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Differences in Nutritional Habits or State Propaganda?

Food supply and ethnic groups in Transylvania during World War II

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Abstract

The study examines nutritional habits in Transylvania and their ethnical projection through a specific case from the Second World War. The related Hungarian official standpoint is also investigated in order to establish whether the government's statement covers an everyday reality or should rather be considered propaganda. The study is carried out on the Romanian minority living in Northern Transylvania in 1942 at the time of requisitions. At the centre of the investigation is a sentence of the Hungarian government and the truth behind it. The main aim is to establish whether there were any kind of differences in nutritional habits among the different ethnic groups living in Transylvania at the time and whether there was any truth to the statement that Romanians only fed upon maize and had no use of wheat. It is in fact an attempt to answer these questions with statistical methods, using all available agricultural information of the mentioned period.

Keywords

World War II, food policy, discrimination, ethnic relations, Transylvania, Vienna Award

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“The role that wheat plays in the nutrition of a people reflects the level of civilization they have reached”

(Vita, 1937: 271)

The present study aims to shed light on the food consumption practices, public provisions and the ethnic dimensions of these among the population in Transylvania through a debate about specific cases that took place during World War II. In 1939, in his work on nutritional habits in Romania, the medical doctor Ioan Claudian stated that nutrition primarily depended on social conditions and not on climate or soil.¹ Regarding food availability and provisions during the years of World War II, the main question is about the interplay between objective food shortage and intentional or socially embedded patterns of exclusion, worldwide. The food history of the region of Transylvania between 1940 and 1944 is a relevant and complex case in this regard since the food issue became an element of rivalry between the governments of Romania and that of Hungary even as both countries were within the orbit of Nazi Germany.

1 Claudian, *Alimentația poporului român*, 23.

Territorial changes had a direct bearing on food availability. In 1939 and 1940 the German and Italian government addressed the interwar territorial dispute between Romania and Hungary via the so-called Vienna Awards. These decisions divided Transylvania, leaving most of the southern parts of the region with Romania, but granting the rest for Hungary. As a result, the size of the Romanian and Hungarian population was roughly equal in Northern Transylvania and numbered ca. 1 million. Romanians formed the majority in all counties except for the ones in Szeklerland. (The census of 1941 showed a 52% Hungarian majority, however, a large wave of Romanian emigration preceded it.) Several re-annexed counties had a mixed population.²

In 1940, Romania also lost Bessarabia to the Soviet Union. Due to the agricultural potential of the plains, this resulted in a grave situation regarding food supply. In 1942, Romania was allowed to annex the so-called Transnistria as a kind of compensation. By 1941, as the armies of Hungary and Romania became involved in World War II, supplying the civilian population apart from the armies going to the front lines posed an ever-greater challenge for the administration. For Romania, the loss of lands annexed to Hungary aggravated the situation further. For the economy of Hungary, annexation was not a clear net gain since resources needed to be re-allocated for the integration of new territories. This applied to the food economy, too.

In 1942, Romanian government began to use the need for centralized food reserve as an instrument in ethnic politics. In the summer of 1942, the Romanian government implemented a discriminative commandeering campaign in which the Hungarian population living in Romania bore the full brunt. This was done without any consultation. The goal of the action was to force Hungarians to flee at the mass level in June 1942. However, this was an unsuccessful measure since, at the request of the Hungarian government, the Axis Powers intervened and demanded the action to stop.³ Mihai Antonescu (1904-1946), the Romanian

2 L. Balogh, *Kiszolgáltatva*, 28.

3 For more on the events in Southern Transylvania in 1942 see Sárándi 2014: 73–127.

deputy prime minister stated that the criticized measures were merely responses to the Hungarian tactics intended to starve the Romanian population in Northern Transylvania.⁴ If Antonescu had been right, it would have been in line with the policy of reciprocal action that indeed dominated relations between Hungary and Romania since 1940.⁵

June 1942 was not the first instance that Romania accused Hungary with depriving the Romanian population of foodstuff. Indeed, this was one of the common elements of propaganda discourse. The Romanian Embassy in Budapest claimed that there was hunger in the Tara Oasului and Maramures area and that Romanians are running out of reserves in general already in the autumn of 1941.⁶ On 13 May 1942, prior to the commandeering, Undersecretary of State, Davidescu brought up the charges yet again emphasizing that Hungarian authorities purposefully starve the Romanian population. As a response, the Hungarian Embassy in Bucharest handed over a memorandum to the Romanian government denying the charges but presenting a willingness to investigate specific cases.⁷ On 15 June 1942, after the commandeering had already started, it was the Romanian Embassy that handed over memorandum to the Foreign Ministry that contained detailed complaints of 14 locations spread across five counties (Bihar, Máramaros, Szilágy, Szolnok-Doboka and Ugocsa) at the request of the Hungarian government. Most of these were about discrimination experienced during the distribution of supplies. In some of the reported cases authorities allegedly excluded certain Romanian families from rationing, so that they did not receive ration cards or rations and sowing seeds. The document emphasized that the Hungarian inhabitants received their due rations without issues. There was one

4 *Menekültkérdéssel kapcsolatban tartott értekezlet jegyzőkönyve*, 1942. ANIC, Fond 765, dos. 515/1942. 1–30.

5 For more on what the politics of reciprocity meant in the Hungarian-Romanian relations see L. Balogh 2013: 84–92.

6 *Bukaresti román követség által átadott jegyzék a románok közellátására vonatkozóan*. 1942. május 13. MNL OL, K 63, 268. csomó, 27. tétel. 113–114.

