Frontière et identité à l'époque moderne dans l'espace méditerranéen et en Europe centrale et orientale

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SOMMAIRE

Introduction **5**

Salvatore Barbagallo
Rivolte e rivoluzioni: imperi, borghesie e mercati nell'Età moderna **7**

Janusz Smołucha
The Concept of the Border in the Polish Consciousness and its Impact on the Culture and Identity of the Central and Eastern Europe in the Modern Period **17**

Dávid Jablonský – Taťána Součková
Hungarian polymath Matthias Bel (1684–1749): crossing the boundaries of interpretation of his work in the modern Slovak historiography **25**

Beáta Varga
The identity-shaping/forming role of the border/peripheral region – "kraj" – in the formation of Cossacks in Ukraine **33**

Lajos Kövér
Les Français dans le Sud de la Hongrie au XVIII[e] siècle **45**

Péter Balázs
Séparer l'inséparable : l'évaluation de la politique religieuse de la Révolution par Edgar Quinet et Philippe Buchez **63**

Andrea Kökény
A Hungarian Map-Maker in the Mexican-American Boundary Survey **73**

Simon Mercieca
Distant Borders Confronted and Met Each Other Through Different Religious Identities: The Story of the Holy Crucifix at Ta' Ġieżu Church in Valletta and the threat of an Ottoman invasion against Malta **85**

Zsolt Palotás
Borders and Identity in Early Modern Maghreb: Boundary Changes of Algeria and Tunisia, 1529–1881 ..... **99**

Habib Kazdaghli
Frontières intérieures en temps colonial Limites du cosmopolitisme colonial et les chances d'un avenir en partage **111**

Péter Ákos Ferwagner
Arabie du Sud pendant la Grande Guerre **117**

Krisztián Bene
Identité sans frontières Le mythe et l'esprit de corps de la Légion étrangère **129**

László J. Nagy
La guerre de libération nationale algérienne Révolution ou une « simple » guerre ? **141**

Didier Rey
L'évolution du nationalisme corse depuis les années 1970 ..... **147**

Abdallah Abdel-Ati Al-Naggar – Zoltán Prantner
Jewish Community in Egypt (1952–1970). Additional Glimpses to the Present **159**

Zoltán Prantner – Abdallah Abdel-Ati al-Naggar
The Consequences of the Six Day War for the Jewish Communities of Arab countries from Hungarian Perspective **181**

Vittorio Felci
Listening to the urban islanders:
oral histories of resilience from Tuti island, Khartoum, Sudan **201**

Enike A. Šajti
Raspad Monarhije i Mađarski nacionalni odbor u Nađbečkereku, novembar 1918 ..... **213**

Zoltán Dévavári
A portrait of a controversial minority politician Iván Nagy (1904–1972) **235**

Zoran Janjetović
Yugoslav-Hungarian Border 1948–1953 ..... **243**

Péter Vukman
Border, identity, everyday life
The South Slavs of Gara in state security documents (1945–1956) **251**

Peter Vanek – Pavol Krajčović
The Population and Transportation Infrastructure of Slovakia during the Second Republic in the years 1938–1939 ..... **265**

Border, identity, everyday life
The South Slavs of Gara in state security documents (1945–1956)[*]

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Abstract

The Baja Triangle, also known as Northern Bácska, geographically roughly included the area between Baja (in Hungary), Subotica and Sombor (in Serbia). It has been a multiethnic region for centuries, inhabited by Hungarians, Germans, and South Slavs. The physical proximity of the border and its separating function had a fundamental impact on the daily lives of the Hungarians and South Slavs living here, especially after 1948, when, because of the escalation of the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict, Hungarian-Yugoslav relations also became frosty. In my paper, I will examine how the fluctuating Hungarian–Yugoslav relations following World War Two affected the South Slavs living there in connection with Gara, a multiethnic village close to the Hungarian–Yugoslav border, how it affected their everyday life, their ideas about the border, their identity and their relationship with other nationalities.

Keywords: Hungarian–Yugoslav relations, 1945–1956, South Slavic minorities in Hungary 1945–1956, state security and minorities, everyday life in Hungary in the 1940s and 1950s

Introduction

Geographically, the region known as the Baja Triangle (also known as Northern Bácska) roughly encompassed the triangle area between Baja, Subotica and Sombor (or those Northern parts of the former Bács-Bodrog County that remained in Hungary after World War One). For centuries, it was an ethnically diverse area that was inhabited by Hungarians, Germans and South Slavs; its economic, transport, geographic, social and historical unity was disrupted by the change of borders after the First World War. The physical proximity and separating function of the border had a profound impact on the daily lives of Hungarians and South Slavs living there, especially after 1948, when the escalation of the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict also led to a rapid and sharp deterioration in Hungarian–Yugoslav relations. In my study, I examine the impact of the fluctuations in Hungarian–Yugoslav

[*] The research for this article was financed by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences through my ongoing project "Power politics and everyday life, Hungarians and South Slavs in the Baja Triangle, 1945–1956" (Hatalmi politika és mindennapok, magyarok és délszlávok a bajai háromszögben, 1945–1956) financially supported by the János Bolyai Research Fellowship.

relations after World War Two on the South Slavs living in Gara, in one of the multi-ethnic settlements of the Baja Triangle, their everyday life, their perceptions of the border, their identity and their relations with other nationalities.

