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# Making Peace in the Shadow of War: The Austrian–Hungarian Borderlands, 1945–1956

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## Abstract

*This article examines the process of state reconstruction in Austria and Hungary's borderlands that followed the Second World War. This process of state reconstruction was also a process of pacification, as it represented an attempt to (re)build states on the foundations of the military settlement of the war. The construction of legitimate state authority was at its most successful on the Austrian side of the border, where political actors were able to gain legitimacy by creating a state that acted as an effective protector of the immediate demands of the local community for security from a variety of threats. On the Hungarian side of the border the state was implicated with some of the actors who were seen as threatening local communities, something that produced political polarisation. These differences set the stage for the transition from war to cold war in the borderlands.*

## Introduction

During spring 1946, Hungary's popular front regime, created as a consequence of the Red Army's occupation of the country that had ended the Second World War, proceeded with the deportation of an ethnic German minority that it held partly responsible for the country's tragic entanglement in that conflict. In the far north-west of the country, the deportation, and the broader process of expulsion of substantial numbers of Germans and their replacement with agrarian settlers from

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Hungary's interior, was motivated by a desire both to secure the country's border with Austria and to build a reliable social basis for left-wing parties within the anti-fascist ruling coalition – especially the Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Párt, MKP) – in a region politically hostile to the left.<sup>1</sup> The selective nature of the 1946 deportation and settlement programme shattered village communities. In Sopronbánfalva, on the fringes of the city of Sopron, approximately 700 of the 3,304 pre-1945 residents had been allowed to remain.<sup>2</sup> They were mostly ethnic German miners who worked in the nearby pit at Brennbergbánya, who escaped deportation because of the dire shortages of skilled labour available for mining, and the importance of scarce coal to post-war reconstruction. Over the course of 1946 village society became polarised between the 'old' residents and almost three hundred new settlers, who arrived with the support of the authorities to occupy the houses and property of the deportees. Tensions came to a head in February 1947, when the local authorities confiscated all the property of eighty-nine 'old' Sopronbánfalva residents, whom they accused of membership of the Volksbund, the pre-1945, pro-Berlin association of the German minority. 'Old' residents mobilised against the state by attacking it at its weakest point. Left-wing parties were the most enthusiastic advocates of deportation, but they also claimed to rule in the interests of the working class. As many ethnic Germans worked at the Brennbergbánya mine, they forced the local trade union to threaten a solidarity strike with the eighty-nine Sopronbánfalva residents, forcing local left-wing parties to demand successfully that confiscated property be returned.<sup>3</sup>

While acts of state despotism in polarised local communities weakened the authority of the state on the Hungarian side of the border, 8 km from Sopronbánfalva in Austria the local state acted to protect an established local community from the consequences of upheaval brought about by deportation and the broader process of expulsion from Hungary. The village of Baumgarten lay only a few hundred metres from the Hungarian border, and had a population of predominantly Croatian ethnicity, who worked as agricultural labourers on a large local farm. In 1946 it employed as the farm manager A.S., an ethnic German refugee from Hungary who had fled to Austria to avoid deportation. His relations with the workforce were poor almost from the beginning,<sup>4</sup> but they worsened dramatically when he began sacking Croatian workers and evicting them from tied cottages, in order to replace them with ethnic German refugees like himself, who had fled to Austria to avoid deportation

<sup>1</sup> Ágnes Tóth, *Migrationen in Ungarn, 1945–1948. Vertreibung der Ungarndeutschen, Binnenwanderungen und Slowakisch-Ungarischer Bevölkerungsaustausch*, trans. Rita Fejér (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2001); András Kirsch, *A Soproni németek kitelepítése 1946* (Sopron: Escort Kiadó, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Győr-Moson-Sopron Megye Soproni Levéltára (Sopron Archives of Győr-Moson-Sopron county, hereafter GyMSM.SL.), Soproni járás főjegyzőjének iratai, 1945–1950 (Papers of the Chief Notary of Sopron District, 1945–1950, hereafter XXI/21)/b, 1d., Kimutatás a soproni járás községeinek lakosságáról az 1941.I.31-i népszámlálás adatai, továbbá az 1945.I./1-i állapot szerint.

<sup>3</sup> GyMSM.SL., XXI/21/b,14d., Sopronbánfalva község Nemzeti Bizottsága. Emlékirat!, 1947 február 26.

<sup>4</sup> Burgenländisches Landesarchiv (Burgenland Provincial Archive, hereafter BgLA), Bezirkshauptmannschaft Mattersburg (Office of the Mattersburg District Governor, hereafter BH Mattersburg), XI-Polizei, Abschrift, Draßburg, am 15. Jänner 1949, 1–2.

to Germany.<sup>5</sup> This generated ethnic tensions in the village that grew during the late 1940s and culminated in protest by Baumgarten residents in 1949. A.S. dismissed the protestors by referring to their ethnicity: ‘You are no Austrians, you are Croatians; we [ethnic Germans] are better and truer Austrians than you.’<sup>6</sup> This statement provoked a spectacular retaliation from the local Austrian Socialist Party (Sozialistische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ), the dominant party in Baumgarten. Arguing that A.S. was unable to prove his status as an Austrian citizen, and was a threat to the local community, it interceded, using its influence over security issues in the provincial government to ban him permanently from residence in Burgenland, the easternmost Austrian province which lay along the international border with Hungary, using a law passed by the Nazis in August 1938 to remove ‘undesirables’.<sup>7</sup>

These two incidents reveal the different ways in which the Austrian and Hungarian states approached the creation of the post-war peace, and the process of state (re)construction on which it rested. The experience of the war and its end in the Austrian–Hungarian borderland focused residents on the immediate needs of their local communities, especially for material security. This focusing of political aspiration on the local generated demands for a politics that concentrated less on national, or ideological, mobilisation than had been the case in the pre-war years. Residents demanded that would-be state builders combat the insecurity generated by the military and economic impact of war by shaping protective institutions and practices that focused on these local community needs. The post-war Austrian and Hungarian state-building projects differed profoundly in the way in which they confronted this political environment. The emergent Hungarian state utterly failed to address popular aspirations adequately, and thus proved unable to build for itself legitimate state authority that would have enabled it to overcome generalised political polarisation, which its practices instead exacerbated. Furthermore, its despotism generated real fear outside its borders, which further increased demands for protection in those Austrian communities that were Hungary’s most immediate neighbours. Austrian state builders, on the other hand, proved relatively successful in constructing legitimate state authority in the post-war climate, because they built institutions and practices that served to protect local communities in the borderland from a variety of external threats, both real and imagined.

