

**ETHNIC AND CLASS IDENTITY FORMATION  
WITHIN THE GERMANS OF HUNGARY**

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## **Executive Summary**

This report focuses on the reasons why the three largest German-speaking minority groups in Hungary, reacted so radically different to the partitioning of the Hungarian Kingdom following the end of World War One. When Hungary was partitioned, the Zipsers who were now under Czechoslovak administration wanted to become part of Hungary again, the Saxons who were part of Romania celebrated their divorce from Hungary, and the Schwabs were unhappy with being in Hungary. The Germans who were out wanted back in, others who were out were celebrating their exit, and those Germans who remained in Hungary wanted out. What explains such vastly different reactions? Why is one German group patriotic, while the other two disillusioned with the Hungarian state? How different were these German groups? In studying the different reactions of these three different German-speaking groups, this essay will evidence that a strong correlation exists between the class position of each group and the type of ethno-national identity they develop. Or in other words, class plays a profound influence in ethno-identity formation.

## Introduction

Few events transformed European and World history like the outbreak, evolution, and failed conclusion of World War One. The critical years between 1914 and 1918 forever altered the course of history. Great dynasties like the Hohenzollern, Habsburg, and Romanov fell and, in their place, a multitude of new nation states arose. The stark contrast between Europe of 1910 and 1925 is most easily illustrated by examining the changing political borders. In 1910, the three great multi-national states of the German and Russian Empires, as well as the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, dominated from the Baltic to Transylvania. Combined, these three large states had a population of over 270 million. By 1925, the three empires in the region were replaced by Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the new independent states of Austria and Hungary.

Among the new states, Poland had the largest population with 29 million, but the majority of the new states were small. Estonia had a population of just over one million, Latvia just under one million, Lithuania slightly over two million, Austria 6.5 million, and Hungary 7.9 million.<sup>1</sup> Large, complex, and multi-national political entities were replaced by small, and in many cases, ethno-linguistically more homogenous nation-states.

The common wisdom in 1918 was that giving aspiring nationalities self-government – reflected in Woodrow Wilson’s “peace without victory” speech before the US Senate on January 22, 1917 – will ensure a reduction of ethnic conflict in East Central Europe.<sup>2</sup> The presumption was – whether right or wrong – that World War One was caused by the irresolvable nationalities

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<sup>1</sup> World Almanac and Book of Facts (New York: 1911): 559. And look at the Almanac of 1925: 565. See also Dudley Kirk, Europe’s Population in the Interwar Years (Geneva, 1946).

<sup>2</sup> Guido Kisch, “Documents: Woodrow Wilson and the Independence of Small Nations in Central Europe,” Journal of Modern History (September, 1947): 235-239. Iván Berend, Decades of Crisis, (California, 1998): 151.

problem in the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. To extinguish the fires of hatred, policy makers argued that as many of the nationalities as possible should be granted their own states.

From the beginning, this was strongly challenged and criticized. Some protested that borders were drawn badly, while others noted that it was not clear what really defined a “nation,” and the creation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia seemed to contradict the policy of creating homogenous nation-states. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the new borders followed closer the ethno-linguistic reality of the region than any geopolitical demarcation lines that had existed previously. The Poles, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and the Czechs got what they wanted. The Romanians of Transylvania celebrated their unity with Romania proper, and both the Slovaks and Croats enjoyed their divorce from Austro-Hungary.

Late 1918 was welcomed as a period of liberation and freedom, as every conceivable ethnic group clamored to be recognized as an independent self-governing nation. Champagne bottles popped, government buildings were decorated, and intellectuals debated deep into the night about the creation of Ruthenia, the Zipser Republic, independent Transylvania, and the future of East Central Europe in the new world order. As Joseph Rothchild noted: “The interwar territorial settlements, for all their weaknesses, freed three times as many people from nationally alien rule as they subjected to such rule.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Rothchild, East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars, (Seattle, 1974): 4. See also C. A. Macartney, Hungary and Her Successors 1919-1937 (London, 1937, rpt. 1965). ). C. A. Macartney and A. W. Palmer, Independent Eastern Europe (London, 1962). Oscar Jászi, The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy, (Chicago, 1961). Hugh Seaton-Watson, Eastern Europe Between the Wars, 1918-1941 (Cambridge, 1941). Numerous works focus on the Paris Peace Conference and its consequences: Francis Deák, Hungary and the Paris Peace Conference (New York, 1942), Titus Komarnicki, Rebirth of the Polish Republic (London, 1957), Ivo Lederer, Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference (New Haven, 1963), Dagmar Perman, The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State (Leiden, 1962), Sherman D. Spector, Rumania at the Paris Peace Conference (New York, 1962).

After the dust had settled and the ink had dried on the numerous Peace Treaties, four major ethnic minorities (German, Jew, Magyar, and Roma) with contested positions remained.<sup>4</sup> For these minorities, 1918 was filled with contradictions. On the one hand, there was the end of trench warfare; the sweeping away of autarchic monarchies; the establishment of new popular governments based on modern constitutions; and the vision of a new age of democracy, liberty, and prosperity. On the other hand, 1918 also produced an army of disaffected souls filled with vile. It created large Magyar and German ethnic minorities bitterly struggling for revision of the borders, as well as a significant rise in anti-Semitism. 1918 showed the hope for an end decades of ethnic conflict, but at the very same moment it ushered in decades of contested sovereignty between dissimilating minorities and assimilating and insecure new nation states.