My conclusions are based on the state security documents kept in the Historical Archives of the former State Security Services (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, ÁBTL, Budapest). My research was greatly aided by the fact that the so-called object files (*objektum dossziék*) opened in the early 1950s for the villages of the Baja Triangle have survived almost intact, thus providing insights into local conditions at the time, the problems caused by economic and social transformation, ethnic tensions and cross-border activities (e. g. smuggling of goods and people, propaganda and espionage). At the same time, the documents constitute a special group of sources. In many cases, the files and reports of the informants and secret agents were subject to pressure from above, from their officers, and, moreover, the agents often had a desire for ideological identification, which led to distortions of reality or in emphasis. The state security documents were influenced by national processes and individual motivations, too, and they also reflected the expectations coming from the superiors of the state security apparatus and the Communist party rather than the reality. The finished version of the text itself often underwent several transformations, too.[1] Therefore, we can only describe how individuals and small communities, influenced by national processes and their individual motivations, were seen by the secret service apparatus. However, I am sure that the reports of mood (*hangulatjelentések*) and summaries of the local agents and informants provide us an insight into the everyday lives, activities, fears and hopes of a certain minority community in an ethnically mixed border region between Hungary and Yugoslavia, the local processes and the activities of a particular person or community. From a methodological point of view, this paper will thus also allow me to examine what the open object files are good for and what they are not. This article is also related to my ongoing research ("Power politics and everyday life, Hungarians and South Slavs in the Baja Triangle, 1945–1956") financially supported by the János Bolyai Research Fellowship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and it provides the first results of my research.

Ethnic composition of Gara in the 1940s

According to census data, Gara, located two and a half kilometres from the present-day Hungarian–Serbian border, had a population of 4,087 in 1910, 4,473 in 1941 and 4,540 in 1949. At the beginning of the 20th century, Germans were still in a majority of nearly two thirds, followed by the South Slavs. In 1910, 2,749 people declared themselves German based on their mother tongue, 1,207 Bunjevci (a distinct South Slavic ethnic group that nowadays identifies itself with the Croats) and 122 Hungarians.[2] In 1941, a total of 4,473

[1] GYARMATI, György (2008), "Nem mind arany, ami… A szocialista rendszer állambiztonsági iratainak történeti forrásértéke," in MAJTÉNYI, György – SZABÓ, Gabriella (eds.), *Rendszerváltás és Kádár-korszak*, ÁBTL – Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 127–139; GYARMATI, György (2012), "Mire jók az állambiztonsági ügynökiratok és mire nem?" *Kommentár* 7, 6, 64–78.

[2] *A magyar Szent Korona országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása. I. rész: A népesség főbb adatai községek és népesebb puszták, telepek szerint*, Budapest, 1912. 176–177. Available:

inhabitants lived in Gara, among them 2,709 Germans, 1,042 Bunjevi, 5 Croats and 716 Hungarians based on their mother tongue. In the 1941 census, the census takers also asked about nationality, and in Gara, in a significant departure from the use of mother tongue, the enumerators registered only 91 people as Bunjevci.[3]

After World War Two, between 1945 and 1949, there were several national or regional censuses that included or specifically targeted the South Slavs living in the Baja Triangle. According to the report of the deputy county governor of Bács-Bodrog County in 1945, the number of Bunjevci was 1,320 out of 3,779 local inhabitants in Gara.[4] Compared to the 1941 census, the total population of the settlement decreased by about 700, while the number of those who declared themselves as Bunjevci or Croats (considering their mother tongue) increased by nearly 300 people. In the spring of 1946, a Hungarian–Yugoslav joint committee conducted a separate census of the South Slavs living in the Baja Triangle;[5] unfortunately I have no available information on the results of the census broken down by settlements at this stage of my ongoing research. However, it is well known that the Yugoslav diplomats, together with local minority leaders, were already protesting the results of the ongoing census because the South Slavs of the region were claiming themselves to be Hungarian, even though they had defined Serbo-Croatian as their mother tongue.[6] In 1949, during the first national census after World War Two, the census enumerators counted 4,450 inhabitants in the settlement, of whom 4,031 declared themselves Hungarian by nationality and 3,236 by mother tongue, while the number of those declaring themselves German and South Slavs decreased significantly: 6 Germans were counted by nationality and 383 by mother tongue, and 475 Bunjevci by nationality and 894 by mother tongue. Slightly more than 20 people identified themselves as Croats or Serbs.[7]

Several factors could have resulted to this significant demographic change. After World War Two, most of the Germans were deported from the village and replaced by Hungarians – as a result of the Czechoslovak–Hungarian population exchange agreement, resettlement from Czechoslovakia and other parts of Hungary (mainly from Karcag, Gyoma and Rakamaz).[8] 105 families from Gyoma (now part of Gyomaendrőd in Békés County) arrived in Gara in July 1945,[9] and in July 1946 another 73 families were moved from Karcag, Rakamaz and other villages of Szatmár County.[10] At the same time, Székely (or Szekler) settlers, who originated from Bukovina but were settled in the former Yugoslav part of Bácska after

https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/NEDA_1910_01/?pg=243&layout=s, downloaded: January 24, 2023.