A focus on processes of pacification and state (re)construction in the Austrian–Hungarian borderland sheds light on the social history of the early cold war and trajectories of post-war state formation more generally. This is not to deny the importance of international and high politics in determining eventual political outcomes. The Moscow Declaration in 1943, the existence of a unified Austrian government from 1945 and four-power, rather than simply Soviet, occupation played a decisive role in Austria’s integration into Western economic and political structures,

<sup>5</sup> BgLA, BH-Mattersburg, XI-Polizei, Draßburg, am 12. Jänner 1949, Niederschrift, 1.

<sup>6</sup> BgLA, BH Mattersburg, XI-Polizei, Gendarmeriepostenkommando Drassburg, am 31.1.1949. Niederschrift, 1.

<sup>7</sup> BgLA, BH Mattersburg, XI-Polizei, Bezirkshauptmannschaft Mattersburg. Zahl: XI-57/3-1949.

while Hungary found itself part of the Soviet bloc. In Austria the unity between the dominant political traditions – political Catholicism represented by the Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP), and social democracy represented by the SPÖ – against the tiny Austrian Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Österreichs, KPÖ) contrasted with the bitter polarisation across the border in Hungary between a left led by the MKP, supported by the Soviet occupation forces, and the centre-right majority.<sup>8</sup> An exclusive focus on high, and international politics, suggests that local communities and their residents played a role that was essentially passive in the shaping of the post-war peace. This article, by contrast, seeks to show that the reception of the projects of national and international actors at local level played a central role in their success or failure in constructing legitimate state authority. The post-war Hungarian state's failure to do so helped to determine the local dynamics of the country's slide into dictatorship and the consequent intensification of despotism in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Austrian state's relative success aided its consolidation and the population's pacification. They also textured the local experience of the early cold war in the borderland.

### The politics of protection

At the turn of 1945, despite the considerable violence perpetrated by both the German and Hungarian states against tens of thousands of Jewish forced labourers building border defences for Germany, and the penury brought about by the end of the conflict, populations on both sides of border were deeply fearful of what the end of the war might bring. In north-western Hungary this fear provoked the flight of much of the local population – especially in those villages with substantial ethnic German populations – in the face of the advance of the Red Army. In the Mosonmagyaróvár district – next to the border with the collapsing German Reich – around 40 per cent of the population had gone before the new occupiers arrived.<sup>9</sup> Across the border the pattern of flight was similar. In Nickelsdorf, 70 per cent of the total population left.<sup>10</sup> Just as in Hungary, the regime demanded that the population flee with them. In Gols, Nazi officials threatened to shoot those who insisted on staying, asking them 'if they wished to be communists'. The village's party leadership attempted to remove most of the cattle, taking them from their owners and letting

<sup>8</sup> For Austria see Oliver Rathkolb, *Die paradoxe Republik. Österreich 1945 bis 2005* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2005); Peter Berger, *Kurze Geschichte Österreichs im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: WUV, 2007), 232–70. For Hungary, see László Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War 1945–1956: Between the United States and the Soviet Union* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2004); Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: the Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Mark Pittaway, 'The Politics of Legitimacy and Hungary's Postwar Transition', *Contemporary European History*, 13, 4 (2004), 453–75.

<sup>9</sup> Győr-Moson-Sopron Megye Győri Levéltára (Győr Archives of Győr-Moson-Sopron county, hereafter GyMSM.Gy.L.), Győr-Moson megye és Győr thj. város főispánja (The Prefect of Győr-Moson County and the City of Győr, hereafter XXIf.1)a.1.d., Jelentés Győr, Moson és Pozsony k.e.e. vármegyék alispánjától

<sup>10</sup> BgLA, Landeshauptmannschaft Burgenland (Burgenland Governor's Office, hereafter A/VIII-11)/V, Nickelsdorf. Berichte der Gemeinden über die Ereignisse 1945–1956.

them free. The behaviour of Nazi activists – who had internalised their leaders’ demands that they ‘fight until the end’ – generated considerable fear.<sup>11</sup>

Those who remained faced the Red Army. In western Hungary attitudes to the Soviet troops were defined by the wave of lawlessness that accompanied their arrival. In April 1945, in the Mosonmagyaróvár district,

[O]ccupying forces . . . during their searches for enemy soldiers became interested in wine, and spirits, as well as pocket, and wrist watches. In those villages where they got hold of drink, they did not refrain from raping the women either. In the places where they rested, or where they were stationed they took food and clothing from the population.<sup>12</sup>

In Csorna, Red Army troops stationed in the small town stripped the population of its property: ‘in general they took clothes and food, in many houses they removed the furniture and in others emptied the yards. A few days after the occupation they began to search for the warehouses, and from those they took all the corn and food stored.’<sup>13</sup> The extent of rape in the city of Sopron provoked panic among midwives and doctors, who at the end of April 1945 petitioned the county authorities to relax restrictions immediately on the performance of abortions.<sup>14</sup>

The actions of Soviet troops produced widespread fear. When local schools reopened in Győr in May 1945, inaccurate rumours spread that the local Soviet command had sent ‘two trucks’ to a local school in order ‘to take away the pupils’. Within a short space of time, ‘the greater mass of pupils and parents shouted out that others “should flee to their homes, because the Russians are taking away the children”’, a situation that resulted in panic.<sup>15</sup> The behaviour of Soviet troops created serious problems for Hungary’s new civil authorities who represented the provisional government, a popular front coalition that had been constituted under Soviet auspices, in which the MKP was the first among equals. Many in conservative regions, such as the counties of Győr–Moson and Sopron that were adjacent to the border of the newly restored Austria, expected the new authorities to intercede to protect their communities from the occupying forces, and believed, because of their political stance, that they were able to do so effectively. In late April a lorry carrying an armed Soviet officer and eight soldiers turned up in the village of Ménfőcsanak. After searching the village they rounded up eleven pigs from the residents at gunpoint, driving off with them and refusing to pay the owners. The irregular village police force, which was unarmed, was powerless to defend the villagers, leaving village authorities to demand that the county government intervene to secure the return

<sup>11</sup> BgLA, Bezirkshauptmannschaft Neusiedl am See (Office of the Neusiedl am See District Governor, hereafter BH Neusiedl), *Verschiedenes*-XI-1945, Abschrift: Gendarmerieposten Gols, Gols, am. 11 Okt. 1945.

<sup>12</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., XXIf.1b.1d., A magyaróvári járás főszolgabírájától. ad 1132/1943.sz. Tárgy: 1945. évi április helyzetjelentés, 1.

<sup>13</sup> GyMSM.SL., Sopron Megye és Sopron Város Főispánjának iratai (Papers of the Lord-Lieutenant of the County and City of Sopron, hereafter XXI/11f.), 2d., Csorna község jegyzőségétől. 1485/1945. szám. Tárgy: Jelentéstétel Csorna község általános helyzetéről, 1.

