorandum speaks about threats and scuffles. And with the “help” of the press, these local clashes became country-wide.

1 M. SOMLYAI Magda (ed.), *Földreform 1945. Tanulmány- és dokumentumgyűjtemény (Agrarian Reform in 1945)*. Budapest, 1965. 360–361.



## Relocations and Vagrants

Proclaimed in December 1945, relocations began in early 1946. Some 200 thousand to half a million Swabians were displaced – in Törökbálint, more than half of them in two waves. According to reports the process was more successful than in neighbouring Budaörs, where the police force could not deter the pillaging.

By this time already three waves of settlers had arrived in Törökbálint: agricultural and day-labourers from the village's periphery and from surrounding villages, during the distribution of land; as well as from Budapest, who were invited by local left-ist leaders in hopes of land grabbing; and the aforementioned transborder people.

The settlings after the relocations transpired slowly; mostly individual settlers arrived, as well as some smaller groups from Eastern and North-Eastern Hungary. The arrival of a band from Erdőtelek was quite memorable in Törökbálint:

“They were blighters, rather crowded with 8–10 children, a couple of them were wheeled in a wheelbarrow”, the wife of BOLDOG Lajos recalled. “They passed along the streets, then they pointed a finger at a house, ‘I want it.’ When they did not like it after all, when they needed a different one, they got it. A number of persons looted two–three houses, too.”<sup>2</sup>

2 BOLDOG Lajosné WEIGL Anna, Törökbálint, 1935.

FERENC Bóza recounted his personal settler-story: “A settler shouted across the fence, ‘Come out! How large is the backyard?’ My father answered quickly, ‘As large as this, you can see, no size at all.’ ‘Then I do not want it!’ and he was off.”<sup>3</sup>

Ms. KRONAWETTER is aware of gossip some decades later that “in Erdőtelek it was announced they could come. Here are vacant houses, the Swabians are relocated at present.”<sup>4</sup>

## Settler Facts

From abject poverty, arriving at a well-off village after relocation and obtaining property and a steady income seemed like an outstanding possibility. Part of the settlers, however, faced up to reality soon.

A settler descendant from Budaörs recalled the received house: “From our house were everything taken away. Even the barrels and the shutters. There was nothing any more. A couple of Swabian beds and a cupboard.”

Many of the defects were already mentioned under agrarian reform. In addition to all those, settlers were often welcomed by unsettled estate circumstances. “Nobody knows which and how much land has, the Land-claimant Committee is totally incapable,” some of them said.

“Under such circumstances all kinds of work have stopped, because nobody wants to do uncertain work. It is feared that in this year the village will not match last year’s crop production.”<sup>5</sup> Another announcement complained that settlers in the village were not paying any taxes.

## Settler Quarrels

Studying administrative documents, one can strike upon quite a few crimes against ownership: unlawful appropriations, thefts, embezzlements, fraud, misappropriations; as well as several varieties of aggression, as if the participants in these disputes permanently suffered from the lack of some mission-critical resource (“nutrition” or “nest”), which they were trying to gain.

The types of clashes can be sorted according to “powers” and dif-

3 BÓZA Ferenc, Törökbálint, 1933.

4 KRONAWETTER Istvánné HAMVAS Ottilia, Törökbálint, 1929.

5 Törökbálint: Jelentés Pestvármegye közállapotáról (Documents of Municipality’s Public Administration). In Pest Megyei Levéltár (PML, Pest County Archives). 19 July 1946., 20 August 1946. 1947/803.

ferentiated into dichotomies between: settler (vagrant) and public (state, community, authority); settler and original inhabitant (Swabian or Magyar); settler and settler (vagrant and vagrant).

The most typical case of settler versus public was failure to pay taxes, but in documents there can often be found settlers who were cultivating the fields of the relocated people which still had not been shared out.

“The village’s rebuilding is inching along. The new agrarian population, who has taken the place of the relocated Volksbundists and Nazi Swabians, is in the way of every rebuilding project, and these are inhibited by them. They founded cliques, deal severely and violently resist all measures taken by the authorities”, complained the notary.

Many more examples can be found of conflicts between settlers and Swabians. WENCZ Erzsébet reminisced about the circumstances at school: “Teaching was very troublesome. The settlers’ children and the kids of this place mocked and fought each other, as well as stabbed too. As the children of settlers left school during the war years, they were taller and stronger than their classmates here. ‘You, stinky Swabian!’ ‘You, dirty Magyar!’ flittered in the school for the hell of it. They beat and kicked each other. I could barely control them. I did not even dare go out to the lavatory. At breaks in the day I had to explore their bags and pockets, and I took away their knives.”

At least as much source material can be picked up about quarrels of settlers amongst themselves, especially accusations about calumniating and robbing one another. Another person recalls: “As far as I know, KÓSA Lajos does not live legitimately with his wife; they have a little girl of five, who is illegitimate too, and the illegitimate wife has a boy of twenty, who was chased away from the family.”<sup>6</sup>

## Escape Opportunities

What kind of opportunities did settlers have to escape from the (new) pauperization, social humiliation and conflicts? One possibility was to occupy the house and property and try to make a living off the land. Another was to occupy the house but not to work the land, instead seeking work in Budapest.

A third one was to make money from one’s assets. These tended to fall into two categories: those who came for this express pur-

pose – to attain, to sell and to move off; and those who made an attempt at living “honestly” but failed, thus moving incrementally to seek work in Budapest – beginning to parcel out assets. Finally, another possibility was to sell the assets altogether with the income-producing land and move presumably to Budapest or to some other bigger cities anywhere in the country.