[3] FEHÉR, Mária (1998), "A Bács-Bodrog megyei délszlávok alsó fokú oktatásának történetéhez 1945–1948," *Bács-Kiskun megye múltjából* 5, 1, 539; TÓTH, Ágnes (1998), "Adatok az 1946-os magyarországi délszláv összeírás történetéhez," *Bács-Kiskun megye múltjából* 14, 1, 334 and 336.

[4] FEHÉR, "A Bács-Bodrog megyei délszlávok," 540.

[5] For this see: TÓTH, Ágnes (2016), "A 'nagypolitika' erőterében. Délszlávok Magyarországon, 1945–1948," in HORNYÁK, Árpád – BÍRÓ, László (eds.): *Magyarok és szerbek a változó határ két oldalán, 1941–1948. Történelem és emlékezet*, Budapest, 358–363.

[6] TÓTH, "Adatok az 1946-os magyarországi délszláv összeírás történetéhez," 301–303 and 308–310.

[7] Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára (henceforth: ÁBTL) 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 3. rész, 15.

[8] Ibid.

[9] TÓTH, Ágnes (1987), "Telepítések Csátalja, Gara és Vaskút községekben 1945–1949 között," *Aetas* 3, 1, 40.

[10] Ibid. 46.

1941 and who had to flee or were forced to flee from there at the end of the world war, also arrived in the area: the first settlers appeared in January 1945 in Gara and the surrounding villages. According to a decree of the Minister of the Interior in January 1945, 500 people were to be resettled from the internment camp near Bačka Topola to Gara, but the decree was not implemented.[11] Based on another decree of the Ministry of Interior, 654 people were accommodated in Gara by the end of March (824 in Csátalja and 322 in Vaskút). [12] According to a state security report dated November 13, 1950, 60 families of Szekler settlers who had moved from Yugoslavia were living in the village,[13] and based on a list of names from December 1952, another 22 Yugoslav citizens found a new home in the village between 1945 and 1947.[14] (Although the list did not specify their ethnicity, I suspect that they were mostly Germans who had been deported from Yugoslavia.) After the arrival of Soviet troops in the region, the Swabians (ethnic Germans) in the Baja triangle were interned and deported to labour camps, as early as autumn 1944. This trend intensified in January–February 1945, when 400 able-bodied men and women of German nationality were deported from Gara to the Soviet Union. The arrangements of deportations of the local Swabian population in Gara and neighbouring villages began in the summer of 1946, lasting for 6 months in case of Gara, and the deportations themselves finally took place on 8 November and 22 November 1946. A total of 990 people were resettled to Germany in the two transports.[15]

Based on the above, the decline in the number of self-declared South Slavs was not only due to advanced assimilation, but also to the above-mentioned population movements, the fluctuation of contemporary Hungarian–Yugoslav relations from normality to animosity, and the fears and tensions they generated. By 1949, the Hungarian–Yugoslav "cold war" was in full swing, and the South Slavs well remembered that the expulsion of local Swabians had been preceded by a census in 1941.[16] Ágnes Tóth also draws attention to the fact that the census of the southern Slavs of the Baja Triangle, which took place between 16 and 23 March 1946, coincided with the expulsion of the Germans, so the local South Slavs could easily have linked the two parallel events, which could justifiably have aroused fear among them.[17] In June 1949, exactly a year after the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict became public, the South Slavs in Gara, fearing resettlement in Yugoslavia, noted that "there was already the Jewish question and the Swabian question, and now the Slavic question will follow."[18]

[11] The Székely (Szekler) settlers expelled by the Yugoslav authorities in February 1945 fled to Bácsalmás, Bácsborsód and Katymár. Ibid. 36.
[12] FEHÉR, "A Bács-Bodrog megyei délszlávok," 545.
[13] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556 3.1.5. 2. rész, 6/8.
[14] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 105.
[15] TÓTH, "Telepítések," 35, 42 and 46.
[16] TÓTH, "Adatok," 309.
[17] TÓTH, "A 'nagypolitika' erőterében," 358–359.
[18] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 163.

South Slavs and everyday life in Gara between 1945 and 1948

Gara was mostly spared by the Second World War, it did not cause any real damage. Approximately 280-300 local people served in the army, 21 of them died and 26 were captured by the Soviets, 12 of the latter never returned. The Red Army reached the village on 20 October 1944.[19] The following months proved to be a rather turbulent period. The Yugoslav military entered the villages of the region, and people's liberation committees and armed militias formed from local South Slavs took over power in several places. [20] Their leaders in Gara were South Slavic folk writer Antun Karagity and Iván Sokác.[21] The sources also seem to indicate that the situation in Gara was particularly tense. Several people paraded in the village and the surrounding settlements with machine guns to demonstrate their strength and power, beating and scaring the local Hungarians.[22] Although Yugoslavia did not officially announce its territorial claim to the region, the possibility of a Hungarian–Yugoslav border adjustment was raised from time to time even at the highest levels of government in Belgrade, and active propaganda activities in this direction were carried out among the South Slavs in Hungary.[23] Part of these processes, a South Slavic delegation led by the already mentioned Karagity personally visited Tito on January 10, 1945 and asked for the Triangle to be annexed to Yugoslavia. [24] It is also worth knowing that several of the local South Slavs were partisans (a 1953 census mentions 28 people by name), and at least 14 people from Gara took part as volunteers in the construction of socialist Yugoslavia (for example in the construction of the Belgrade–Zagreb highway and the Samać railway line) during 1946–1947.[25]