7 *Bukaresti magyar követség jelentése a dél-erdélyi magyarok élelmiszerkészleteinek elrekliválásáról*. 1942. június 20. MNL OL, K 63, 268. csomó, 27. tétel, 163/pol. 1942. 698–710. Published in L. Balogh, Kiszolgáltatva, 174–181.

case that looked more serious than the others: the inhabitants of Jód village in Máramaros County reportedly had to use flour made of corncob.⁸ There were signs indicating that the food shortage was occasionally grave. In May 1942 a revolt broke out in a village with mixed ethnic composition, Gyergyótölgyes and the armed forces had to be called in to suppress it.⁹ Drought conditions in 1941 and 1942 and the growing food export to Germany further aggravated the food situation for the government.¹⁰ The chief administrator of Beszterce-Naszód County complained that there was not enough corn. For this reason, the leaders of the county particularly welcomed the return of the Banat to Hungarian administration but that their hopes for more corn were not fulfilled.¹¹

The Hungarian Foreign Ministry forwarded the memorandum to the Office of Public Supply, emphasizing that supply issues have a foreign policy dimension. In order to prompt the intervention of the Axis Powers and halt the discriminative commandeering in Southern Transylvania, the Hungarian government made a commitment to investigate the complaints. It asked the Office of Public Supply that it should be a ministerial committee that carries out the investigation instead of local public administration.¹² In line with existing practice, investigations did

- 8 *Román követség által átadott szóbeli jegyzék a román lakosság élelmezési panaszairól.* 1942. június 15. MNL OL, K 252, 1, doboz, 39/1942. 284–288. Iván Balassa, a leading Hungarian ethnographer found that using corncob was a practice in times of famine, however the last time the population actually made use of it was in the late 19th century. Balassa 1960: 427.
- 9 *Gyergyótölgyesi járás főszolgabírájának jelentése a közellátási hiányosságokról.* 1942. május. 9. MNL OL K 149, 1942 6 tétel 131. doboz. 1942-G-13253. 19-20. This is a village with inhabitants of mixed ethnic background, this might have had an impact on food distributed there.
- 10 *Szolnok-Doboka vármegye főispánjának beszámolója a közellátásról.* 1942. augusztus 11. MNL OL K 28, 222. csomó, 439. tétel. 1942-O-23890. 289-291. See also Hámori, „„Produktív szociálpolitika”, 101.
- 11 *Beszterce-Naszód vármegye főispánjának beszámolója a megye közellátásáról.* 1942. augusztus 12. MNL OL K 28, 222. csomó, 439. tétel. 1942-O-23890. 33-35.
- 12 *Külügyminisztérium átírata a Közellátásügyi Minisztériumnak a román követség jegyzékéről a román lakosság közellátási panaszait illetően.* 1942. június 19. MNL OL K 251. 39/1942. 282–283.

not look for general causes but followed a case-by-case method.¹³ Eventually, these investigations dismissed each complaint and denied that discrimination was the reason even if the reports acknowledged that there were delays in distributing rations.¹⁴ Regarding the case of Jód, the investigation found that all those concerned received their rations, however, one of the families did not have enough money to pay for the flour ration, while in the other case the family was too large, therefore, they tried to make up for the shortage by resorting to flour made of corncob.¹⁵ The Hungarian government posited that in Hungary the issues had to do with limitations of supply and even if there were cases of discrimination, these were the outcome of arbitrary decisions taken at the local level, while Romania made discrimination part of their official commandeering policy.¹⁶ The Hungarian government argued that whenever local administration consisted of Hungarians who were found to be biased, these staff were transferred to ethnic Hungarian area.¹⁷ Following the commandeering of 1942, the Inter-Ministerial Committee found similar instances. They proposed to the prime minister that the civil servants working in majority Romanian areas should be reminded that biased decisions had an adverse impact on the territorial revision.¹⁸

- 13 The case of Tökés in Szolnok-Doboka County was typical. According to the Romanian memorandum, the notary told the Romanians asking for sowing seeds that they should go ask God instead. The investigation focussed on whether the notary actually said those words.
- 14 *Közellátástügyi Hivatal jelentése a románok élelmezési és vetőmagpanaszaira*. 1942. július 13. MNL OL K 251, 1. doboz, 39/1942. 293–299.
- 15 *Jegyzőkönyv Jód község közellátásáról*. 1942. július 5. MNL OL, K 251. 1. doboz, 39/1942. 344–349. Due to the continued practice of letting a significant portion of the arable fallow made conditions in Iod worse than they would have been otherwise. For conflicts related to banning the fallow, see Oláh 2004: 98–113.
- 16 Romanian grievances in Northern Transylvania and the Hungarian response to these. 1942. júl. 22. MNL OL, K 28, 274. csomó, A. dosszié. 21–34. It is a propagandistic document written in German. A note on the folder says that „it was not handed over”.
- 17 *Közellátástügyi Hivatal jelentése a románok élelmezési és vetőmagpanaszaira*. 1942. július 13. MNL OL, K 251, 1. doboz, 39/1942. 293–299.
- 18 *Az észak-erdélyi magyar kormányintézkedések és a román panaszok ismertetése*. MNL K 63, 259. csomó, 27. tétel. 674–696. *Miniszterközi Bizottság jelentése Kállay Miklós miniszterelnöknek a románok kiűzéséről szóló vádról*. 1943. május 3. MNL OL, K 28, 92. csomó, 150. tétel. 1943-O-31267. 837–839.