In short, the Peace Treaties that concluded World War One were supposed to help aspiring nationalities in reducing ethnic conflict, but peace brought with it a Pandora's Box of problems. Leading to a crisis of identity, instability, contesting ideologies, migrating states, plastic borders and eventually, the most violent years of ethnic cleansing (1938-1945) in European history.<sup>5</sup>

This article focuses on the largest and most agitorial of the minorities in the region: the Germans, the group often understood as supporters of Germany's imperial ambitions in Eastern

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<sup>4</sup> There were an estimated over 3 million Jews in Poland in 1931; 756,930 in Romania; 444,567 in Hungary; 356,830 in Czechoslovakia; 157,527 in Lithuania; 95,675 in Latvia; and 4,566 in Estonia. From Ezra Mendelsohn, The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars (Bloomington, 1983). The Magyar minority was limited to the territories of the former Hungarian Kingdom. In 1920 there were an estimated one million Magyars in Czechoslovakia; 1,650,000 in Romania; and 450,000 in Yugoslavia. See C. A. Macartney, Hungary and Her Successors 1919-1937 (London, 1937, rpt. 1965). 4.

<sup>5</sup> The ethnic tensions that were particularly acute in Interwar period East Central Europe are discussed by C. A. Macartney, National States and National Minorities (1934, rpt., New York, 1968), and his Hungary and Her Successor States (London, 1937). The classic work on the topic of ethnic tensions before the war is Robert W. Seaton-Watson's Electoral Corruption and Reform in Hungary (London, 1911). Also by Seaton-Watson, Racial Problems in Hungary (London, 1908). And, German, Slav, and Magyar: A Study in the Origins of the Great War, (New York, 1968).

Europe during World War Two. The creation of the German minority is considered the classic example of the flaws inherent in the Peace of 1918. Approximately 10 million Germans found themselves from one day to the next as national minorities living in East Central Europe after the war's conclusion, with an estimated three million in Czechoslovakia, one million in Poland, 750,000 in Romania, 700,000 in the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, and 500,000 in Hungary.<sup>6</sup>

The German Diaspora of East Central Europe was not only the largest ethnic minority after World War One, and found in almost every new nation state created after 1918, but it also represented tremendous internal heterogeneity in a cultural, linguistic, and economic sense. To illustrate the diversity of the Germans East of the Elbe, this report discusses specifically the evolution and development – leading up to World War Two – of three German diasporic sub-groups: The Zipsers in Czechoslovakia, the Saxons in Romania, and the Schwabs in Hungary. Out of these three German sub-groups in 1910, the Schwabs were the largest with an estimated size of 1.4 million, followed by the Saxons with 300,000, and the Zipsers with 100,000.

The central argument of this report is that the origins of ethnic conflict in interwar period Central Europe must be understood as based both on a struggle for material resources and a clash of ethnic identities. This does not mean to imply that class is identical to ethnicity. Instead, I argue that ethnic identity formation cannot be separated from its social structural context. Ethnic identity, in other words, evolves in a dialectical relationship with class position. The fact that in East Central Europe ethnic and class lines were historically intertwined necessitates a clear focus on class as a central element in discussions of the ethnic question. Class plays a critical role in

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<sup>6</sup> Alfred Bohmann, Menschen und Grenzen, 4 vols. (Köln, Politik, 1969-1975). Valdis Luman, Himmler's Auxiliaries. The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe 1933-1945, (Chapel Hill, 1993). Wilhelm Winkler, Statistische Handbuch des gesamten Deutschtums, (Berlin, 1922). Also by Winkler, Deutschtum in aller Welt: Bevölkerungsstatistische Tabellen, (Wien, 1938).

the evolution of ethnic identity and in turn, both class and ethnic identity become major factors in the outbreak of ethnic conflict. In discussing the relationship between class and ethnic identity formation, this article discusses specifically the origins of ethnic identity formation among the Zipsers, Saxons, and Schwabs in relation to their social-structural position under feudalism and in the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

The starting paradigm of this work concerns why the Zipsers, Saxons, and Schwabs reacted so differently to the partitioning of the Hungarian Kingdom after World War One. As Peace was concluded in late 1918, the Hungarian Kingdom was divided along three broad and two minor lines: the northern part (Slovakia) became part of the Czechoslovak Republic, the eastern territory (Transylvania) part of the Romanian Monarchy, and the western and central plains formed the core of Hungary. The two lesser, but nevertheless significant territory transfers were Vojvodina, which became part of the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia (renamed Yugoslavia in 1928), and Burgenland, which became part of Austria in 1923.

The Zipsers, who came under Czechoslovakian administration, first petitioned to form their own republic (The Zipser Republic). However, this failed quickly, and the Zipsers grudgingly accepted their place in Czechoslovakia. In the first few months of 1920 many Zipsers moved to the now reduced territory of Hungary, or remained in Slovakia and agitated there for reintegration with Hungary. They formed their main political party (*The Zipser-Deutsch Partei*), which worked closely with the Magyar political parties. The Biedermeier Zipsers, in particular, wanted the return of Hungarian rule.<sup>7</sup> The Zipsers were often called *Magyarones* by the Slovaks and pan-German agitators (meaning they were really Magyars but spoke German).