After the armistice agreement signed on January 20, 1945, the local militias gradually ceased their activities, but this by no means meant the complete cessation of tensions in the region. The South Slavs of Gara acquired the agricultural machinery of the displaced Swabian farmers (immediately turning their eventual recovery into a nationality issue), [26] they primarily benefited from the land taken from the Germans during the land distribution [27] and actively intervened in the operation of the local public administration. In August 1945,

[19] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 3. rész, 16.
[20] FEHÉR, "A Bács-Bodrog megyei délszlávok," 542–543.
[21] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 132–134.
[22] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 157. and 212.
[23] BAGARIĆ, Petar (2012), "The Croatian Contribution to Plans for Revision of the Yugoslav–Hungarian Border in 1945–1946," *Review of Croatian History* 8, 1, 151–182; HORNYÁK, Árpád (2015), "Határkérdés és kisebbségek a második világháborút követő magyar–jugoszláv államközi kapcsolatokban, 1944–1946," *Kisebbségkutatás* 24, 2. 142–158 and HORNYÁK, Árpád (2016), "Határkijelölés, határsáv és a magyarországi délszlávok. Vitás kérdések a magyar–jugoszláv kapcsolatokban a második világháború után," in HORNYÁK, Árpád – BÍRÓ, László (eds.): *Magyarok és szerbek a változó határ két oldalán, 1941–1948*, Történelem és emlékezet, Budapest, 315–335.
[24] A. SAJTI, Enikő (2012), "Tito 1947-es magyarországi látogatásának előzményei," in BARÁTH, Magdolna – MOLNÁR, Antal (eds.), *A történettudomány szolgálatában. Tanulmányok a 70 éves Gecsényi Lajos tiszteletére*, Budapest – Győr, 590–591; ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 215. and V-9556/2. 195–196.
[25] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 123. and 125.
[26] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 145. and V-9556/1. 212.
[27] FEHÉR, "A Bács-Bodrog megyei délszlávok," 545.

for example, they prevented the election of Ferenc Tury, an old and well-respected judge as a village judge. Armed with sticks and led by Márton Csatalinác, the local secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Párt, MKP), the South Slavic crowd assaulted the local presidents of the Social Democratic Party (Szociáldemokrata Párt, SZDP) and the Independent Smallholders' Party, too.[28] Like in Hercegszántó, the bulk of the local membership of the MKP in Gara was made up of South Slavs. According to a report dated March 1949, the Hungarian Working People's Party (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja, MDP), which was formed in June 1948 by the merger of the MKP and the SZDP, had 520 members in the settlement, and its leadership and most of its membership still consisted of South Slavs.[29] However, this did not mean that all of them were influenced by the left-wing ideology, it rather spoke to the prestige of Josip Broz Tito and the Yugoslav partisans (and with it Yugoslavia) who were victorious in the World War and liberated their country almost exclusively by their own strength. Contemporaries were also aware of this, as the Social Democratic deputy prefect of Bács-Bodrog County made a clear reference to in his report dated May 15, 1946: "Most of the Slavs are members of the Communist Party. However, they spend their activities there not so much on expounding communist ideas, but rather on achieving their nationalistic, one might say chauvinistic goals."[30]

Their victorious superiority can also be seen in the act against the local Hungarians. Referring to the power relations within the village, Miksa Dujmov, a partisan who returned home in 1946, for example, declared with the confidence of a World War Two hero: "you crappy Hungarians, we are the masters here and not you, because the Slavs won the war" [31]; "you Hungarians, we'll come and deal with you" and "I don't want to hear a Hungarian word, I've had enough of this harsh gobbledegook language" [32]. If we are to believe the informant reports of 1953, Mátyás Ostrogonácz, also a partisan, said something similar: "don't let him hear you talking to the Bunjevci girls in Hungarian, because we partisans are the masters here and [everything] will be here the way we want it to be." [33] József Osztrogonácz insisted to Antal Csatár, a local fellow who returned from the internment camp in 1945: "Enough of the Hungarian speech, the Hungarians have nothing to do here. […] I don't want to hear any more Hungarian words here."[34]

The effect of the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict after 1948

However, the superiority of the South Slavs of Gara disappeared within a few years. As a result of the intensifying superpower confrontation, Stalin demanded a clear alignment from the leadership of the countries in his sphere of interest. Since Yugoslavia was considered mostly "autonomous", it must have been Tito and the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia the first who had to be taught how to behave. Stalin therefore opened a

[28] TÓTH, "A 'nagypolitika' erőterében," 353.
[29] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 60.
[30] Cited by: TÓTH, Ágnes (1993), "A magyarországi délszlávok helyzete és törekvései 1945–1948 (Dokumentumok)," *Bács-Kiskun megye múltjából* 12, 1, 363.
[31] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 71.
[32] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 185.
[33] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 275.
[34] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 114.

new, "minor Cold War" front against Yugoslavia.[35] As a result, Hungarian–Yugoslav relations, which had been on the rise until the spring of 1948, became frosty again. Following the decision of the Information Bureau of the Communist Parties (Cominform) in Bucharest (June 28, 1948), South Slavic minority organizations and their leaders were immediately put under pressure in Hungary. The only South Slavic member of parliament, Rob Antun, was stripped of his parliamentary mandate, and the operation of the Democratic Union of South Slavs in Hungary (Magyarországi Délszlávok Demokratikus Szövetsége, MDDSZ) was suspended. Statements by the local communities of South Slavs stigmatizing the policies of Tito and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička partija Jugoslavije, KPJ) appeared in the press, the Congress of the MDDSZ on August 10 supported the Cominform resolution affirmatively and elected a new leadership that remained loyal to the Hungarian government.[36]