<sup>14</sup> GyMSM.SL., XXI/11f.,2d., Levél dr. Hám Tibor urnak, Sopron, 1945 április 30.

<sup>15</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., XXIf.1a.,1d., Jegyzőkönyv készült 1945.május 17-én, 1

of the 'stolen' pigs.<sup>16</sup> In Hegyeshalom, when Soviet troops confiscated the only cow owned by one agricultural labourer, village authorities demanded that the county authorities intercede to secure the return of all locally owned cattle, given that many of their owners had 'large families and young children to feed'.<sup>17</sup> This perception was encouraged by the pro-Soviet rhetoric of communist leaders, for they argued that they represented a promise of 'liberation' from 'from the German/Arrow Cross<sup>18</sup> fascists' that had been brought by the Red Army.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the experience of Soviet occupation undermined support seriously for the post-war state in western Hungary.

On the other side of the border, the population did not perceive the emergent Austrian state in the Soviet zone of occupation to have any privileged relationship with the Red Army. The wave of widespread violence, theft, rape and murder committed by Soviet troops endured by western Hungarian communities was repeated across Burgenland. It did not, however, have the same political consequences.<sup>20</sup> The trauma of rape played a fundamental role in generating fear and insecurity.<sup>21</sup> Soviet troops were not the only 'outsiders' who fuelled the disorder during spring and summer 1945. The arrival of the Red Army led to the freeing of substantial numbers of prisoners of war, who worked as forced labourers on the land during the war years.<sup>22</sup> When freed they joined the wave of terror against the local population – in one incident in July 1945, 4,000 Greek former prisoners of war, who had been freed from a camp in Wiener Neustadt, descended on the village of Pöttsching and forced their way into the homes and gardens of the population, stealing what they could. When local police irregulars intervened, a hail of stones confronted them, and they beat a hasty retreat.<sup>23</sup> Around the town of Mattersburg, local authorities believed that Soviet troops and bands of freed Ukrainian prisoners

<sup>16</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., XXIf.1b.id., Ménfőcsanak jegyzősegtől. Tárgy: Sértesigénybevétel, Ménfőcsanak, 1945. április 25.

<sup>17</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., XXIf.1b.id., Hegyeshalom község előljáróságától. Jegyzőkönyv készült Hegyeshalom községben 1945 április 26-án.

<sup>18</sup> Hungary's National Socialist Party, brought to power by a German-backed coup d'état in October 1944.

<sup>19</sup> Komárom-Esztergom Megyei Önkormányzat Levéltára (Local Government Archive of Komárom-Esztergom County, hereafter KEMÖL), Az MKP Tata Járási Bizottságának iratai (Papers of the Tata District Committee of the MKP, hereafter XXXV.24f.)16.e., 2.

<sup>20</sup> Sonja Wagner, "Der Sowjetstern auf dem Schlossberg". Besatzungserfahrungen im Burgenland', in Stefan Karner and Barbara Stelzl-Marx, eds., *Die Rote Armee in Österreich. Beiträge. Sowjetische Besatzung 1945–1955* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005), 497.

<sup>21</sup> Pia Bayer, 'Die Rolle der Frau in der burgenländischen Besatzungszeit, 1945–1955', in Felix Tobler, ed., *Befreien – Besetzen – Bestehen: Das Burgenland von 1945–1955. Tagungsband des Symposiums des Burgenländischen Landesarchivs vom 7. – 8. April 2005* (Eisenstadt: Amt d. Burgenländ. Landesregierung, Abt. 7, 2005), 139–50.

<sup>22</sup> Ela Hornung, Ernst Langthaler and Sabine Schweitzer, *Zwangsarbeit in der Landwirtschaft in Niederösterreich und dem nördlichen Burgenland* (Vienna and Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> BgLA, BH Mattersburg, XI-Polizei-Besondere Vorfälle, Gendarmerieposten Pöttsching. E.Nro.18. Vorkommission in Pöttsching durch Ausländer.

of war worked in concert to pillage the area's vineyards.<sup>24</sup> The crime wave and food shortages, focused local residents on the needs of local communities. Residents in Drassburg demanded greater protection against 'outsiders' and 'foreigners', who threatened 'the property and security of residents' in August 1945.<sup>25</sup>

The perception of the state as a credible protector of the security of local communities was shaped not only by their perceived relationship with the Red Army, but by their concrete policies towards policing and crime. As in Hungary, the authorities at both provincial and federal level in Austria asked villages to organise their own, unarmed, irregular, volunteer police forces to keep the peace.<sup>26</sup> In Hungary the popular front government, suspicious of an organisation that had enthusiastically supported the wartime and then the Arrow Cross regimes, and had played a central role in the organisation of the deportation of Jews in 1944, disbanded the gendarmerie outright.<sup>27</sup> In Austria, while the KPÖ was suspicious of the gendarmerie, it was marginalised within the federal government in Vienna, dominated by the ÖVP and SPÖ, which strongly supported the institution.<sup>28</sup> While the gendarmerie survived, communist suspicion of it meant that in the Soviet zone its powers and its right to carry arms were curbed severely by the occupation authorities.<sup>29</sup> Tension between local gendarmerie commanders and communists could explode into protest, especially in the small number of communities where the KPÖ enjoyed significant support.<sup>30</sup> Given the demands of communities for protection in the climate of crime and insecurity, majorities supported strengthening the police and the routine arming of gendarmes as part of a drive to bolster institutions capable of protecting local communities. This was especially the case since police irregulars often had few means, and little power, to protect the population.<sup>31</sup> This popular pressure was in turn used by provincial and federal authorities to secure Soviet consent for the routine arming of the gendarmerie.<sup>32</sup>

If the politics of law and order in eastern Austria demonstrated the ways in which legitimate state authority was reconstructed around a desire for the protection of local

<sup>24</sup> BgLA, BH Mattersburg, XI-Situationsberichte, Gendarmeriepostenkommando Mattersburg. E.Nr.183. Situationsbericht vom 15. bis 31. August, 1945, 1.

<sup>25</sup> BgLA, BH Mattersburg, XI-Situationsberichte, Gendarmeriepostenkommando Drassburg. Er.Nr.34. Situationsbericht vom 4.8. bis 8.8.1945.

<sup>26</sup> BgLA A/VIII-11/VI, Gemeindeamt Deutsch-Jahrndorf. 12. Juli 1960. Zl:207/1960. Betr.: Ereignisse 1945–1956.

<sup>27</sup> András Zoltán Kovács, 'Csendőrsors Magyarországon 1945-után', in Imre Okvách, ed., *Katonai perek a kommunista diktatúra időszakában 1945–1958* (Budapest: Történeti Hivatal, 2001), 103–40.