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Brosz, *Die Karpaten-Deutsch in der Slowakei 1918-1945* (Stuttgart, 1972). Also by Brosz, *Das letzte Jahrhundert der karpatendeutsche in der Slowakei*, (Stuttgart, 1992). Jörg Hoensch, and Dušan Kováč. *Das Scheitern der Verständigung: Tscheschen, Deutsch und Slowaken in der Ersten Republik* (1918-1938), (Essen, 1994). Egbert Kurt Jahn, *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929* (München, 1971). Dušan Kováč,



In strong contrast to the Zipsers, the Germans in Transylvania – who referred to themselves as the *Siebenbürgen Saxons* – celebrated the division of the Hungarian Kingdom. Since the late nineteenth century, the Saxons had become disillusioned with Magyar rule because of the policy of Magyarization of their schools. Shortly after the war ended, the Saxons at first agitated for the creation of an independent Transylvania based on autonomous cantons like Switzerland, but when their effort failed, they celebrated their incorporation into Romania.<sup>8</sup> The pro-Magyar Saxons, who were few to begin with, thereafter moved to the territories of Hungary. During the 1920s the Saxons became critically disillusioned with the Romanian government, because of the way land reforms were introduced, but few wanted to rejoin Hungary.

A third and entirely different approach characterized those Germans that remained under Hungarian rule and are known as the Donauschwabe or simply, the Schwabs. The Schwabs, who represented the most dispersed German group of Hungary, after 1920 fell under the administration of either Hungary, Romania, or the Kingdom of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. The Schwabs who remained under Hungarian administration, were clearly dissatisfied with Hungarian rule and agitated for greater autonomy. For most of the 1920s and 1930s, the

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Nemecko a nemecká menšina na Slovensku (1871-1945), (Bratislava, 1991). Also by Kováč, “Die Ungarndeutschen in der Politik des deutschen Imperialismus bis 1914,” Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft, (Nr. 2, 1991): 153-162. And, “Das nationale Selbstverständnis der deutschen Minderheit in der Slowakei,” Österreichische Osthefte (Nor 2, 1991): 77-92. A more pro-German approach is by Rudolf Melzer, Erlebt Geschichte: vom Umsturz 1918 zum Umbruch 1938/39: eine Rückschau auf ein Menschenalter Karpatendeutschum (Wien, 1989). And also, Erlebt Geschichte: Rückschau auf ein Menschenalter Karpatendeutschum. Teil 2: Von 1939 bis 1945 und wie es weiterging, (Wien, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Johann Böhm, Die Deutschen in Rumänien und die Weimarer Republik 1919-1933, (Ippenheim, 1993). Karl M. Reinert, Zur politischen Entwicklung der Deutschen in Rumänien 1918-1928, (Thaur/Tirol, 1993). Harald Roth, Politische Strukturen und Strömungen bei den Siebenbürger Sachsen, (1919-1933), (Köln, 1994).

Schwabians in Hungary thought Hungarian rule oppressive, struggled for the establishment of German language schools and German-speaking cultural institutions, as well as for more political autonomy.<sup>9</sup>

To summarize the paradigm, after Hungary was partitioned, the Zipsers who were now under Czechoslovak administration wanted to become part of Hungary again, the Saxons who were part of Romania celebrated their divorce from Hungary, and the Schwabs were unhappy with being in Hungary. The Germans who were out wanted back in, others who were out were celebrating their exit, and those Germans who remained in Hungary wanted out. What explains such vastly different reactions? Why is one German group patriotic, while the other two disillusioned with the Hungarian state? How different were these German groups? Is there a correlation between the different political orientations of these groups and their position within Hungary's social structure?

The literature on the German Diaspora in East Central Europe and Hungary is extensive; there is both a long tradition of these German groups writing about themselves, and scholars from Germany taking note of them. The Zipsers and Saxons in particular have a long literary tradition dating back to the Reformation, furthered by the establishment of local printing houses in their main cities.

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<sup>9</sup> Part of the future problem was diffused, when the territory known as Burgenland was seeded to Austrian control in 1923. With Burgenland, the Hungarian German minority would have numbered almost one million, making them a considerable political force. After Burgenland was annexed by Austria, the size of the German minority in Hungary was halved to an estimated 500,000. Jacob Bleyer, who emerged as a political leader of the Schwabians in the interwar period, even tried to bloc the transfer of Burgenland to Austria, because he was well aware it would cut into his political base. The literature is extensive: Gusztáv Gratz, Deutschungarische probleme (Budapest, 1938). Béla Pukánszky, Német polgárság magyar földön (German Burghers on Hungarian Soil), (Budapest, 1936). Michael George Hillinger, The German National Movement in Interwar Period Hungary, (New York: Ph.D. Columbia University, 1973). Alajos Kovács, A németek helyzete Csonka-Magyarországon statisztikai megvilágításban (The Situation Statistically of the Germans in the Trianon Treaty Reduced Territories of Hungary), (Budapest, 1936). Gerhard Seewan, Ungarndeutsche und Ethnopolitik, (Budapest, 2000). Thomas Spira, German-Hungarian Relations and the Swabian Problem 1919-1936 (New York, 1977). Loránt Tilkovszky, Ungarn und die deutsche "Volkgruppenpolitik" 1939-1945, (Budapest, 1981).

One of the earliest works on the Zipsers and Saxons was published in 1644 by David Fröhlich, a burgher from Kežmarok. An impressive collection of works on the Germans of the East has also been produced by German scholars. Especially after Herder had made his impact by establishing the importance of studying ethnic-national groups as a dynamic element in the historical dialectic, works by Germans on the Germans in the east increased incrementally. During the progress of the nineteenth century this scholarship became intertwined with German Romanticism, and in the late nineteenth century, it became practically indistinguishable from pan-Germanism.