However, all this did not go so smoothly. What's more, the surviving object files at the Historical Archives confirm my suspicion that Gara took fierce stands for Tito. The officers at the State Protection Authorities was also forced to admit that 95 percent of the South Slavs of the Baja district saw Rob's dismissal as a violation of national self-determination, and in the first days of July, delegates from the MDP's organizational department were trying to convince the local South Slavs to support the Cominform resolution, while Milán Ognienovics, member of the leadership of the suspended MDDSZ who would later be convicted in the Rajk trial, was persuading the locals to stand by Rob and Tito. At their meeting in Gara and Katymár, they also decided to send a telegram to Prime Minister Lajos Dinnyés emanding that Rob's parliamentary mandate be returned.[37] Moreover, at the national congress of the MDDSZ, the 17 delegates from Gara wanted to submit a proposal supporting Tito and the Yugoslav leadership.[38] The local officers of the State Protection Authority (Államvédelmi Hatóság, ÁVH) were also forced to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation: "In the area of our authority, [the situation] in Yugoslavia undoubtedly caused a serious problem, both politically and economically. The Bunjevci big landowners, who until now were not openly but covertly anti-Titoist and anti-democratic, are now focusing all their efforts on sharpening the contradictions related to nationality issues with the chauvinistic slogans of the previously left-leaning persons. These persons are trying to oppose the Slavs to the Hungarian state and nation by emphasizing Tito's greatness."[39] Therefore, it seems that in the wake of the smear campaign against Yugoslavia, the existing

[35] For a good summary on the origin of Soviet–Yugoslav conflict: GIBIANSKI, Leonid (1994), "The 1948 Soviet–Yugoslav Conflict and the Formation of the 'Socialist Camp' Model," in WESTAD, Odd Arne – HOLTSMARK, Sven G. – NEUMANN, Iver B. (eds.), *The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, 1945–89*, New York, 26–46 and RAJAK, Svetozar (2010), "The Cold War in the Balkans, 1945–1956," in LEFFLER, Melvin P. – WESTAD, Odd Arne (eds.): *History of the Cold War. Vol. I*, Cambridge, 198–220.

[36] For the consequences of the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict in Hungarian–Yugoslav relations without entirety: VUKMAN, Péter (2016), "Barátból ellenség – ellenségből barát (?): A magyar–jugoszláv párt- és államközi kapcsolatok (1945–1956)," in MOLNÁR, Tibor (ed.), *Fejezetek a titói Jugoszlávia korai szakaszából*, Zenta, 45–79 and VUKMAN, Péter (2017), "*„A fordulat évei". Magyar–jugoszláv kapcsolatok (1948–1949)*," *Acta Historica Szegediensis*, Tomus 141, 179–194

[37] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 124–126.

[38] Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (The National Archives of Hungary, Budapest), MNL OL M-KS 276. f. 67. cs. 127. ő. e. 32–34.

[39] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 125.

conflicts among the local South Slavs became secondary: "This event [e.g. the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict] to a certain extent eliminated the different political and worldviews among the Bunjevci."[40]

At the same time, the South Slavs of Gara also demanded additional rights: That they could fill the official positions in accordance with their proportion in the local populace (according to the opposing opinions, almost all the power was already in their hands), and after this was rejected, they demanded the post of local clerk for themselves. On September 15, an inter-party meeting was convened on the issue, which resulted in a heated debate. While the MDP supported the proposal, the Smallholders and the National Peasant Party delegates opposed it. I must again note here that almost all the members of the MDP were South Slavs. János Molnár, the president of the local organization, even feared that the South Slavs were slowly pushing out all the members of ethnic Hungarian origin and they were holding special meetings to which the ethnic Hungarian party members were not even invited.[41]

However, this inflammation subsided over time, and the period between 1949 and 1952 could be described from the point of view of the local South Slavs with these three terms: *passivity*, *fear*, and the *search for illusions*. The reports of the ÁVH regularly mentioned that South Slavs had become passive, they did not attend the meetings of MDP and MDDSZ, they did not pay membership fees, they only made friends among themselves, they did not seek relations with ethnic Hungarians and they did not voice their political opinions in front of strangers.[42] On February 12, 1949, Milán Ognyenovics and the former employee of the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest, Ozren Krisztonosity, who emigrated in October 1948 and became a leading member of the Cominformist emigrants in Hungary, were received with complete indifference, their rally was not announced in advance, and they had to wait for two hours to gather a larger audience. The locals received their presentations that stigmatized the "terrorist methods of the Tito clique" with complete passivity: "Even when the names of Rákosi and Sztálin were mentioned, there was no expression of approval, only the board members sitting on the lectern applauded and one or two attendees clapped their hands. There was no cheering at all."[43] However, it is also true that there was no disturbance, either. According to the state security report on the assembly, "it could be stated that the security of the delegates was not taken kindly by the local Slavs and soldiers of the home-defense guard who wanted to listen to the assembly were advised against it."[44] In my opinion, the appearance of the national guardsmen served much more to keep the participants under control than to their interest in current political topics. Incidentally, even in 1951 and 1952, the passivity of the South Slavs appeared as a recurring element in the state security reports.[45] On March 20, 1951, for example, at the meeting held by the local South Slavic association, those who attended excused they did not go to meetings because