<sup>28</sup> Manfred Mugrauer, *Die Politik der KPÖ in der Provisorischen Regierung Renner* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> BgLA, BH Mattersburg, XI-Situationsberichte, Gendarmeriepostenkommando Wiesen. Er.Nr.251. Situationsbericht für die Zeit vom 14. bis 21. Jänner, 1946, 3.

<sup>30</sup> BgLA, BH Neusiedl, Verschiedenes-XI-1945, Landesgendarmeriekommando f.d. Burgenland. Nr.160. Frauenkirchen, am 20. Oktober 1945.

<sup>31</sup> BgLA, BH Mattersburg, XI-Situationsberichte, Gendarmeriepostenkommando Drassburg. Er.Nr.34. Situationsbericht vom 4.8. bis 8.8.1945.

<sup>32</sup> BgLA, Sicherheitsdirektion für das Burgenland (Burgenland Security Directorate, hereafter A/VIII-14)/V-1, Zahl: SD891/46. Eisenstadt, 13 June 1946: 'Betrifft: Waffengebrauchsrecht für die Sicherheitsorgane erbeten'.

communities, then in western Hungary they worked in an entirely different direction. While Hungary's population demanded the protection of their communities from crime, black-marketeering and the occupation authorities, civil government proved unable to offer this to them. The 'new' police force established in spring 1945 barely existed outside the towns for most of the year. Furthermore, the Mosonmagyaróvár police admitted that they were unable to stem the tide of theft, rape and cross-border smuggling, given gross understaffing and a dire material situation in which the police had to work without food or pay.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, they were seen as a party police force, in the hands of the occupying authorities and the MKP. This was illustrated dramatically by an incident in the village of Alszipor. On the afternoon of 24 June 1945, a group of Red Army troops arrived in the village, stealing a horse from one resident. The villagers resolved to take the stolen horse back by force, and in the melee that ensued one of the troops was killed. The same evening the Red Army returned, backed by the Sopron police, who arrested twelve locals, including the village judge. While the police took away those arrested, the Soviet troops raided houses in search of weapons and stole a number of 'valuable items'. Incidents like this confirmed for many that the 'new' police, rather than offering them protection, were instead interested in defending only those who threatened them.<sup>34</sup>

These incidents were symptomatic of the fact that the Hungarian state and the left-wing parties that played a central role in state-building during 1945 conceived the purpose of the police and other security agencies as being primarily to defend the state-building process against sections of society they believed opposed it. Their priority was not to protect local communities from either the occupying forces or the post-war crime wave fed by hyperinflation and generalised penury. In September 1945 a border police station was established at Hegyeshalom as large numbers of refugees from Germany returned home, for the state realised that among them there could be 'a large number of leading fascists, who are attempting to return to Hungary in secret'.<sup>35</sup> Rather than focus on smuggling and organised violent crime, which generated real misery in borderland communities, the border police concentrated on screening those returnees they suspected of 'political unreliability', who were sent to a camp where their cases were investigated.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the police and their political commanders were most interested in the implementation of anti-fascist retributive legislation,<sup>37</sup> which served to strengthen the impression of many that they

<sup>33</sup> GyMSM.GyL., Győr-Moson Megyei Rendőrkapitányság (Győr-Moson County Police Captaincy, hereafter XXIVf.3)/1d., Magyar Államrendőrség Mosonmagyaróvári Járási Kapitánysága. Szám: 1014/1945. Tárgy: A rendőrség működéséről készítendő jelentés, 1.

<sup>34</sup> GyMSM.SL., Csepregi járás főjegyzőjének iratai (Papers of the Chief Notary of Csepreg District, hereafter XX1/12a), 5d., Újkéri körjegyzőség, 234/1945. Jelentés az Alsziporon történt őrizetbevételekről.

<sup>35</sup> 'Új határrendészeti csoportot állítottak fel a Nyugatról hazatérők ellenőrzésére', *Dunántúli Szabad Nép*, 8 Sept. 1945, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archive, hereafter MOL), Belügyminisztérium iratai (Papers of the Ministry of the Interior, hereafter XIX-B-1)-v/4d., Hazahozatali Kormánybizottság, 690/1945.V.F.P. Kh., Budapest, 1945. október 8.

<sup>37</sup> 'Kétszeresére emelik a győrmegyei rendőrség létszámát', *Dunántúli Szabad Nép*, 12 Sept. 1945, 1.



were more interested in protecting the regime in Budapest than in safeguarding the security of the population. The police in Mosonmagyaróvár were prepared to write off as ‘hopeless’ fighting crime committed by Soviet troops or organised criminal gangs, while it measured its ‘success’ by the number of ‘fascists’ it interned – among whose number it included not merely members of the Arrow Cross, nor those who had collaborated with the German occupiers after March 1944, but many who had served the neo-conservative inter-war and wartime regime prior to that date.<sup>38</sup>

This happened against a backdrop of deep-seated political antagonism between the state and the population. Győr–Moson and Sopron counties were characterised by a hegemonic Catholic and conservative political culture that had allowed the dominant political actors of the conservative, inter-war regime to win considerable support. Prior to the outbreak of war, anti-communism provided an especially potent part of the construction of the regime’s local appeal, given the memory of the Soviet Republic in 1919, and the way in which it was successfully blamed for Hungary’s territorial losses after the First World War. Even during the 1930s this had turned to anti-Soviet sentiment; the local pro-government press in Sopron, for example, had argued that the state that had arisen in Russia after the Revolution of 1917 was a ‘regime of command that had created a new form of capitalism – state capitalism – in which all the country’s energy was drained into maintaining its rule’, and which was marked by ‘the most terrible oppression and misery of the Russian people’.<sup>39</sup> Its railing against communism in Hungary, especially against the tyranny of the ‘kolhoz’ over the peasantry, and the immorality of godless communism, however, did not have merely an abstract meaning for many, given the region’s experience of the Soviet Republic and the subsequent trauma of border disputes with Austria in the Sopron region. Throughout the 1930s local elites linked anti-communist propaganda to local memories of 1919.<sup>40</sup>

Anti-communism had been a potent theme of wartime propaganda<sup>41</sup> and shaped attitudes that were reinforced by the behaviour of the Red Army and the ‘new’ Hungarian state in local communities. While the outcome of the war discredited the authoritarian conservatism of the inter-war years, many of the cultural values it rested on allowed a democratic conservatism – represented largely by the Independent Smallholders’ Party (Független Kisgazdapárt, FKgP) – to become dominant in western border regions. This was despite the fact that while opposing the left and the MKP’s vision of a socially radical post-war state, it was simultaneously resolutely anti-fascist and a partner in the popular front coalition government in Budapest.<sup>42</sup> In Csorna, the party’s activists proclaimed their goal as creating an ‘independent country,