Clubs and associations sprouted up in Germany, advocating the unity of volk and state. The most noteworthy of these pan-German groups was the *Alldeutscher Verband* (Pan-German League) organized by Ernst Hasse in 1894 in Leipzig, and the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Verband* (General German League) founded in 1891. The leadership was often composed of German professors, who published profusely their scientific works on their German brothers and sisters living on the European frontier. The role of Georg Ritter von Schönerer (1842-1921) - the founder of the Pan-German Party in Austria in 1885 - and the German radical Karl Hermann Wolf are noteworthy here, because they articulated pan-German feelings in Austro-Hungary, mixing it with anti-Semitism and an anti-Slav ideology. This school of thought played a prominent role in the interwar period as well, and had a strong influence on the development of Hitler's ideology. Works produced in this tradition include Karl Haushofer's Baustein zur Geopolitik (1928), Ewald Banse's Raum und Volk im Weltkrieg (1933), and Hans Grimm's Folk ohne Raum (1926).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The classic work remains, of course, George Mosse's *Crisis of German Ideology* (New York, 1964). But more specific books are: Hans-Adolf Jacobson, ed., Hans Steinacher, Bundesleiter des VDA, 1933-1937: Erinnerungen und Dokumente, (Boppard, 1970). Alfred Kruck, Geschichte des Alldeutsche Verbandes, 1890-1939 (Wiesbaden, 1954). Ernst Ritter, Das Deutsch Ausland-Institute in Stuttgart, 1917-1945, (Wiesbaden, 1976).

Modern literature on the German Diaspora of Eastern Europe has focused on the events of World War Two. The themes most commonly discussed include the Sudetendeutsch question and the politics of Konrad Henlein, the Munich Agreement, and the role of Polish-Germans in the invasion of Poland in 1939.<sup>11</sup> Discussion of the Hungarian-Germans, Lithuanian-Germans, Yugoslav-Germans, Italian-Germans, and Romanian-Germans pales in comparison to the literature available on the Sudetendeutsche.

Nevertheless, a common thread runs through many of the books and articles on the German Diaspora of Eastern Europe. Namely, they treat the Germans through the model which Rogers Brubaker has referred to as the “triangular configuration.” According to Brubaker, to understand an ethnic-minority’s position, what need to be established are: the ethnic minority’s relationship to its host country, whether the minority has a home-state to defend its interest, the minority’s relationship to its home-state, and lastly the relationship between the home-state and the host-state. This methodology has yielded the most important works on the German Diaspora of the interwar period and their reaction to the rise and spread of National Socialism.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> On the Germans of Bohemia the literature is especially rich. Johan Brügel, Tschechen und Deutsche (Munich, 1967). Gary B. Cohen, The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914, (Princeton, 1981). Jeremy King, Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: The Local History of Bohemian Politics (Princeton, 2002). Hermann Münch, Böhmische Tragödie (Braunschweig, 1949). Ronald Smelser, The Sudeten Problem: Volkstumpolitik and the Formation of Nazi Foreign Policy (Middletown, 1975) Elisabeth Wiskemann, Czechs and Germans: A Study of the Struggle in the Historical Provinces of Bohemia and Moravia (Oxford, 1938).

<sup>12</sup> Rogers Brubaker, Nationalism Reframed (Cambridge, 1996). Representative works that concentrate on the Hungarian German Diaspora accordingly are G. C. Paikert’s The Danube Swabians (The Hague, 1967), Komjáthy and Stockwells’ German Minorities and the Third Reich (New York, 1980), Thomas Spira’s The German-Hungarian Swabian Triangle (New York/Boulder, 1990), and Loránt Tilkovszky’s Ungarn und the deutsche “Volkgruppenpolitik” 1939-1945 (Budapest, 1981). Other noteworthy works that concern Germans in other areas of Eastern Europe using a similar methodology include Valdis Lumans’ Himmler’s Auxiliaries (Chapel Hill, 1993), Ronald Smelser’s The Sudeten Problem (Middletown, 1975), and Elisabeth Wiskemann’s Czechs and Germans (Oxford, 1938).

However, utilizing primarily political pamphlets and the correspondences of leading party figures, in these works the focus on politics often smothers the significance played by the social roots of ethnic group formations. And while ethnic conflict and identity find their most affirmative confirmation in the political sphere, beneath the rhetoric of ethno-politics exists a socio-economic reality that is often of decisive importance. Or as Gary Cohen had argued already in 1981: “To explain properly the evolution of the nationality conflicts or Habsburg politics as a whole, we must look more closely at the social history of ethnic and national identification and the relationship between solidarity and social bonds based on class, economic interest, and geographic origins.”<sup>13</sup>

An understanding of an ethnic group’s position within the larger social structure is especially important in the context of Hungarian developments. Hungarian social structure in 1910 was characterized by the sociologist Ferenc Erdei as a “dual society.” By the term dual society, Erdei meant that into the twentieth century one part of Hungarian society belonged to the old feudal past, while the other to the modern, industrial, developing future. Hungary had not yet broken free from its feudal shackles, but neither was it lost in the archaic medieval ages. It was a time of clashing systems of values and norms, a time of transition from feudalism to capitalism, from an estate to a class-based society, from aristocracy to bourgeoisie, peasantry to proletariat, monarchy to democracy, from rural to urban, wood to gas, carriage to car, and whip to pen.