Moreover, the Hungarian government reasoned that occasional hunger is the outcome of the difference between the nutritional habits of Hungarians and Romanians: while the staple diet of Hungarians is wheat, Romanians exclusively opt for corn and they do not know what to do with wheat they receive from the government, thus, they sell it on the market.¹⁹ The Romanian Embassy rejected the argument that Romanians would refuse to take wheat flour in times of food shortage and asked for specific cases to be presented to them.²⁰ According to contemporary Romanian publications, although there were regional differences in the country in terms of diet, namely that people consumed more corn in the area of the Old Kingdom than in Transylvania, corn consumption of Romanians was declining and made up only half of the food consumed.²¹

In the remainder of the paper, I investigate the extent to which these claims were true. The paper will reappraise the motto quoted above, which suggests that there were significant differences in nutritional habits of the different ethnic groups living in close proximity in Transylvania in the mid-20th century, and that the Romanian population had no knowledge about processing wheat flour. In order to contextualize the situation in Northern Transylvania, I briefly describe the system that was in place in contemporary Romania. Subsequently, I will discuss the changes in nutritional habits that had taken place between the late 19th century and the 1940s. I chiefly give my answers using statistical calculations based on contemporary data on agriculture that I will supplement with information from narrative sources. Concerning Northern Transylvania, we do not have data either for production or consumption, therefore I will compare the late 19th century data with the last agricultural statistics from interwar Romania (1937). Of course, the comparison is problematic since not all output was consu-

19 *Simándi Ferenc német-olasz tiszti bizottsághoz kirendelt összekötő tiszttel jelentése a Vezérkari Főnökség 2. osztályának a bukaresti magyar követ tiszti bizottságnál tett látogatásáról.* 1942. jún. 28. MNL OL K 63, 263. csomó, 27. tétel. 4478/1942. 120-122.

20 *Román követség által átadott szóbeli jegyzék a román lakosság élelmezési panaszairól.* 1942. június 15. MNL OL, K 252, 1, doboz, 39/1942. 284-288.

21 Claudian, *Alimentația poporului român*, 121–126. According to Claudian, on average, corn occupied 30% of the arable land in counties of Transylvania.

med: sowing seed and animal food need to be deducted. I included Máramaros in the analysis because the most serious case reportedly took place in a village from the county, namely, Jód. I compare Máramaros with the three counties of Szeklerland in Southeastern Transylvania where geographical conditions were similar. Even though these did not favour cereal production, the inhabitants insisted on growing plants used for making bread even as they were dependent on cereal imports. I took Bihar County as the control group.

Public supply and the system of commandeering during World War II in Hungary and Romania

For addressing the problem presented above, it is indispensable to outline the system of commandeering and public supply and related measures in place in Romania and in Hungary in 1942.

Increasing war effort meant the shift to the so-called war economy in which the main task of the economy is to supply the army with what it needs. This meant that the civilian population had access to less consumer goods. In 1940, both states decided to increase its involvement with the economy, just like many other states in Europe. In this model, the state itself tried to act as the main distributor replacing the market in organizing supply to the public. The system evolved gradually, the first step being the introduction of price caps in order to reduce differences in prices and inflation that arose due to the scarcity of goods. The economic rules of such centralized system of public supply included that in case there was a shortage of some of the goods, it was only available at prices higher than the one set by administration. On the other hand, if a price cap was miscalculated, it might have led to a price hike. Romania introduced this method of redistribution in 1940 and the Hungarian military administration adopted it right away in the annexed areas of Transylvania. Due to the permanent shortage of goods, the gap between officially set and actual market prices could

grow enormous. This led to the emergence of black market, and, hence, dozens of sabotage cases.²² Despite these efforts on behalf of administration, prices kept rising in 1940: the inflation reached 38% in Romania,²³ and 20% in Hungary²⁴

The other key administrative measure was rationing that applied to basic food items. This, too, appeared in both countries already in 1940 and was extended to even more goods with the shift to war economy. In Hungary, rationing was centrally regulated, thus local authorities only had to deal with implementation. By 1942, the system of national rationing extended to all basic food items (bread, flour, sugar, rice, canned food) as well as to paraffin and soap.²⁵ According to the decree of 1942, each rural inhabitant had the right to own and retain 2q of wheat per year, 4kgs of flour per month and 1.6kgs of finely ground flour.²⁶ For urban dwellers the ration was 150 grams of bread per day and 1.6 kgs of flour per month.²⁷ Just like in Romania, the system of requisitioning/procurement was about the change in Hungary in 1942. Initially, it worked on a voluntary basis and the authorities purchased the quantities above the above-mentioned limitations.²⁸ However, since this method was not sufficient to gather the required quantities of foodstuff, the so-called Jurcsek regime, named after Béla Jurcsek (1893-1945) the state secretary for public supply, replaced of the voluntary one. This determined the quantity of foodstuff that farmers needed to give up for the purposes of public supply based on their income per acres. State authorities

22 In Romania, both sellers and buyers were brought under investigation for transactions above the maximum prices.

23 Szamos. 1940. augusztus 11. *Júniusban 16%-kal drágult az élet.* 4.

24 Szamos. 1940. október 31. *Magyarországon a háború első évében alig 20%-kal emelkedett az elsőrendű fontosságú cikkek ára.* 6.

25 Subsequently, the introduction of no-meat days made the system even harsher.

26 *Jegyzőkönyv Tőkésbánya közellátásáról.* 1942. július 3. MNL OL K 251. 1 doboz, 39/1942. 323–328.

27 Rations became smaller and smaller: initially the ration consisted of 250grams of bread daily and 2 kgs of flour per month. *Feljegyzés a magyarországi élelmiszer-ellátásról.* 1942. július 22. MNL OL K 28, 274. csomó, 2. tétel, A. dosszié. 52–62.