<sup>38</sup> GyMSM.GyL., XXIVf.3/1d., Magyar Államrendőrség Mosonmagyaróvári Járási Kapitánysága. Szám: 1014/1945. Tárgy: A rendőrség működéséről készítendő jelentés

<sup>39</sup> ‘Felelősséggel bíró magyar ember nem támogathatja a demagóg jelszavakkal dobálózódó szélsőségeket’, *Soproni Hírlap*, 10 May 1938, 1.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Moszkvában agyonlőtték az egykori soproni kommunista városparancsnok hugát’, *Soproni Hírlap*, 8 Jan. 1938, 1.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Komoly idők intelmei’, *Mosonvármegye Magyaróvári Hírlap*, 27 Jan. 1944, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Pittaway, ‘Politics of Legitimacy’, 466–68.

a clean, Christian democracy'.<sup>43</sup> Such rhetoric allowed them to claim support as the party that could oppose the Soviet occupation successfully. In Győr–Moson, in advance of the 1945 elections, many believed that if the country 'votes for the Smallholders' Party then the Soviets will be forced to leave the country, if they vote for the communists, they'll stay forever'.<sup>44</sup> As elections approached, the FKgP, backed by public opinion in the borderland, attacked the police focus on anti-fascist retribution. They concentrated their fire on the Sopron internment camp, where many former gendarmes, because of their role in the deportations of local Jews in 1944, and other supporters of the inter-war regime locally, for reasons that were less clear, had been interned as 'fascists'. Sopron residents did not believe that the detention of many of the camps' inmates was legitimate. The local police were compared both to officials of the 1919 Soviet Republic and the Gestapo. While persistent antisemitism fed these protests, so too did a sense that the police stood against the majority of the people and spent too much time interfering in politics and little on fighting crime.<sup>45</sup>

In November 1945 the FKgP won a landslide victory over the MKP and its allies.<sup>46</sup> Although the occupying authorities demanded that a popular front coalition of all anti-fascist parties continue, the elections intensified political polarisation, as many working-class voters demanded greater assertiveness from the left. The MKP leadership responded, attacking the FKgP as enemies of democracy. Within days of the election the MKP warned that 'it seems that the reaction has drawn the conclusion from the election results that the coming months will see the elimination of democracy'. It accused the FKgP of protecting 'provocateurs' who 'victimised' communists.<sup>47</sup> While the MKP and the police it controlled enforced a tough line against those Smallholders it accused of supporting 'reaction', it intensified class-based rhetoric to mobilise industrial workers, and other supportive groups, who had become disillusioned as a consequence of the hyper-inflation that had gripped the country since summer 1945. At Brennbergbánya it accused the mine management of using transportation to fetch for themselves 'fatted geese and ducks', but not to bring 'oil and margarine' for miners.<sup>48</sup> The focus of the MKP's anti-fascism had shifted – as internment camps were run down the MKP welcomed working-class former members of the Arrow Cross, who had held no leadership roles into its ranks, for they were 'workers' who had been 'cheated into joining fascist organisations'.<sup>49</sup> This represented no let-up in retribution, however, against those who had served

<sup>43</sup> 'Ujjongó lelkesedéssel fogadták szónokainkat a csornai járásban', *Soproni Újság*, 18 Oct. 1945, 3.

<sup>44</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., XXIf. rb., 1d., Győr–Moson megye és Győr thj. Város. főispánjától. 75/5.főisp. 1945.sz. Tárgy: Szeptember havi tájékoztató jelentés, 1.

<sup>45</sup> 'Komoly munka folyik a városházán', *Soproni Újság*, 14 Oct. 1945, 4.

<sup>46</sup> The FKgP won 57.03 per cent of the national vote, the Social Democratic Party 17.41 per cent, the MKP 16.95 per cent, and the National Peasants' Party 6.87 per cent; no other party won more than 2 per cent of the votes cast. Information adapted from Sándor Balogh, *Választások Magyarországon 1945. A fővárosi törvényhatósági és nemzetgyűlési Választások* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1984), 147, 161.

<sup>47</sup> 'Kommunista ellenes merényletek Sopron- és Győr megyében', *Dunántúli Szabad Nép*, 14 Nov. 1945, 1.

<sup>48</sup> 'Igy élnek a brennbergi bányászok', *Új Sopron*, 21 Feb. 1946, 3.

<sup>49</sup> 'Kisnyilasokat bocsáttotak szabadon', *Új Sopron*, 29 Sept. 1945, 3.

Hungary's pre-1945 regime, but rather its re-focusing on apparent 'reactionaries' who staffed public administration and private business, and whom it accused the FKgP of protecting.<sup>50</sup>

While the MKP sought to put political retribution in Hungary to work in its attempts to mobilise its base of support and to smash the FKgP following its electoral victory in late 1945, on the Austrian side of the border it was used to bolster the authority of the emergent, protective state. While Hungary's practice of anti-fascist retribution gave licence to its police forces to attack all those they perceived to be enemies of the 'new' state, and allowed open wounds from the war years to fester, the implementation of Austria's de-Nazification laws was not to the letter and, being more limited, offered the potential of closure to conflict. While the 1945 De-Nazification Law mandated the registration of all former Nazis, it extended an implicit bargain in that it allowed them to petition for 'clemency' if they had never 'misused' their membership of the party or one of its front organisations.<sup>51</sup> Some of the petitions the authorities received revealed popular understandings of this bargain – that the state would protect from the consequences of prior political affiliations those who professed loyalty to it. A former party member in the border town of Mörbisch am See framed his claim for clemency in 1945 on the grounds that he had been deceived by National Socialist promises to 'turn around the situation in agriculture'. He had 'always regarded himself as an Austrian' and promised that 'in future he would act positively towards the state'.<sup>52</sup>

### Processes of separation

While the local practice of de-Nazification in Burgenland bolstered the inclusive features of post-war Austrianness, it was deeply exclusive in other respects, as a result of the state's desire to define the new Austria against the Germany of which it had been part for the seven years prior to 1945. When in 1946 officials in the borderland were asked to document 'National Socialist' oppression locally, in order to provide material for the 'Red-White-Red' book that was to record Austrian 'victimhood' at the hands of the Nazis, many returns concentrated on the dismissal of local officials and their replacement by those brought in from Germany proper.<sup>53</sup> The state's definition of itself against Germany was more than simply a matter of rhetoric. In spring 1945 the provisional government in Vienna instructed districts to separate their residents into 'Austrians' and those it termed 'Germans who came

<sup>50</sup> 'Módot kell találni az antidemokratikus közalkalmazottak eltávolítására', *Dunántúli Szabad Nép*, 4 Jan. 1946, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Knight, 'Denazification and Integration in the Austrian Province of Carinthia', *Journal of Modern History*, 79, 3 (2007), 596.