[40] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 126.
[41] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 140.
[42] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 137., 143–144., 187–188., 202., V-9556/2. 186. and 190.
[43] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 156.
[44] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 156.
[45] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 95. and V-9556/2. 277.

they were afraid: the police had often beaten them, and they had been often labeled as Titoists because of their nationality.[46]

There was also a general atmosphere of fear. There were rumors as early as September 1948 that the former South Slav partisans would be interned. Fears related to resettlement grew especially when a larger number of border guards arrived in the village, conducted raids in search of illegal border crossers or spies, but locals also anxiously awaited the consequences of national events (such as an election). Before the parliamentary elections on May 15, 1949, rumours had already spread that after the elections the ÁVH would intern the leaders of the South Slavs – the South Slavs therefore did not want to vote for the candidates of the Hungarian Independent People's Front (Függetlenségi Népfront), an umbrella organization of loyal political parties dominated by the MDP. It was also common knowledge that the ÁVH knew everything what was happening in the village and had informers among the South Slavs, too.[47] A month later, in connection with the strengthening of the border zone, the rumours spread that the South Slavs would be resettled in Yugoslavia. The locals feared that in this case they would have been thrown out of the frying pan, into the fire: "Therefore they say that they do not dare to oppose Tito's policies, because if Tito's friends are resettled there [e.g. in Yugoslavia], they will tell [the Yugoslav authorities] who were anti-Tito here in Hungary and then they will be imprisoned." [48] The nightmare of deportation reappeared among the South Slavs in the autumn, in connection with the Rajk trial. Moreover, as in the summer, a parallel was drawn with the evacuation of the Swabians in 1946.[49]

The fear of deportation of the South Slavs living in the Baja triangle was not completely unfounded. As it is well known, the Secretariat of the MDP decided on the establishment of the southern border zone at its meeting on January 18, 1950, and the 24-point plan of related measures was presented at the meeting on April 12. As Gara was located within the 15 km border zone, from July 1, residents from other parts of the country could only stay in the village with a special permit, and permanent residents were provided with a card entitling them to permanent residence. By July 1, the ÁVH prepared its proposal for the resettlement of hostile social groups living in the border zone, including dual landowners, those who emigrated from Yugoslavia after 1945, were of South Slavic origin, including the South Slavic teachers, Orthodox priests, and those with relatives or friends in Yugoslavia. The evacuation of 2,446 persons deemed the most dangerous from the border zone was ordered on June 22; deportations from Bács-Kiskun County began in Hercegszántó. Other waves of deportations took place on the night of November 21 to 22, 1951, and then on December 19, 1951. Between 1950 and 1952, a total of 3,456 people over the age of 16 (according to other data, approximately 4,000 people) were deported from the border zone, 510 of them from Bács-Kiskun County. [50] Although this did not affect the large masses of South Slavs, it proved to be excellent for instilling fear in them.[51]

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[46] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 277.
[47] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 159.
[48] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 163.
[49] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 148.
[50] ORGOVÁNYI, István (2001), "A déli határsáv 1948 és 1956 között," *Bács-Kiskun megye múltjából* 17, 1, 256–264.
[51] HORNYÁK, "Határkijelölés, határsáv és a magyarországi délszlávok," 334.

At the current stage of my research, I do not yet have specific data on how many South Slavs were evicted from Gara, but it is clear from the reports of the ÁVH that fears among the South Slavs intensified especially around the above dates. In August 1950, fear was widespread among the South Slavs, many of them referred to the list of South Slavs to be deported that they happened to see in the building of the village hall or the office of the local agricultural cooperatives.[52] It is no wonder that wealthy landowner Jakab Dujmov distributed his valuables to his acquaintances; and in December 1951, Péter Osztrogonác said the following to the informant of the ÁVH: "now all the South Slavs will be deported from the border, because none of them are reliable, and that's why I'm buying warm winter clothes for myself."[53] At the turn of 1951–1952, many people packed their valuables out of fear or hid them at friends and acquaintances. The wife of János Sibalin regularly woke up at night when a car passed through the village, but the locals' worries were also heightened in mid-January when rumours spread that the South Slavs from Gara would be taken away in the wagons stationed at the Katymár station.[54]

István Orgoványi rightly draws attention to the fact that the acceleration of collectivization of the agriculture proceeded parallel to the construction of the border zone.[55] Several reports of the ÁVH seem to confirm the connection between the collectivization, the construction of the border zone and the fear of displacement. In September 1950, for example, the Collective Red Star (Vörös Csillag Termelőszövetkezet) was founded in the village, with predominantly Bunjevci members.[56] A report dated August 23, 1950, mentions in connection with the deportations that the South Slavs were reluctant to join cooperatives,[57] and in the turn of 1951–1952 the process of collectivization only further increased the fears of deportation among the wealthy South Slav land owners.[58]