28 *Kolozs vármegyei közellátásügyi kormánybiztos jelentése a város polgármesterének.* 1942. január. 31. MNL OL R 374. 3. doboz, 20/1942. 9–104.

made their claim for the surplus already during thrashing.²⁹ This way, the central administration could estimate the amounts of wheat that it would supply to the army and to the public in a given year. However, this method of distribution did not give sufficient weight to possible bad harvest years that would leave the families of farmers with less than they needed. Yet, the system remained in place. Until 1942, there were two requisition campaigns, in May 1941 and at end of the same year. Unlike in Romania, the authorities announced both of these in advance.³⁰

Before the events of 1942 discussed here rationing was not centrally regulated in Romania. Local authorities had the power to decide to introduce it considering the specific conditions of the given area. Local authorities tended to introduce rationing for flour, oil, sugar, leather, sowing seed and wool but there was significant regional variation.³¹ Commandeering and rationing were closely related. Sending armies to the front meant a double burden for production. On the one hand, most enlisted men were farmers who were lost to production, at least in the short term. On the other hand, tens of thousands of people had to be supplied. For providing enough to them, and later on, to civilians, the state had to turn to commandeering. In Romania, related decrees were frequently amended while rations and reserves were reduced. In December 1941, the State Secretariat for Public Food Supply issued decree no. 2260/1941 that regulated the year 1942. This prescribed 4 wheat days and 3 corn days. The ration for wheat was set until August 1942 at 0.4 kgs per day and for corn until 1 November 1942 at 1kg per day.³² Since rules were not precise, commandeering was carried out two times before the summer of 1942. During the one in spring, authorities were to

29 The Hungarian authorities calculated the quantities that farmers needed to give up in Northern Transylvania based on the average produce in interwar Hungary without considering regional characteristics and limitations. This was a grievance in itself for the local population.

30 *Feljegyzés a magyarországi élelmiszer ellátásról*. 1942. július 22. MNL OL K 28, 274. csomó, 2. tétel, A. dosszié. 52–62.

31 *Külgügyminisztérium jelentése a dél-erdélyi gabonarekvirálásról*. 1942. június. MNL OL K 63, 263. csomó, 27. tétel, 3373/1942. 331–338.

32 *A Közélelmezési Államtitkárság 2260/1941 sz. rendelete*. MNL OL K 63, 443. csomó 47. tétel, 285/pol. 1942. 207–208.

leave 46 kgs of wheat and 108 kgs of corn for farmers, 6kgs of wheat and 32kgs of corn for agricultural labourers and, they were supposed to consider needs for sowing: 130kgs of barley or hay per acre and 30kgs of corn or potato. For producers this meant 5 kgs of wheat or 4 kgs of wheat flour or 8 kgs of corn flour per months on average.³³ Those engaged in heavy physical work or had animals could keep extra quantity above these quota.³⁴ The novelty of the decree was that authorities registered the quantity of cereals during threshing and claimed the surplus with the explicit goal of preventing farmers from hiding the produce or find others way out from the system of commandeering and rationing.³⁵ Commandeering and reducing public supply to a minimum did not mean extraordinary conditions during World War II.

Changes in Nutrition during World War II in Northern Transylvania

Before turning to the data sets, we shall keep in mind two circumstances. First, that small-holders could hope for a better harvest from corn than wheat. Moreover, the market price of corn is lower than that of wheat and *mamaliga* is more nutritious than bread, therefore, it makes much sense to have a corn-based diet.³⁶ Second, as far as it is possible for us to know, virtually all households had an oven suitable for baking bread in Transylvania.³⁷ There are no overall data on food consumption and nutrition from the first half of the 20th century in

33 *Külgyminisztérium jelentése a dél-erdélyi gabonarekvirálásról*. 1942. június. MNL OL K 63, 263. csomó, 27. tétel, 3373/1942. 331–338.

34 The decree allowed the farmers to keep 1 kg corn for feeding each pigs daily. However, due to lack of food resources, people tended to keep part of that amount. It was a shortcoming of the regulation that it failed to consider that most families kept poultry and did not allocate extra corn for this purpose. *Beszámoló a gabonarekvirálási panaszokról*. 1942. július 31. MNL OL K 63, 444. csomó, 47. tétel. 373/pol. 1942. 172–174.

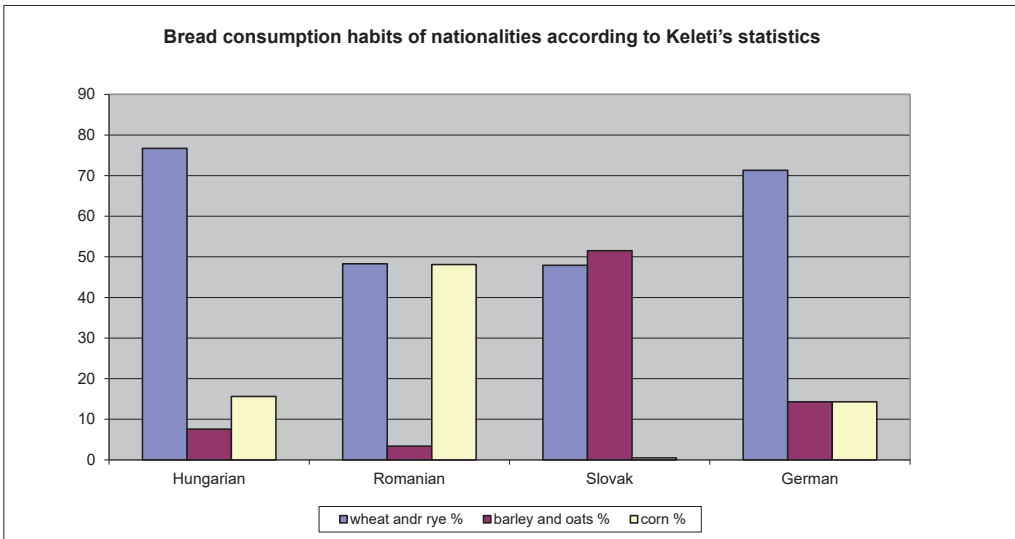
35 *Beszámoló a gabonarekvirálási panaszokról*. 1942. július 31. MNL OL K 63, 444. csomó, 47. tétel. 373/pol. 1942. 172–174.