<sup>52</sup> BgLA, Bezirkshauptmannschaft Eisenstadt (Papers of the Eisenstadt District Governor, hereafter BH Eisenstadt), NS-Angelegenheiten, Karton 4, H.A., Brief an die provisorische Staatsregierung, Mörbisch am See, am 20. Juli 1945.

<sup>53</sup> Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes (Documentary Archive of the Austrian Resistance, hereafter DÖW), 8339.

from the Reich' (*Reichsdeutsche*), as a prelude to their removal from Austrian soil.<sup>54</sup> In 1946 local authorities faced a steady stream of appeals from Austrian women married to German citizens, who discovered that they were denied Austrian citizenship as a result of their marital status, and faced deportation to Germany.<sup>55</sup>

Post-war constructions of 'Austrianness' did not merely seek to demarcate Austria and Germany, but celebrated provincial identities.<sup>56</sup> In the case of the borderland, this meant that the reconstruction of Austrianness was tied to the rebuilding of Burgenland identity. Burgenland had been carved out of Hungary at the end of the First World War, as a consequence of the demands of its German minority that it be ruled by Vienna rather than Budapest. Owing its origin in part to a political project of ethnic Germans within the pre-war Kingdom of Hungary, dominant constructions of its provincial identity during the inter-war years had argued for its fundamental kinship to those western Hungarian counties populated by German speakers.<sup>57</sup> Pan-German nationalists dreamed of the territorial extension of the province. While the province was divided after Austria's incorporation into Germany between the *Gaue*<sup>58</sup> of Niederdonau and Styria, Burgenland's own Nazis had argued against Berlin that their province should become a *Gau* in its own right within the expanded Reich, in view of its distinctive 'mission' as a 'borderland' (*Grenzland*) that could serve as bridge between Germany, and German speakers in Hungary.<sup>59</sup> Berlin's only concession to pro-Burgenland sentiment was to establish a National Groups Office (*Völkstumstelle*) in the former Burgenland capital, Eisenstadt, that supervised the region's ethnic minorities and maintained close contact with pro-Berlin, ethnic German activists in the neighbouring Hungarian city of Sopron.<sup>60</sup>

These notions of Burgenland identity were revived in an unfavourable post-war context at the precise moment that the Hungarian state engaged in its campaigns of expulsion against the German minority. The waves of expulsion between 1945 and 1946 generally, but especially deportation in 1946, played a fundamental role in the construction of Burgenlander and, by extension, Austrian identities in the region and shaped perceptions of the Hungarian neighbour that strengthened the authority and legitimacy of the Austrian state as a protector. In border villages, where

<sup>54</sup> Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv, St. Pölten (Lower Austrian Provincial Archive, St. Pölten, hereafter NÖLA, St.P.), Landeshauptmannschaft Niederösterreich (Lower Austrian Governor's Office, hereafter Ia-10)/B.nm.208/Stammzahl 29/bis ONv.74/1945, Bezirkshauptmannschaft Scheibbs. Zl.XI-55/: Behandlung der Flüchtlinge und Ausländer, Scheibbs, am 20.6.1945.

<sup>55</sup> BgLA, BH Eisenstadt, II-1946, Bezirkshauptmannschaft Eisenstadt. Zl. II-86-46. Eisenstadt, den 24.1.1946.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Kreichbaumer, 'Einleitung', in Robert Kreichbaumer, ed., *Liebe auf den Zweiten Blick. Landes- und Österreichbewußtsein nach 1945* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau, 1998), 7-13.

<sup>57</sup> Alfons Barb, 'Der Burgenländer', repr. in Elisabeth Bockhorn, Olaf Bockhorn and Veronika Plöckinger, eds., *Die Geburt des Burgenländers'. Ein Lesebuch zur Historischen Volkskultur im Burgenland* (Eisenstadt: Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten aus dem Burgenland, 2004), 83-9.

<sup>58</sup> Sub-national administrative units in Nazi Germany.

<sup>59</sup> DÖW, 11498.

<sup>60</sup> Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Archiv der Republik (hereafter ÖStA/AdR), Reichkommissar für die Wiedervereinigung Österreichs mit dem Deutschen Reich (hereafter 'Bürckel'/Materie), Zl.2770, Kt.83, 37.

ties of kin often spread into villages on the Hungarian side, expulsion provoked particular outrage. When ethnic Germans returned home in late 1945 to north-western Hungarian villages such as Magyarkimle to find that their homes and land had been redistributed to settlers, they launched an armed uprising with the goal of reclaiming their property, using flight over the border and networks of solidarity with kin on the Austrian side to sustain their fight. While they were beaten back as the Hungarian state flooded the border region with armed police, both the central government and its local representatives remained worried at their lack of control over the border.<sup>61</sup>

Public opinion, the political parties, opinion formers and even officials in the Burgenland government responded to Hungarian violence against borderland Germans by claiming them as ‘Austrians’, and arguing – in an adaptation of pan-German arguments from the inter-war years to post-war circumstances – that the lands they inhabited were, in fact, eastern Burgenland. These arguments sought to differentiate Hungary’s German-speakers from Germans proper, and underline their kinship to ‘Austrians’ living on the Burgenland side of the border. ‘Hungary’s German speakers refer to themselves as *Donauschwabern* and *Heidebauern*, and are so known by the Hungarians; they know nothing of Germany’, according to one opponent of expulsion used by officials in the Burgenland government to make their case against Hungary. These officials in the Burgenland government lobbied Vienna to intervene with the occupying powers, especially the Soviet Army, against expulsion, on the grounds that ethnic Germans ‘settled right on the border, can be seen as good Austrians’.<sup>62</sup> Others argued for a solution that allowed for the Moson and Sopron districts closest to the border to be removed from Hungary and incorporated into Burgenland.<sup>63</sup>

When the Hungarian government drew up regulations to intern German citizens on its territory in spring 1945 it had been aware that some would claim exemption on the grounds of their ‘Austrianness’. While it argued that Austrian citizens could not be regarded automatically as ‘German citizens’, the authorities had to ‘pay attention to’ Austria’s ‘true relationship to the German Reich, which had existed over several years’.<sup>64</sup> Neither the Hungarian state, nor the left-wing parties who most enthusiastically supported expulsion were prepared to make any concession to claims that borderland German speakers should be exempted on grounds of their ‘Austrianness’. Aware of calls in the Burgenland press for a redrawing of the border, the Hungarian police rounded up five ethnic Germans for spreading pro-Austrian propaganda in Sopron during early 1946. Prosecutors accused them, in a political trial designed to serve as a warning to authorities across the border, of conspiring with leading Burgenland politicians to launch an armed uprising in Hungary to

<sup>61</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., XXIf.1b.5d., Kedves Medei képviselő elvtárs!