In addition to the fear of deportation, the fear of war could also be observed throughout the period, especially in September and October 1948 and between July and August 1949. Rumours spread as early as August 1948 that an unusually large number of Yugoslav soldiers were stationed in Bački Breg, tanks were seen in Sombor,[59] and travel permits (passports) for Hungary were no longer issued in Novi Sad.[60] A year later, in the summer of 1949, there were rumours that British soldiers from the colonies had been seen in Senta and Novi Sad, Tito ordered a general mobilization, while King Petar was also on his way from Greece to unite with Tito's troops and advance as far as Kalocsa.[61]

In addition to fears, hope and wishful thinking could also be observed among South Slavs: Tito would prove himself right, [62] Tito would liberate us, South Slavs, the triangle of

[52] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 61–62., 182. and 187–188.
[53] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 210.
[54] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 319., 323. and 326.
[55] ORGOVÁNYI, "A déli határsáv 1948 és 1956 között," 260.
[56] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 3. rész, 18. and 25.
[57] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 187–188.
[58] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 323.
[59] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 133–134.
[60] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 147.
[61] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 165. and V-9556/2. 262.
[62] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 190.

Baja would belong to Yugoslavia and Tito would put an end to this communist system.[63] Already in September 1948, János Zegnál explained in a pub: "You will see, Tito will soon occupy Hungary and there is no doubt that Gara will be annexed to Yugoslavia."[64] At the beginning of 1952, the daughter of István Sokacz said hopefully: "Dirty communists rule Hungary, but then Tito will come and woe to the communists."[65] Her comment also highlights that many locals (both South Slavs and Hungarians) contrasted Hungarian and Yugoslav relations, and personally Mátyás Rákosi and Tito, the latter not even being considered a communist. Wealthy landowner Ádám Klanácz is said to have already declared during the 1947 elections: "That headstrong Rákosi is always making big remarks, but he doesn't know what he is saying. It would be better if he also listened to Tito."[66] And in 1951, Ferenc Sibalin contrasted the Hungarian and Yugoslav living standards: "here in Hungary they joke that the Tito has nothing, while [in reality] here in Hungary there is nothing."[67]

As different stories spread, locals tried to interpret all the major political events that had such profound impact on their daily lives in their own way. In the meantime, Tito transformed into a kind of folk hero. It was noted in November 1948 that Tito had in fact been murdered already in 1943, and his fake substitute was not recognized by his mother (the birthmark was missing under his right tit). Tito was Lenin's most trusted colleague, whom Stalin therefore sent first to the Spanish Civil War and then to the Balkans in 1941. Because of his popularity, the jealous Stalin wanted him to implement a course that would have led Yugoslavia to decline, but "Tito, realizing this, and wanting the good of his people, refused the instructions of the Cominform and Stalin."[68]

The tense atmosphere has often escalated in violent inter-ethnic quarrels or confrontations. Balls and dance parties often ended in fights, for which it was enough to quarrel over whether the band should play South Slavic or Hungarian tunes.[69] Some of the South Slavs took every opportunity to express their national grievances (according to the wife of Alajos Babity, for example, she was not allowed to smoke cigarettes in the cinema during the film screening because of her ethnicity[70]), but the ethnic Hungarians and Germans who remained in the village also made threatening remarks. In March 1951, the local secretary of National Association of Working Peasants and Land Workers (Dolgozó Parasztok és Földmunkások Országos Szövetsége, DÉFOSZ) stated that he himself would do everything for that the South Slavs be interned within a few months: "you will not be here for long, for one or two months, you will all be interned. I will also do everything to take you away",[71] and the German János Véber attacked the South Slavs with an ax a month later: "you will not work the Swabian lands for long, go to Tito, your land is there!"[72]

[63] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 262.
[64] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 169–170.
[65] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 325.
[66] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 268–269.
[67] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 310–311.
[68] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 186–187.
[69] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 215.
[70] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 275.
[71] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 277.
[72] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 280–281.

It is worth noting that for a short time in September 1948, anti-Semitism intensified among the local South Slavs. I have not experienced anything similar during my research so far in other villages of the Baja triangle inhabited by South Slavs (except for one reference in Bácsszentgyörgy). Several of the South Slavs in Gara blamed the Jews for the surplus appropriation and they supposed that the wheat was going to be transported to Palestine to feed the Jewish army. At the same time, several people feared that, realizing their "harmful activity", the Yugoslavs would deport the remaining Jews to Hungary in a mass scale, all of whom would be replaced in leadership positions.[73] According to the ÁVH, these rumors were also spread by Hungarians resettled from Czechoslovakia,[74] but it originated from Iván Raics, the local secretary of the MDP of South Slavic origin, who, returning from the congress of MDDSZ in Budapest, declared: "I've been to Pest and the whole line [e.g. the leadership of the MDP] is Jewish." Pál Vaity added the following: "Hungarians don't come to their senses and don't see that here the entire state leadership is in the hands of the Jews and how different it is in Yugoslavia, because Tito doesn't tolerate a single Jew by his side."[75]

It must be also mentioned that the ÁVH was primarily interested in tension-causing information like the above-mentioned ones, which could have been magnified by informants and agents, while the fact that most of the population lived their daily lives in peace had no news value. Thus, the above tensions may be overrepresented but certainly existed.