As Erdei wrote of the complex development of Hungary during the early twentieth century:

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<sup>13</sup> Gary B. Cohen, The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914, (Princeton, 1981). 7. Look at Alfred Bohmann, Das Sudetendeutschtum in Zahlen: Handbuch über den Bestand und die Entwicklung der sudetendeutsch Volksgruppe in den Jahren von 1910 bis 1950, (München, 1959). An emphasis on class and economic forces is also part of Jeremy King’s Budweisers into Czechs and Germans, (Princeton, 2002).

Generally and as a whole it was not bourgeois society but the compound of a bourgeois society developed together with the capitalist transformation and a feudal social structure which continued to exist in the course of capitalist evolution as well. Under such circumstances entirely independent structures became interlinked with each other within the framework of Hungarian society.<sup>14</sup>

One of the important points stressed by Erdei's "dual society" model was that class and ethnic lines crossed. Hungarian social structure had always been deeply heterogeneous, and under feudalism, the division of labor often mirrored ethnic differences. Armenians, Greeks, Arabs, and Jews played an important role as traders. Magyars played an important role as frontiersmen, nobles, yeomen, freemen, serfs; Slovaks were often peasants or nobles; and Serbians were soldiers and peasants.

Further, because capitalism was introduced late and from above, up to the outbreak of World War One, and well into the interwar period, parts of the feudal social structure merged with the newly developing capitalist division of labor. Accordingly, a discussion of ethnic identity, and especially ethnic-politics, and class position as well as class struggle, must be carried out simultaneously. Without clearly analyzing the Zipsers', Saxons', and Schwabs' socio-structural position under feudalism and, most importantly, during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, therefore, it is difficult to understand the choices they made in the interwar period and during World War Two.

In a discussion of the different positions occupied by the Zipsers, Saxons, and Schwabs in Hungary's historic social structure, and the relationship of those positions to later developments, it is noteworthy that among these three German groups, the Zipsers were the most favored by the Hungarian nineteenth century liberal literati. A popular stereotype of the Zipsers can be

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<sup>14</sup> Ferenc Erdei, "Hungarian Society Between the Two World Wars;" In: Tibor Huszár eds. Erdei Ferenc: Selected Writings (Budapest, 1988): 7-95. 12. The essay was originally published in Hungarian in 1976 in the Journal, Valóság (4 and 5).

illustrated in Mór Jókai's famous novel A Lőcsei Fehér Asszony (The White Woman of Levoča). Jókai wrote of the Zipsers: "They settled during the time of the first Hungarian kings [...] They kept their language, but in everything else they became Magyars." A few pages later Jókai further elaborated: "Through the many centuries of vicissitude, these German-Hungarians remained the most unshakable believers in the struggle of [Hungarian] national liberation. They never bowed before the Turkish Sultan, nor the German Emperor. And during the years when there was no national [Hungarian] prince, they turned their cities into republics such as Venice or Ragusa [Croatia], being self-governed, and printing their own money with their city coat-of-arms..."<sup>15</sup>

The Zipsers were German speakers who lived in 30 odd small towns in and close to Spiš County (today's north-eastern Slovakia and south-east Poland), including the towns of Levoča, Kežmarok, Poprad, and Spišská Nová Ves. In this border region of the old Hungarian Kingdom, ethnic and estate lines were often indistinguishable. Since the early medieval times, a division of labor was formed in which landlords identified themselves as Magyars or Poles (even if they were assimilated Germans or Slovaks), the peasantry was overwhelmingly Slovak, the day laborers and serfs Ruthenian, and the town-dwellers German. Some German speakers were peasants, who considered themselves Zipsers, but Zipser identity developed as both a "cultural identity" (German-speaking Lutherans) as well as an estate consciousness. To be a Zipser was to be a German-speaking Lutheran and privileged urban dweller, and this identity was in a dialectical relationship with the local Magyar noble and Slovak peasant world. To be a Magyar was to be a "noble" and a Slovak, to be an "agriculturalist."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mór Jókai, A Lőcsei Fehér Asszony (The White Woman of Levoča) (Budapest, 1974): 12.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, it is important to note, that to capture what "Slovak" signified in the early modern times is extremely difficult.

The Schwabs present the polar opposite of the Zipsers. While the Zipsers constituted an urban estate, the Schwabs were peasants. Specifically, the term Schwab emerged in Hungary in the late seventeenth century to describe German peasants who settled on the southern frontier of the Hungarian Kingdom after the Ottomans were expelled. Part of the Schwabian population - and this applies to the Bácska and Bánát Germans first and foremost – formed border guard communities. For the most part, however, the Schwabs tended to live in villages, had few privileges, and did not develop an intellectual layer until late into the nineteenth century.

Indeed, for a long time the German-speaking peasants of southern Hungary did not share a collective identity, such as the Zipsers. They settled in Hungary from all over the Holy Roman Empire, and while the first to settle in 1689 did come from Schwabia, the immigrants of the eighteenth and nineteenth century came from across the Holy Roman Empire. The term Schwabian, therefore, did not emerge as a form of self-affirmation, and did not signify a collective point of origin, but was ascribed onto them mostly by Magyar lords and nobles, and it connoted German-speaking Catholic peasant, tavern keeper, tailor, or poor artisan. It was a derogatory term, and the Zipsers and the Saxons made a point of differentiating themselves from the Schwabs.<sup>17</sup>

The Transylvanian Saxons evidence a third position within Hungary's social structure. While the Zipsers represented an urban estate, and the Schwabs a peasant estate, the Saxons of Transylvania formed what can be called a complete petit national community, with a developed