## Justification

To apprehend what made the settlers embark from Eastern and North-Eastern Hungary to Törökbálint, it is worthy and expedient to contrast the old, abandoned milieu with the newly elected one, using the language of numbers – the census of 1941.

Since the most families arrived from Erdőtelek (Heves county), its indices will be reviewed here. In Erdőtelek eight per cent of the houses were provided with electricity; on the other hand, in Törökbálint seventy per cent were. Four per cent of homes had a cellar in Erdőtelek, compared to thirty-eight per cent in Törökbálint.

Employment structure of wage-earner population in the year 1941 in Erdőtelek and in Törökbálint:

	Erdőtelek		Törökbálint	
	number	%	number	%
All earners	2175	100	2389	100
Agriculture	1911	88	544	23
– of this: manual workers	1175	54	214	9
–of this: permanent (mop fairs)	209	10	75	3
periodic (construction labourers, diggers)	966	44	139	6
on fields of less than seven acres, farm holders, hirers, and members of their families	454	21	209	9
on fields of more than seven acres, farm holders, hirers, and members of their families	277	13	119	5
Mining, industry, building trade	74	3	1178	49
Transport, trade, service	104	5	355	15
Civil service, other, pensioners	86	4	312	13

In Törökbálint half of the wage-earners were industry workers; a quarter of them laboured for agriculture (the proportion of very poor people was only eighteen per cent, comprising the first migration at the time of the agrarian reform), but even more people than that worked for the third sector.

<sup>6</sup> Törökbálint: *Jelentés Pestvármegye községéről* (Documents of Municipality’s Public Administration). In *Pest Megyei Levéltár* (PML, Pest County Archives). 1947/1110.

In Erdőtelek three quarters of all the earners were agrarian workers either without fields or with such small lands that they could not support the living of their families, so they had to find lease work.

While in Törökbálint just one tenth of wage-earners were agrarian workers, in Erdőtelek more than half were. In turn, forty–fifty per cent of this stratum lived at or under the subsistence level in these distressed years.

The cultural differences were also fairly suggestive. In the Eastern Magyar settlement, more than sixteen per cent of the population above sixteen years could not write; in Törökbálint it was just one quarter of this figure. In the former village there would have been eighteen university graduates for every 10.000 people, while in Törökbálint there were eight.

Regarding completion of higher elementary school, gymnasium, college and university, in Erdőtelek twenty-five and in Törökbálint 186 in 10.000 should have finished the studies. In these differences of development and civilization level, the sources of the relocation and settlement conflicts can be deduced. Great social metamorphoses command high prices, wrote Emil DURKHEIM. These high prices had to be paid by not only the Swabian people, but most of the settlers as well.

After the great war, with the downfall of the semi-feudal Ancient Magyar Regime and the appearance of the New Democratic and then (from 1948) the Stalinist Regime, the wide-ranging crisis of values characterised Magyar society, especially that part of it which decided to abandon the homeland in the hope of more secure subsistence.

The direct connection with the ancient milieu (parents, family, friendships, neighbourhood and other social institutions) which had controlled their behaviour discontinued and became obsolete.

The great mass of internally displaced settlers arrived from hopeless poverty, and then they stood in front of recovery's gate. Up until then they could not achieve their socially accepted purposes (eg. wealth) by socially possible instruments (eg. by work).

In turn, arriving in the new milieu made these people to clash many times, as far as the norm of settlers and of the original residents is concerned: centre versus periphery (capital versus countryside); wealthy versus poor; artisan versus agrarian; German versus Magyar life strategy<sup>7</sup>; well educated versus unschooled.

7 GUNST Péter (ed.), *A magyar agrártársadalom a jobbágyság fölszabadításától napjainkig (The Magyar Agrarian Society from the Emancipation of Serfs until Today)*. Budapest, 1998. 92.

Only the Roman Catholic denomination could function as a link between the settlers and the original inhabitants; therefore the parish took on an influential role during the days of cohabitation, and might be responsible for the extended toleration of the Church during the communist years.

## Curiosities

As KOMANOVICS József reported<sup>8</sup> from Baranya county, beginning in 1947 in Törökbálint there shaped up another strong opposition between the Eastern Magyar settlers who had arrived one–two years previously and the “up-to-date” newcomers from Czechoslovakia.

Among the reasons were not just the fear from “them”, but the transborder people were wealthier, more erudite, and rather well established in the middle class. Accordingly, the conflicts did not principally grow out of national grounds.

Another interest of the general population movement was the people coming from Pozsonyligetfalu (now Petržalka) to Törökbálint. The German and Magyar population of Pozsonyligetfalu was relocated that time, but since that time many Germans who became Magyars were relocated to Hungary as well. “By the fountain one of the Swabian women scolded these ‘upstart’ people in the German language,” remembered Mrs. KRONAVETTER, but “several of them broke into a smile. We have already known that they understand what we say.”<sup>9</sup>

The curiosity of this last story is that these Magyarized German-Swabian people in Czechoslovakia were stigmatized as Magyars and relocated to Hungary into this ex-German-Swabian village Törökbálint, thus completing the social-ethnic circle.

8 KOMANOVICS József, *Szlovákiai magyarok betelepítése Baranyába (kitelepítés, betelepítés és lakosságcsere) 1945–1948 (Relocation of Magyars from Slovakia into Baranya, 1945–1948)*. Agrártörténeti Szemle 1970./1–2.

9 KRONAVETTER Istvánné HAMVAS Ottília, Törökbálint, 1929.

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