36 Claudian, *Alimentația poporului român*, 137.

37 Claudian, *Alimentația poporului român*, 126.

Transylvania and Romania. Thus, in the lack of better alternatives, I attempt to draw conclusions from data on food production.³⁸ The latter type of data cannot be taken as if it directly referred to food consumption but, perhaps, they are good enough to track major shifts.

In 1887, using questionnaires and other data, Károly Keleti published his results about consumption of basic foodstuff. For this paper, I focus on his statements about ethnic minorities and only on the questions of bread and the ingredients used for making it.³⁹



Keleti believed he observed differences in nutrition along ethnic lines. He identified three large regions in the territory was then the Kingdom of Hungary. There was Upper Hungary where Slovaks mainly used barley, oat and some wheat for making bread, the Great Plains where Hungarian and Germans chiefly eat bread made of wheat and Transylvania where, while wheat is also present, where the amount of corn is markedly more than in the other two regions.⁴⁰ Since

38 In the interwar period, the school of sociologist Dimitrie Gusti also paid attention to nutrition and calories consumed. However, there were no all-Romania surveys conducted. See Georgescu, *Problema alimentației țărănești*, 6–10.

39 I left out potato from the analysis since this paper discusses bread consumption.

40 Károly Keleti included both flour and spoon food while assessing corn consumption.

the majority of the inhabitants of Transylvania were Romanians,⁴¹ Keleti linked the prevalence of corn to the presence of Romanians.⁴² Based on Keleti's statistics, one may deduce that only Slovaks used to eat significant quantities of barley and oat,⁴³ and corn only mattered to Romanians, while wheat dominated the diet of Germans and Hungarians even if it was present in the daily life of all ethnic groups. Instead of saying that corn, or barley and oat were dominant among Romanians and Slovaks, respectively, Keleti's figures tell that both communities had a mixed diet in which wheat played a role. It remains a question if these categories really refer to ethnic communities, or, indicate regional differences.

Keleti's statistic for Transylvania provides a complicated picture. According to him, in areas where Romanians live in rather homogenous blocks (such as Maramures, Beszterce, Szolnok-Doboka), corn should have dominated nutritional habits, while in the three Szekler counties (Csík, Udvarhely and Háromszék) wheat and barley should have been prevalent. On the surface, this appears to be the case as the proportion of corn was 0 and wheat and barley took up 65-95% in the Szekler counties, while corn consumption makes up 75% of the total in Maramures. However, if we consider the three Szekler Counties individually, we find larger differences. In Háromszék County, the combined proportion of corn, barley and oat was 8%, while in Csík County corn alone counted for 14.5%. Since the Hungarian central government argued that Hungarians living in Northern Transylvania exclusively eat wheat products, we separated wheat and oat for the analysis.⁴⁴

Although the ratio of wheat was low in Máramaros, in the case of Szekler Counties the thesis about the importance of wheat did not hold: oat dominated to various degree: 52% in Csík County and 65% in Udvarhely County. In Bihar,

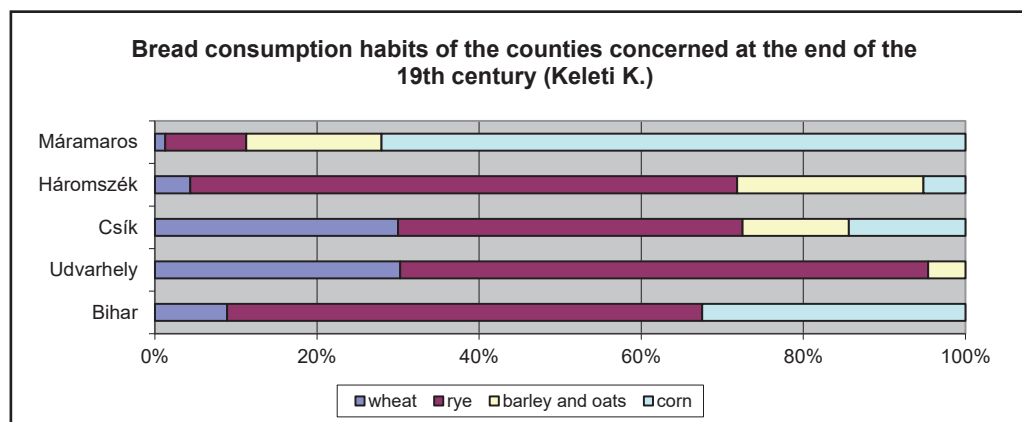
41 According to the census of 1910, 55% of the population of Transylvania were Romanian, 34% Hungarian and 8.7% German

42 Keleti, Magyarország népességének élelmezési, 144–149.

43 Balassa, A magyar kukorica: 395.

44 We did not disaggregate barley and rye as they were marginal crops in all regions analysed here.

the proportion of rye reached a similarly high level (58%). Thus, it is clear that in the 19th century Hungarians did not exclusively eat wheat.