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<sup>17</sup> Mathias, Annabring, Das Ungarländische Deutschtum 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1952) Also by Annabring, Geschichte der Donauschwaben, (Stuttgart-Möhringen, 1954). Raimund-Frederich, Kaindl, Geschichte der Deutschen in den Karpathenländern, 3 vols. (Gotha, 1907-1911). Also by Kaindl, Geschichte der Deutschen in Ungarn (Gotha, 1912). Johann Schwickler, Die Deutschen in Ungarn und Siebenbürgen, (Wien, 1881). Gerhard Seewann and Edgar Hönsch, Aspekte ethnischer Identität: Ergebnisse des Forschungsprojekts "Deutsche und Magyaren als nationale Minderheiten im Donauraum", (München, 1991). Anton, Valentin, Die Banater Schwaben, (München, 1959).



layer of peasants, burghers, as well as landowners, and a few nobles. What distinguished the Saxons was that unlike the Schwabs and Zipsers, the Saxons, since medieval times, had a distinct territory called Crownland in Transylvania over which the Saxon urban patriciate and the Saxon Count wielded political administrative control. The Saxons were not all from Saxony, as the Schwabs were not from Schwabia, and the term instead descends from Teutonic knights who first settled and founded the autonomous territory of the Crownland in the twelfth century. However, these Teutonic knights were expelled shortly after they arrived, and modern Saxons are a mix of different German speakers who settled from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century.

The homogeneity of the Crownland from the thirteenth to the mid-nineteenth century was maintained by laws hindering the freedom of non-German speakers to settle, and after the Reformation, that of non-Lutherans. Saxon identity and Lutheranism became inseparable categories from the sixteenth century onward. Unlike the Zipsers, therefore, who lived in an environment where the feudal division of labor mirrored ethnic differences, the Saxons occupied a province of their own, and constituted both rural and urban elements.<sup>18</sup>

The Zipsers, Saxons, and Schwabs represented different German-speaking groups in Hungary. They had very little to do with one another and lived in three distinct parts of Hungary: the Zipsers in the northeastern Uplands, the Schwabs in the south, and the Saxons in the southeastern corner of Transylvania. Furthermore, they occupied three distinct positions in Hungarian society. The Zipsers represented the interests of an old urban estate; the Schwabs, the interests of new peasant immigrants who settled in Hungary in search of opportunity; and the Saxons were composed of peasants, burghers, and nobles. While the Zipsers and Schwabs each

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Göllner, *Die Siebenbürgen in den Jahren 1848-1918*, (Köln, 1988). Wolfgang Kessler, *Gruppenautonomie in Siebenbürgen*, (Köln, 1990). Friedrich Teutsch, *Geschichte der Siebenbürgen Sachsen für das sächsische Volk*, 4 vols. (Hermannstadt, 1926). Franz Zimmerman and C. Werner, G. Müller, *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutscher in Siebenbürgen*, 3 vols. (Hermannstadt, 1892-1902).

represented the interest of one estate or class (noble-burgher and burgher-artisan on the one side and peasant-farmer and peasant-artisan on the other), the Saxons formed a complete proto-national social structure.

Last but not least, a noteworthy sectarian difference existed among the three groups, with the Zipsers and Saxons being Lutherans, while the Schwabs were often Catholics (many settled by the Catholic Habsburg Court). In short, while these German groups may have collectively been labeled “German” by the census takers in 1910, their cosmologies were radically different. An examination follows of the history and evolution of each group’s ethno-national identity, evidencing that these three German groups are an excellent illustration of the influence class and estate position have on ethno-national identity formation.

When searching for the origins of ethnic identity, of the groups studied in this article, the Zipsers and Saxons have the longest history. While no exact date can be established as to when the Zipsers and Saxons reached self-awareness, by the sixteenth century they had begun to develop some sort of collective group identity. Konrad Sperfogal, the famous sixteenth century judge of Levoča, the Zipser capital, noted in his diary that the Zipsers descend from Noah’s Ark, are the lost tribe of Israel, and wandered for many centuries before settling at the foot of the Tatra Mountains. This tale was retold again in the famous seventeenth century diary of the judge of Levoča, Gaspar Hain. Already in the sixteenth century, therefore, the judge is teaching and the minister is preaching that the Zipsers are a distinct group. They are not part of the Germans in the Holy Empire, and are different from the Magyars and Slavs. They can trace their origins back to the Old Testament, and because they represent the lost tribe, they are also a chosen people.

In a similar way, the Saxons of Transylvania by the time of the Reformation developed an understanding of themselves as a distinct group. This was reaffirmed to them in the creation of the political office, “Count of the Saxons,” and the clear demarcation of the political borders of the Crownland, also called Saxonland. Saxon identity was further strengthened in the early modern period when Johann Honterus established a printing house in Braşov, as well as co-founded a law academy, ensuring the creation of a Saxon intelligentsia.

While both Saxon and Zipser identities have long roots, and both were deeply influenced by the Reformation, it was the Enlightenment and the French Revolution that opened a new chapter in their ethno-national awakening. In many respects, modern Zipser identity cannot be separated from the influences of the eighteenth century. Emerging from the Lutheran royal free towns of northern Hungary, the Zipsers were one of the best educated strata of Hungarian society. The leading families would send their children to the universities of Leipzig, Wittenberg, Jena, and Utrecht, where they were introduced to the political philosophies of Puffendorf, Locke, Wolff, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau. In the 1760s and 1770s, upon returning from their studies abroad, these same youths would actively participate in the founding of clandestine Free Mason Lodges, form radical reading groups that subscribed to the leading journals and newspapers of Europe, implemented educational reforms, and rewrote the course syllabi of the lyceums. They became tutors to Hungarian nobles, eventually spreading to them the new revolutionary ways of thinking about sovereignty, the people, and the nation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Éva Balázs H. Berzeviczy Gergely. A reformpolitikus 1763-1795 (Gergely Berzeviczy. The Reform Politician), (Budapest, 1967). Domokos Kosáry, Művelődés a XVIII. Századi Magyarországon (Culture and Society in Eighteenth Century Hungary), (Budapest, 1987). Moritz Csáky, Von der Aufklärung zum Liberablismus: Studien zum Frühliberalismus in Ungarn (Wien, 1981). Balázs Szelényi, “Enlightenment from Below: German-Hungarian Patriots in Eighteenth Century Hungary,” Austrian History Yearbook 34 (2003):111-143.