However, it is certain that in the paranoid atmosphere of the era, the ÁVH's desire to see Tito's potential fifth military column in the South Slavs was not conducive to the easing of tensions. After the outbreak of the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict, some fled to Yugoslavia, including the local secretary and clerk of the MDDSZ.[76] In all cases, the ÁVH regarded them as intelligence agents, and their relatives and acquaintances became suspicious. Antun Karagity, Alajos Babity and Pál Vujity, who had previously played decisive roles among the South Slavs and enjoyed authority among the locals, were arrested in 1950. From August 1952, the ÁVH monitored the activities of about twenty South Slavs, most of them former partisans, for almost a year, but apart from the fact that they often met, they could not prove anything worthwhile.[77]

The effect of normalization between Hungary and Yugoslavia after 1953

In the summer of 1953, however, other winds started to blow from Moscow to Belgrade. With Stalin's death, a process of normalization began, but the agents could not be retuned overnight: the singing of Titoist songs was still intended to spread the chauvinist spirit.[78] Hope also began to spread among the South Slavs of Gara that it would be possible to cross freely into Yugoslavia, the road between Gara and Regőce would be finally asphalted, dual land ownership cards (kettősbirtokos igazolvány) would be valid again, and relatives would

[73] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 137. and 143–144.
[74] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556. 143–144.
[75] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 192.
[76] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 237.
[77] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 90., 93., 102., 113., 209–210. and 222–223.
[78] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/1. 318.

be able to visit each other freely.[79] In June 1955, some ethnic South Slav teachers hoped that they would finally be able to vacation at the Adriatic Sea.[80] The locals continued to regard the border question with both longing and fear: the ethnic Hungarians allegedly wanted to acquire territory up to Bezdán (according to other opinions, Novi Sad) while the Yugoslavs wanted to acquire territory up to Kalocsa.[81] In connection with the alleged change of the border and the territorial demands of Yugoslavia, in July 1954, rumours spread again about the deportation of Germans and South Slavs, [82] and similar concerns were recorded by state security informants even in August 1955: "In short, it will come to the point that the Swabians will be deported and then the [deportation of the] Bunjevci will follow".[83]

All this also indicates that local ethnic tensions did not disappear overnight. Sometimes local Hungarians made remarks on the "dirty Bunjevci", just as on December 20, 1954, when some people wanted to stop the playing of South Slavic tunes at the local dance party, and a few weeks earlier others made the following threatening remark: "the South Slavs should go to Tito, and the Germans to Germany".[84] Mátyás Erős told South Slav teacher Márk Zegnál on November 4, 1955, referring to the privileged position of South Slavs after 1945 (and perhaps fearing its repetition): "there is not 1945–46 now, when you could listen to South Slavic music and dance South Slavic dances."[85] However, tensions were not only observable in Hungarian–South Slavic relations, but in some cases also in German–South Slavic relations. Some feared that the position of the Germans would strengthen in the village, at least this was the conclusion Antal Dujmov drew from the meeting in Geneva: "Just look at it in Gara's context. The Swabians rush for every function."[86] And in January 1956, when the possibility of border adjustment spread again, according to Mária Sibalin, the local Swabians were the most afraid that they would be displaced when the Baja triangle became part of Yugoslavia.[87]

The mood of the time is perhaps best reflected in the following two quotes. In May 1954, Miksa Dujmov and the wife of Alajos Babity talked like this: "the situation is somewhat better [now], because two years ago the ÁVH people took people away and one had to be afraid every day ... now the ÁVH people also have their hands tied, because now they can only hold the person until an investigation, after which they must be released."[88] A year later, upon the news that the interned Alajos Babity had returned home, János Knipf resignedly asked the question: "Why did Babity sit? Because at that time he was in favor of Tito. What? That's why he had to lose 5 years of his life. And now they lick [the butt of] Tito again..."[89]

[79] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 64–65.
[80] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 315.
[81] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 36. and 431.
[82] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 105–106.
[83] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 352–353.
[84] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 156.
[85] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 382.
[86] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 345.
[87] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 421.
[88] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 91.
[89] ÁBTL 3.1.5. V-9556/2. 181–182.

At the end of this article, let me have a few remarks on what the object files remain silent about. I found it surprising that the dossiers do not contain information about smuggling, illegal border crossing and the distribution of propaganda material at all, or only tangentially, while in the case of other villages we find plenty of examples of this.[90] The local ethnic communities (Hungarians, Germans and South Slavs) also appear to be quite homogeneous, while this was by no means necessarily as we can see in the case of neighbouring Hercegszántó, where dividing lines can be observed based on wealth or geographical location, in relation to native residents and settlers.[91] It should not be forgotten that significant economic, social and political transformations took place during this period, which in itself had a fundamental impact on the life of a micro-community, generating many local conflicts – and giving me a new research framework. All this should encourage me for further research.

[90] VUKMAN, Péter (2022), "A magyar-jugoszláv államhatár és a bajai háromszögben élők mindennapjai (1945–1956): csempészet, határképzet és a Jugoszláviáról alkotott kép," in KISS, Zsuzsanna – SZILÁGYI, Zsolt (eds.), *Határ, határhelyzet, határátlépés: a határok fizikai és mentális működése, változása és emlékezete*, Szeged – Eger, 335–346.

[91] For this: VUKMAN, Péter (2020), "Living in the Vicinity of the Yugoslav-Hungarian border (1945–1960): Breaks and Continuities. A Case Study of Hercegszántó (Santovo)," *History in Flux* 2, 1, 9–27.