After 1918, the peace treaty ordered that Transylvania and the areas known as the *Partium* should become part of Romania. This was a radical change from the point of view of nutritional culture since these areas came into direct contact with regions having a markedly different food culture and habits.⁴⁵ Moreover, from 1918, these areas constituted the food market of Romania together. It is beyond the scope of this paper to dwell into all the differences. We limit ourselves to discussing the relative importance and role of wheat and corn.⁴⁶ The land reform that took place in Romania in 1921 was the most radical one in the region is another factor that makes such a focus relevant.⁴⁷ Due to the land reform, the proportion of most important category of corn producers, small holders, increased significantly.⁴⁸ Throughout the interwar period, Romania produced more corn than wheat and this was unlike the situation in Hungary or in

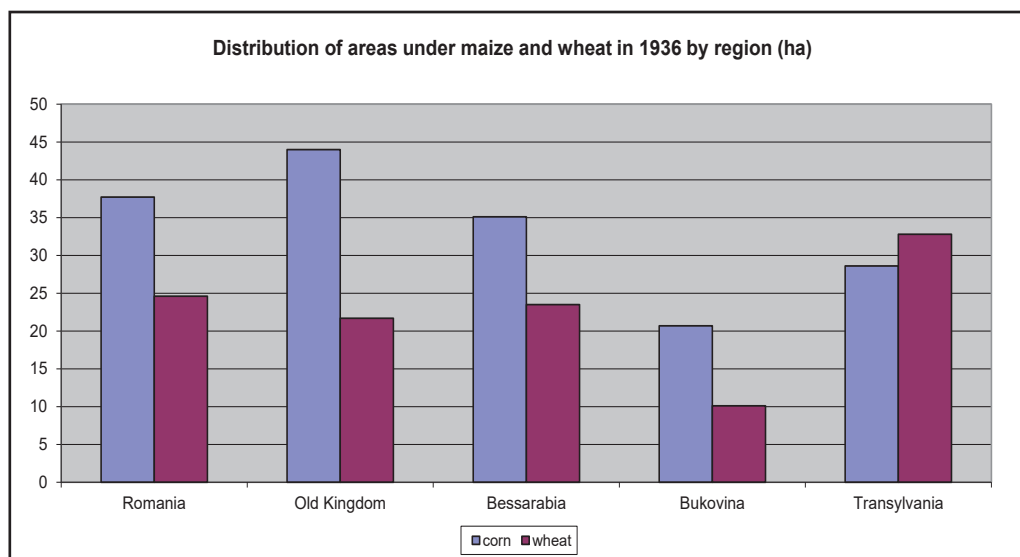
45 Based on ethnographic studies, spoon-food dominated east of the Carpathians, while in the Great Plains bread was the most important item. Transylvania was a mixed zone in this regard. Kisbán 1970: 99. Unfortunately, due to lack of information, we could not take the distinction between corn uses to make spoon-food (*puliszka*) and bread into consideration.

46 There were important differences between Transylvania, and the Old Kingdom in terms of land use. In Romania, on average, 62% were arable land and 21% were forest, but in Transylvania arable land made up only 24% and the proportion of forest and pastures were similar. Enciclopedia 1939: 303.

47 In 1921, the Romanian legislation sanctioned three land reforms the most radical of which was that of Transylvania. Venczel, "Az erdélyi román földbirtokreform", 323–337.

48 According to statistics from 1938, in Romania 74% of the farmers worked an areas between 1 and 5 ha and 14% had 5 to 10 ha. Enciclopedia, 305.

Western Europe.⁴⁹ In the Old Romanian Kingdom, there were sizeable cornfields and these were increasing in the interwar period: in 1924, 30.4% of the arable land was sown with corn, while in 1938 this figure rose to 37.7%.⁵⁰ Despite this increase, corn export did not grow as the produce served domestic demand. Slow growth⁵¹ and large fall-backs characterized Romania's agriculture in the interwar period. Romanians produced more corn than wheat. The gap became particularly large in the later 1920s.⁵² At the same time, regional characteristics became more pronounced.



In 1936, corn took up 37.7% of the arable land and 24.6% wheat. In the Old Kingdom, the difference was larger: 44% vs. 21.7%.⁵³ Even if nominal differences were smaller, the trend was similar in the other two areas recently incorporated into Romania: in Bessarabia and Bukovina. In Transylvania, however,

49 The first time that the area of corn surpassed that of wheat in Hungary was in 1945. Balassa 1960: 78.

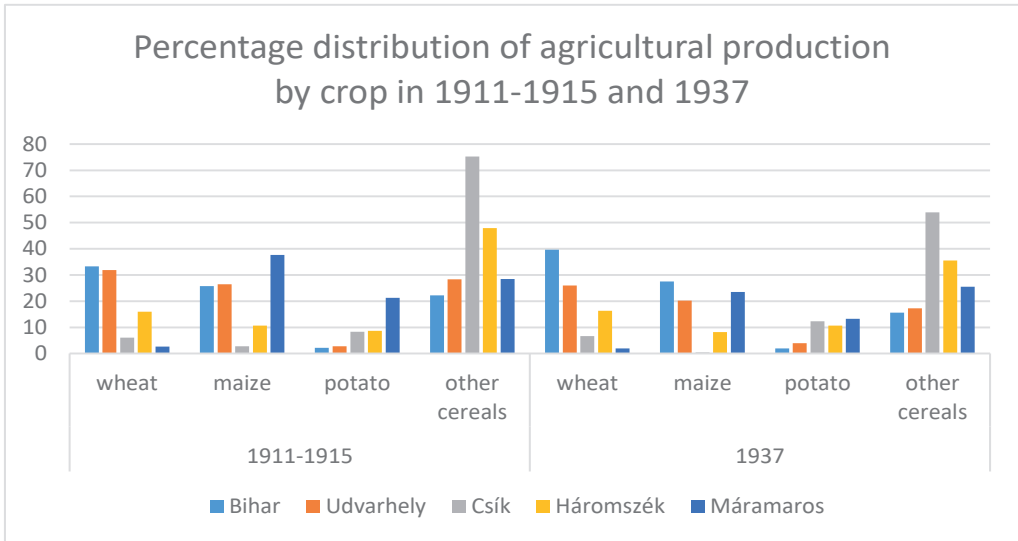
50 Balassa, *A magyar kukorica*, 29.