As the Zipsers began to reframe their place in Hungary during the eighteenth century, they were deeply influenced by French culture, and the French notion of citizenship. As a consequence, when leading Zipser intellectuals articulated their place in Hungarian society, on the one hand they stressed the historical contract that had existed between the Hungarian king and themselves, and on the other, they argued that as representatives of the urban estate, they should play a role in modernizing society. Their membership in the Hungarian nation was not predicated on blood, territory, or language, but on a written contract and their strategic class position. Civic-national responsibility at this point also fused with the Zipsers's religious belief system, stressing self-control, responsibility, and salvation through work.

The Zipsers' adaptation of western notions of civic-nationalism, interestingly, merged and complemented their long historical-political evolution in Hungary. Since medieval times, the privileged Zipser towns of Levoča and Kežmarok regularly sent ambassadors to the King's court and two representatives each to Parliament when that institution began to meet on a regular basis. The Zipsers, therefore, always thought of themselves as politically represented members of the Hungarian State. The state gave them privileges, and they reciprocated it with patriotism.

It was, above all else, a contractual relationship, always under negotiation. They were German-speaking burghers loyal to the state which they understood as both king and parliament. What remained uncertain was how the Zipsers were going to react to the language question. It was clear that the influence of the Enlightenment was challenging the dominance of Latin as the political language of the Hungarian parliament. But what should the language of the state be? Following again the lead of the French Revolution, Zipser intellectuals accepted the need to make a living language the united language of the modern state.

At first, under the rule of Joseph II, German seemed appropriate. However, after the death of Leopold II in 1792, the rise of Metternich, the establishment of the Holy Alliance, and the conservative turn in Vienna, the Zipsers became disillusioned with the Habsburgs and embraced the position that Magyar should be made the unifying language of Hungary. In the town of Kežmarok, the German municipal government had voted earlier, already under the rule of Joseph II, to adopt Magyar as the official language of municipal government. They had been angered by Joseph II, when he abolished royal free town privileges in favor of centralization. The vote in Kežmarok was, of course, symbolic. Few of the town burghers really spoke fluent Magyar. The vote in favor of the Magyar language was a political vote against Enlightened Despotism, toward which Habsburg policies were seen drifting in the second half of the 1780s.

The Zipsers represent a unique development within the German Diaspora, because they considered themselves German-speaking Zipsers, but their strong sense of patriotism led them to accept the primacy of the Magyar language in the late eighteenth century as part of the social contract between state and citizen. If they learnt Magyar, they would be accepted with equal rights, and more often with privileges.

Learning the Magyar language also came with a great possibility of upward mobility. This position was expressed in a letter by Johann Asboth, a Zipser Professor at the Lyceum of Kežmarok around 1800 to his former student Karl Romy (also a Zipser) in Pest. Asboth advised his former student: “You should learn to read and write Hungarian perfectly, because only then can you bring honor to your fatherland ... [Furthermore] ... In the cultural and scientific field in

Hungary, if the Protestant Germans [meaning Zipsers] ever learn to read and write Hungarian perfectly, there is no layer that could compete with them and they would become the leading intellectual stratum of Hungarian society.”<sup>20</sup>

Asboth, therefore, supported the idea of linguistic assimilation into Hungarian society. Interestingly though, in emphasizing the unique position of the Protestant German-speaking middle class, Asboth understands it as a distinct entity onto itself. In other words, Asboth supported linguistic assimilation into Hungarian society, but supported it because assimilation would insure upward mobility. Civic-nationalism and linguistic assimilation, for Asboth, do not lead directly to a loss of Zipser identity.

The Saxons of Transylvania, similar to the Zipsers, were also deeply influenced by the Enlightenment. However, unlike the Zipsers, the Saxons were not enthusiasts of the French road, and instead wanted to follow the path laid by the Swiss Enlightenment. At the heart of this difference was whether to support a strong centralized state, or to adopt the decentralized Swiss Canton solution. The Zipsers, who understood their social position within Hungary as the Hungarian urban estate, felt they were a necessary part in the larger social structure, especially after the French Revolution, because the bourgeoisie was on the ascent.