<sup>62</sup> ÖStA/AdR, Bundesministerium für auswärtige Angelegenheiten 2. Republik (hereafter BMfAA), II-Pol, Ungarn 9, Gz.110.054-pol/46, Z.110.394-pol/46.

<sup>63</sup> ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, II-Pol, Gz.110.054-pol./46, Z.42.072-pol./46.

<sup>64</sup> GyMSM.SL., XXI/21/b, 4d., 1066/1945, KEOKH. Szám: 25/162.VII.e.1945.eln., Másolat.

secure territorial changes.<sup>65</sup> Vienna, mindful of the likely Soviet reaction, were it to show any willingness to lobby openly for territorial change or a halt to deportation, remained silent, and urged restraint on Burgenland's government.<sup>66</sup> By early 1946 the Hungarian state prepared for the organised deportation of most of those it identified as Hungary's ethnic Germans to Germany. The MKP press in western Hungary celebrated what it believed would bring to an end tension generated by the more generalised expulsion efforts it had organised from spring 1945: 'The time is coming fast, when we will be able to start deporting the Hungarian Swabians.'<sup>67</sup>

The expulsion drives, which culminated in the deportations during spring 1946, confronted several problems. The first was the fluid and problematic nature of ethnic identities in the borderlands. The published results of the 1941 census recorded 719,762 people, or 4.9 per cent of Hungary's population, identifying themselves as German-speakers, although it bears mention that these figures were themselves contested strongly by political representatives of the German minority itself.<sup>68</sup> In many western border districts the proportions were higher. In the Mosonmagyaróvár district, 37.2 per cent of the population declared themselves German-speakers and in the Sopron district 39.3 per cent, while 12.7 and 29.9 per cent respectively identified themselves as such in the cities of Mosonmagyaróvár and Sopron.<sup>69</sup> Many ethnic Germans had a 'dual identity' that was both Magyar and German, for German often functioned as a local language rarely used beyond the boundaries of home villages, while ties of kin and friendship often transcended the ambiguous ethnic divide.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, ethnic German identity did not imply political sympathy for Germany's political goals during the war; Volksbund organisations only ever operated in twenty-five villages in Győr-Moson and Sopron counties, and never mobilised anything like all ethnic German residents in these villages.<sup>71</sup>

This contributed to bureaucratic confusion and arbitrariness as to who was to be marked out for either expulsion or, later, deportation. The process of selection was mired in confusion over goals, for the Hungarian state was never consistent in applying the principle of collective guilt to all ethnic Germans, and argued that those who could demonstrate 'loyalty' to Hungary should be exempt.<sup>72</sup> When asked to draw up lists for eventual expulsion in 1945 they faced an absolute lack of documentary evidence; in Ágfalva the notary commented that his list rested on no independent

<sup>65</sup> DÖW, 20000/j5, Vom Volksgericht in Győr. Zahl:Nb.859/1946/13; ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, II-Pol/Ungarn 9, Gz.105.319-pol/47, Z.108.721-pol./1947.

<sup>66</sup> ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, II-Pol, Ungarn 9, Gz.110.353-Pol/46, Z. 110.353-Pol/46, 247-Pr/46.

<sup>67</sup> 'A mosoni svábok milliós értékeket lopnak ki a határon túlra', *Dunántúli Szabad Nép*, 11 Jan. 1946), 3.

<sup>68</sup> Günter Schödl, 'Lange Abschiede: Die Südostdeutschen und ihre Vaterländer (1918–1945)', in Günter Schödl, ed., *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas. Land an der Donau* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1995), 520.

<sup>69</sup> *Az 1941 Évi Népszámlálás Községei Szerint* (Budapest: Stephaneum Nyomda, 1947), 536–8, 602–3.

<sup>70</sup> This point is made for another part of Hungary by the ethnographer Györgyi Bindorffer in her *Kettős Identitás: Etnikai és nemzeti azonosságtudat Dunabogdányban* (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó – MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2001).

<sup>71</sup> György Zielbauer, *Adatok és Tények a Magyarországi Németiség Történetéből (1945–1949)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989), 16.

<sup>72</sup> Tóth, *Migrationen in Ungarn*, 35–70.

evidence and contained the names of some he believed to be patriotic Hungarians.<sup>73</sup> These local lists were scrapped when organised deportation began in spring 1946, as the compilation of deportation lists was placed in the hands of national civil servants and the authorities went to considerable lengths to exclude local actors from the process. This was combined with heavy-handed implementation. Three hundred policemen were imported into Sopron from outside the region in order to ensure that order was kept during the process.<sup>74</sup> As the lists were prepared over the Easter weekend the city was sealed from the outside world, the serving of alcohol was banned in local restaurants, and a night-time curfew enforced.<sup>75</sup> The police hunted down those on the list who hid; during one night-time raid in early May 1946 almost 80 eighty per cent of the city's houses were searched.<sup>76</sup>

The 1946 deportations allowed the impression of a despotic state to crystallise in western Hungarian communities, as the demonstration of arbitrary state power against a group that it argued was its enemy created real fear that transcended the ethnic divide. The sight of deportees being rounded up and placed on cattle trucks awakened fears that reached back to popular memories of the deportation of local Jews in 1944. In Mosonmagyaróvár, the local organ of the left-wing Social Democratic Party, normally supportive of the MKP, reflected commonly held opinion when it equated the removal of Germans with the events of two years earlier: 'Expulsion<sup>77</sup> . . . two years ago it was called deportation.'<sup>78</sup> Reactions to deportation were therefore a product of the way in which it demonstrated the power and will of the state to act against the civilian population. This apparent despotism weakened the state's legitimacy, and its institutions found that the willingness of the population to co-operate with them was weakened as a consequence. The MKP mayor of Mosonmagyaróvár complained in April 1946 of the deportations' corrosive effect in his city on the political authority of the organs of the new state.<sup>79</sup>

Faced with the threat of removal through deportation from Moson or Sopron to Freilassing in southern Bavaria in 1946, many fled over the border, with the intention of returning at a later date.<sup>80</sup> Some took their property with them to prevent its confiscation.<sup>81</sup> Ethnic German refugees from Hungary met with sympathy from the

<sup>73</sup> GyMSM.SL., XXI/21/a, 1d., Ágfalvai jegyzőtől. Hiv.szám 2/1945.Eln., Ágfalva, 1945. május 28.-én.

<sup>74</sup> 'A hét végéig 420 kitelepítési tisztviselő és alkalmazott számára kell helyet biztosítani magánlakásokban', *Soproni Újság*, 12 April 1946, 3.

<sup>75</sup> 'A polgármesterhelyettes nyilatkozata a kitelepítésre kerülők névsoráról', *Soproni Újság*, 25 April 1946, 3.