51 Altogether, in 1921, 71277000 q cereals were harvested in Romania, while in 1937 this number was 104307000 q. *Statistica* 1938: 71.

52 In 1929, 63862000 q corn was produced, in 1937, 46560000 q. In 1929, 63862000 q corn and only 27149000 q wheat were produced. *Statistica* 1938: 71.

53 Claudiu, *Alimentația poporului român*, 138.

the area of wheat (32.8%) surpassed that of corn (28.6%).⁵⁴ This situation and regional pattern is surprising since apart from some areas in the Partium and Banat, Transylvania is not an ideal region for wheat growing, while large plains of the Old Kingdom and Moldva would be.⁵⁵ The proportion that corn occupied indicates that corn was not only used for feeding animals but it was also the basis of human nutrition. We can illustrate the changes that had occurred in nutritional habits since the 19th century with comparing two data sets: the relative proportion of plants produced, and data about late 19th century consumption along with per capita cereal consumption. Admittedly, this is a simplification that distorts reality to some extent.



Despite modernization, changes in the boundaries of counties and the land reform, data about the production of cereals shows considerable continuity. In Máramaros County, which was dominantly Romanian, the area covered decreased in case of all plants considered. While the area for wheat dropped only slightly, from 5% to 2.9%, the change is more drastic for corn (from 37% to 23%).⁵⁶ There were significant differences among the Szekler counties in terms

⁵⁴ Enciclopedia, 309.

⁵⁵ Claudian, *Alimentația poporului român*, 21.

⁵⁶ *Statisztikai közlemények 1924*: 113–115. *Statistica 1938*: 59. Despite the decrease, nearly

of production.⁵⁷ Even though the general trend was similar in all three counties: there was a decline in the production of cereals and mostly in the area of barley and oat. This was so despite the fact that geographical conditions would have favoured just these two types of cereals. The area of wheat and rye decreased to a smaller extent in Udvarhely and Háromszék County but dropped to one third (from 29.3% of the total arable area to 8.1%) in Csík County. As a result of the decrease, rye nearly disappeared in Udvarhely and Csík counties (standing at 1.4%) and in Háromszék County it occupied just half of the area it used (5.9%). Differences among the Szekler counties were also pronounced in corn production: it was marginal in Háromszék és Csík Counties (0.4, and 8.2%), while in Udvarhely County corn took up more than 20% of the arable area.⁵⁸ In Bihar, the situation was markedly different: the area of wheat and rye combined (from 43.4% to 47%) and corn increased (from 25.8% to 27.5%), while that of barley and oat decreased (from 12.1 to 8.1%).⁵⁹

Since there are no better proxies, we shall compare the part of Károly Keleti's late 19th century statistics on food consumption related to the ingredients of bread with per capita quantities of cereal based on the statistical data from 1937.⁶⁰ Of course, we shall only draw cautious conclusions from this exercise. At first sight, the most important difference between the two data sets is that the proportion of barley and oat increased. However, these types of cereals played a marginal role in human nutrition in Transylvania. At the same, time, the amount of wheat, rye decreased while corn increased. Looking at regional patterns, in

one fourth of the area was sown with corn. It is important to note that Máramaros had the worse output for corn in the whole country: it had a 7.8q/ha output vs. the national average of 11q/ha. Indeed, the county only reached the national average in barley production among all cereals. Marina 1939: 28.

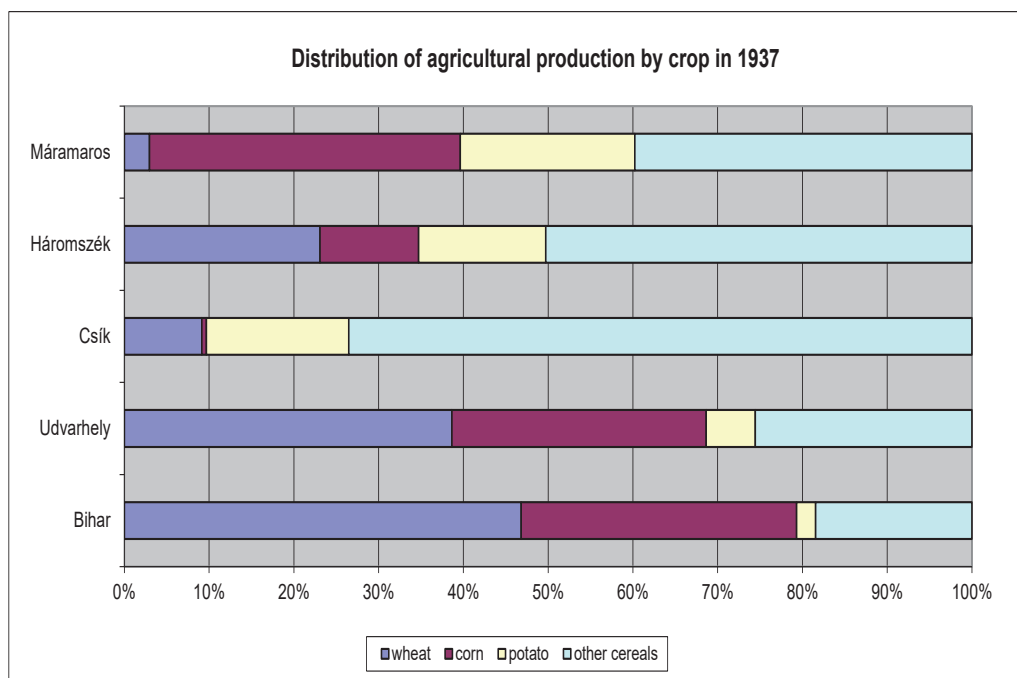
57 In 1937, wheat was the most important cereal with 26% of the area in Udvarhely. In Csík, oat was on the top with 24.5%, and, in Háromszék County, barley occupied 16.4% of the arable. *Statistica* 1938: 59.