The Saxons looked at the problem in different ways. Instead of representing one estate, the Saxons considered themselves a separate “nation” within the multi-national Habsburg Empire, and they wanted “national” rights, or at least significantly more autonomy than the Zipsers. In support of the Swiss model, the Saxons looked back at historical precedence, and

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<sup>20</sup> Béla Pukánszky, *Német polgárság magyar földön* (German Burghers on Hungarian Soil) (Budapest, 1936). 22. Johann Genersich’s anonymously written *Von Liebe des Vaterlandes* 2 vols. (1793). Also see Jacob Glatz’s, *Frey müthige Bemerkungen eines Ungars über sein Vaterlandes* (1799). Ede Glatz, *Das Deutsche Element in Ungarn und sein Aufgabe* (Leipzig, 1843). For an early state-patriotic perspective from a Hungarian German burghers, look at: Johann Schneider, *Definitiones propositiones Wolffinae*, (Lomnicz, 1769). Asboth’s letter to Karl Romy is in the Hungarian National Széchenyi Library, Special Collection; Correspondences.

defended the Canton solution as the organic model for Transylvania. They argued that Transylvania's golden age was the sixteenth and seventeenth century, when the territory - while under Ottoman sovereignty - had a great deal of autonomy. Political decisions were decided in a Diet, which elected a Prince of the Realm. The Diet was put together by representatives from the three privileged "nations" of Transylvania: the Magyars, Székelys, and Saxons (the Romanians being deprived of their status as a privileged nation at the time). Under this arrangement, the Saxons of Transylvania developed their patriotism toward the Transylvanian Diet. As the Enlightenment spread, the Saxons also articulated an ethno-national identity that was state-centric and based on notions of civic responsibility and a written contract between the state and its citizens. But the Saxons fought to maintain their independence as a nation, while the Zipsers were taking up their calling as the middle estate of Hungarian society.

A third road was taken by the Schwabs. In contrast to the Zipsers and the Saxons, it was significantly later that the Schwabs developed a united ethno-cultural identity. Indeed, prior to the late nineteenth century, the German-speaking peasants of southern Hungary had not developed a collective group consciousness. They shared a common language (although the dialects strongly varied from village to village), but they were first and foremost Catholics, second, peasants, and third, loyal subjects of Kaiser Franz Joseph.

A distinct Schwabian ethno-national consciousness emerged in the late nineteenth century and was influenced by the spread of Romantic Nationalism and Pan-Germanism. Interestingly though, the weakness of Schwabian ethno-national consciousness is reflected in the fact that the Schwabians represented the largest ethnic group to assimilate into Hungarian society, followed by the Galician Jews and the Slovaks. This large-scale Schwabian assimilation

was, however, very different from that of the Zipsers. When the Zipsers assimilated into Hungarian society, they became part of the Magyar gentleman middle class.

Emerging from the privileged urban (Lutheran) estate, when they assimilated, the Zipsers brought with them significant cultural capital, and they often experienced a rapid rise within the Hungarian intellectual professions. Even today, assimilated Zipsers constitute a high percentage of university professors and academics in Hungary. When the Schwabs assimilated, many became tavern keepers, barbers, chefs, chauffeurs, police officers, bank clerks, and professional soldiers. The Zipsers looked down upon the Schwabs, and these two groups rarely intermarried, partly because the Schwabs were Catholics, but also because the Zipsers were snobs.

In the industrial cities, a united Schwabian identity had difficulty gaining followers. When they became industrial workers, Schwabs were more likely to become communists than to follow some romantic – get back to the land - cultural nationalist ideology. It was, therefore, among the rural German-speaking peasantry in southern and western Hungary that the popularity of a united Schwabian ethnic identity grew roots. The leaders of the movement were city lawyers and schoolteachers, German language and literature professors, but at its base were poor, uneducated farmers, peasants, and day-laborers.

It is noteworthy that the rise of a “Schwabian” identity among the German-speaking peasantry took place simultaneously to the advance of peasant populism within the Slovak and Magyar subordinate classes. In the second half of the nineteenth century, like Slovak and Magyar peasants, the German-speaking peasants had also grown frustrated with the Magyar state for defending the interests of the landlords vis-à-vis peasant-farmers. All three of these ethno-linguistic groups simultaneously developed a political philosophy that stressed that the Magyar



state was a foreign entity, failing to defend the interest of the people. They argued that a gulf had formed between the people, who represented the real nation, and the state, which was the purview of the parasitic elite.

In the Slav world this was known as the narodnik, in Hungarian népi, and in German the volkish movement. Each of these ideologies contained an element of anti-Semitism, and stressed that the Hungarian state was composed of Jews, aristocrats and assimilated Germans, a corrupted cosmopolitan ethnic mix, different from the volk-nation. Within the Schwabian peasantry, therefore, the emphasis was toward an ethno-linguistic definition of identity, in which what mattered were the blood and sweat of those who till the land and speak the mother tongue. In contrast to the Zipsers and Saxons who had a civic-national understanding of their position in Hungary, Schwabian identity emerged as distinctly anti-state in which belonging hinged on ethno-cultural characteristics and not a social contract or constitution.

In conclusion, the Zipsers, Saxons, and Schwabs, because of their distinct positions within Hungarian society, and because they became ethnically self-aware at different periods, developed different ethno-national identities. The Zipsers, who represented an urban estate, adopted a civic form of national identity and accepted the French centralized state model. The Saxons, who formed a complete proto-national community, also developed a form of civic-nationalism, but advocated the Swiss model based on a multi-culturist and multi-lingual ideal. The Schwabs who were upwardly mobile and migrated into the industrializing cities entered the road of ethno-cultural assimilation into Hungarian society. But the Schwabs who remained peasants and a subordinate class, developed an anti-state ethno-cultural understanding of national identity, based almost exclusively on blood and mother tongue. While it is clear that prior to World War One, none of the German groups discussed had developed a threatening pan-German

identity, it is also evident, that a clear understanding of the German Diaspora in Eastern Europe during the interwar period must include an analysis of the socio-economic superstructure underlying their ethnic-identity formation. Ethnic identity formation, in other words, develops in a dialectical relationship to class position.