58 *Statistica*: 1938. 59. In Udvarhely County, corn is consumed as bread, while in the other two counties it is primarily eaten in the form of porridge (*puliszka*). *Kisbán* 1970: 102.

59 *Statistica* 1938: 59.

60 *Barabás* 1907: 39.

Máramaros County, the quantity of corn also decreased and we can register increase in the quantity of barley and oat.⁶¹ In the Szekler counties the quantity of wheat and oat fell while the amount of corn consumed grew.⁶² In Bihar, the quantity of corn remained unchanged, and there was only a slight decrease in wheat and rye.⁶³ If we separate wheat and rye, we see that the quantity of wheat increased and rye decreased in all counties. Since small holders typically produced corn while large estates prioritized wheat, we may point at the land reform of 1921 as the reason behind the growing corn production.⁶⁴



61 In 1938, there were 1564 wagons of cereals produced in Máramaros County but only 902 went for human consumption. At the same time, requirement was no less than 7408 wagons of cereals so that domestic production only covered 94 days of consumption. Marina 1939: 24, 67.

62 Balassa, *A magyar kukorica*, 425.

63 Per capita quantities given here are based on the census of 1930 and the production data from 1937. *Recensământ 1938: XXXII–XXXIII*. Statistica: 1938. 86–89.

64 In Hungary, the majority of corn was produced on small farms of less than 20 holds in size. Balassa, *A magyar kukorica*, 81. The same can be said of Romania, where large estates primarily cultivated wheat, while small farms mainly produced corn. *Enciclopedia 1939*: 308.

Summary and Conclusion

Although there were some elements of truth in the arguments of the Hungarian government regarding the food supply situation in Northern Transylvania, these arguments were not entirely well founded. The government argued that there was a general shortage in food availability that arose from the agricultural output of the re-annexed territories being insufficient.⁶⁵ Indeed, among these regions only the Banat produced surplus but this surplus was exported to Germany.⁶⁶ It was characteristic of the shortage that inhabitants complained about the delay in the distribution of rations in Szeklerland.⁶⁷

The second argument about the differences in nutritional habits along ethnic lines was a false one. Before 1918, Southern Transylvania was the most important corn growing area in Hungary. Once it was annexed to Romania, Hungary had to import corn in years of bad harvest and this was even more so after the re-annexations of 1938-1940.⁶⁸ The argument was that in the system of rationing, Hungary produced corn only for the needs of domestic animals and there were no stocks for feeding the population with corn. Therefore, Romanians would also receive wheat flour but they did not want it. Although the Hungarian Government maintained that the Office of Public Supply reported that Romanians tended to reject wheat flour, there was not a single specific instance cited and confirmed. Even if corn played a more important role in the nutrition of Romanians than in the diet of Hungarians, it is untrue that Romanians did not know what to do with wheat flour.

Since we do not have data on consumption for the interwar period, attempts

65 *Feljegyzés a magyarországi élelmiszer-ellátásról.* 1942. július 22. MNL OL K 28, 274. csomó, 2. tétel, a dosszié. 52-62.

66 On the disadvantageous obligations to export all surplus wheat to Germany, see Vargyai 1985: 167.

67 Szeklerland had no railway connection to Hungary until the railway line between Déda and Szeretfalva was completed in 1942.

68 *Feljegyzés a magyarországi élelmiszer-ellátásról.* 1942. július 22. MNL OL K 28, 274. csomó, 2. tétel, a dosszié. 52-62.

at statistical comparison only brought partial results. Károly Keleti's statistics positing that there were fundamental differences in nutritional habits along ethnic lines is valid only if we break it down at the regional level. It is valid for the 1940s that people consume more corn in Transylvania than in other parts of contemporary Hungary and that Romanians eat more corn than Hungarians. However, the diet in mountainous land will resemble those of other highlands more than plains regardless of nationality. In terms of nutritional habits, we will find more similarities in the nutritional habits of Romanians in Máramaros and Hungarian in Szeklerland than the latter group and Hungarians living in the plains of Bihar County. Further studies in historical ethnography are required to refine this picture. For example, they would have to address the anomalies of the prevalence of a certain type of cereal where conditions are suboptimal for its growth.

At this stage of the inquiry, one may state that land reform did not substantially impact nutritional habits. Although, due to the increase in the proportion of small holders resulted in the moderate growth of the area of corn, there was no significant shift in the composition of cereals and, presumably, this was also true of their consumption. Importantly, the regions and counties that relied on imports did not eat what they produced. While in Máramaros 75% of the bread was made of corn in the late 19th century, in 1937 cornfields made up only 39% of the arable area. Similarly, in the late 19th century inhabitants of the Szekler Counties primarily used to eat rye bread and also used wheat and corn to a lesser extent, in 1937, in Udvarhely the key cereal was wheat, in Csík it was oat, and in Háromszék barley took the lead.

We may conclude that the Hungarian government made its arguments about food supply in Northern Transylvania based on stereotypes and previous propaganda statements. Romanians consumed both corn and wheat in the late 19th as well as in the mid-20th century. The statement that Romanians did not know how to process wheat flour distributed to them was certainly false. It was not a coincidence that local investigations did not confirm any such instance. It was also a propagandistic oversimplification that Hungarians would only consume wheat

since corn was a part of the diet in the Szeklerland and it had even increased between the late 19th century and the 1940s. Since, except for Bihar County, the regions discussed here needed to import foodstuff, the introduction of the central distribution of food depended on the good will of state authorities to a large extent. This vulnerability was even more pronounced in the case of ethnic minorities.

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Swing in front of the ruins of District I of Budapest, 1945. Source: Fortepan, Photo no. 60167.