<sup>76</sup> 'Razzián a "mozgási korlátozás" ideje alatt', *Soproni Újság*, 5 May 1946, 3.

<sup>77</sup> It bears mention that the Hungarian state referred even to formal deportation using the more neutral term 'expulsion' (*kitelepítés*). This was precisely because the term 'deportation' evoked directly comparison with the deportation of Hungary's Jews in 1944.

<sup>78</sup> 'Akiket elvittek, és akik itt maradtak', *Mosonmagyaróvári Barátság*, 2 June 1946, 2.

<sup>79</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., XXIf.1b.5.d, Mosonmagyaróvár megyei város polgármesterétől. Jelentés, 1946 április hóról.

<sup>80</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., XXIf.1b.5.d.; Mosonmagyaróvár megyei város polgármesterétől. Jelentés, 1946 május hóról.

<sup>81</sup> BgLA BH Mattersburg, XI-Situationsberichte, Grenzgendarmeriekommandos Schattendorf, April 1946.

population on the Austrian side of the border. Furthermore, the 'settlers' who had taken their homes and property were unpopular, and were blamed for cross-border crime in border villages such as Nickelsdorf and Zurndorf.<sup>82</sup> Minor officials showed similar sympathy for the plight of refugees, granting border passes, in contravention of the regulations, so that they could return to Hungary to visit relatives, to explosions of fury from the Hungarian authorities.<sup>83</sup> This sympathy and the belief that expelled populations from the western border regions were of 'Austrian character' provoked a loosening of both work permit and citizenship regulations that made it easier for them to claim Austrian citizenship.<sup>84</sup>

The 1946 deportations created a dynamic of mutual suspicion on both sides of the border which drove a process of separation. While they led many in Austria to see the state over the border as threatening, and generated considerable local sympathy for Hungarian refugees, in Hungary these reactions helped drive a climate of suspicion. Both the local and national state saw the relatively open border as an active threat to the country's security. This was reinforced by apparent attempts by deportees to return home. In Fertőrákos, in one of several such incidents along the border, police were called in March 1947 after five former residents returned from Austria in order to resettle and take back the property that had been confiscated from them and redistributed to new settlers.<sup>85</sup> The border played a central role in the Hungarian left's politics of economic security. During 1947 the MKP smashed the FKgP through the use of the police in order to cement its control over the popular front coalition and prepare the ground for the construction of dictatorship. A vital accompaniment of this campaign was the mobilisation of industrial workers and the poor, by blaming their poor material situation, persistent high prices and the food shortages on 'speculators' and the 'reaction'.<sup>86</sup> Ethnic Germans who had escaped deportation were often blamed for 'smuggling' and 'speculation', accusations that were used to justify the further confiscation of property and expulsion in 1948.<sup>87</sup>

The deterioration of cross-border relations and the politicisation of smuggling continued with the construction of overt dictatorship in Hungary during 1948 and 1949. With opponents of the emergent dictatorship fleeing in large numbers and Hungary gripped by cold war paranoia, ethnic Germans returning to Hungary and Austrian smugglers were labelled as 'spies' and 'enemies' against which Hungary's western border needed to be secured. According to one piece of propaganda in March 1949, 'the cells in the Mosonmagyaróvár police station were full yesterday of illegal border crossers. Horse and livestock traders, ethnic Germans [*svábok*] seeking to return, German and Austrian citizens after food, and escaping fascists waited out

<sup>82</sup> BgLA, A/VII-II/II-1, Zahl:Präs.2/27-1947. Neusiedl am See, am 30.3.1947. Situationsbericht für März 1947.

<sup>83</sup> ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, III-Wpol/Grenzen 2 Ungarn, Gz.120.025-W/Pol/47, Z.121.000-W/Pol/47.

<sup>84</sup> BgLA BH Mattersburg, XI-Polizei, Arbeitsamt Burgenland. Eisenstadt, den 15.6.1948.

<sup>85</sup> 'Több visszaszökött SS-legényt fogott el az államvédelmi rendőrség', *Soproni Újság*, 28 March 1947, 2.

<sup>86</sup> Pittaway, 'Politics of Legitimacy', 468-73.

<sup>87</sup> ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, III-Wpol/Grenzen 2 Ungarn, Gz.102.793-WPol/49, Z.102.793-WPol/49.



the afternoon.<sup>88</sup> Budapest implemented a scheme that involved the physical closure of the border, the creation of barbed-wire fences separating the two countries, the construction of a network of watchtowers and the clearing of all land of vegetation within 500 metres of the border.<sup>89</sup> When it demanded that Austria create a similar zone on its side of the border and Vienna refused, Hungary retaliated by closing the border to all Austrian farmers with properties on their side, to fury in Burgenland border villages.<sup>90</sup>

### Two states in a divided borderland

On the morning of 9 April 1950 in Schattendorf twelve residents left Sunday mass and walked through the cemetery that lay adjacent to the barbed-wire fence that marked the border with Hungary. As they did so they were fired on by the Hungarian border guard. One shot went right over their heads, hitting a bush that lay just behind them. Panic ensued as the men left the cemetery as quickly as they could, as more shots were fired by the Hungarians.<sup>91</sup> Between the closure of the border in 1949 and the temporary thaw along it in summer 1956, the Austrian authorities recorded a string of incidents, which included attempts by Hungarian border guards to kidnap Austrian citizens, one shooting of an Austrian gendarme, and numerous instances of people being fired on; a string of injuries due to the accidental explosion of mines by people walking close to the border, fires, and even an instance of Hungarian border guards protecting agricultural workers trespassing on Austrian territory to steal the crops of local farmers.<sup>92</sup> The Austrian authorities lodged diplomatic protests when confronted with each incident; the Hungarians rejected their protests, arguing that the fault lay with the Austrian side, and that they had a duty to defend their borders.<sup>93</sup>

Despite the unpleasant and abnormal everyday reality of living next to a contested border, it provided one aspect of the background that enabled the emergent Austrian state to construct its legitimate authority as a protector of local residents. This had begun in 1945, when it protected borderland residents from disorder generated by the Soviet occupation authorities. In 1950, although the end of the occupation lay five years in the future, the state had restored law and order, while the Red Army, although still present, was by no means as oppressive a presence as it had been during the late 1940s.<sup>94</sup> With the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Hungary and the subsequent rise in tension along the border, an anti-communist consensus, shaped by events

<sup>88</sup> 'Megszűnt a határon való átsétálgatás', *Mosonmagyaróvár*, 30 March 1949, 3.

<sup>89</sup> MOL, Határőrség Országos Parancsnokság iratai (Papers of the Border Guard National Command, hereafter XIX-B-10), 16d., A nyugati határ megerősítésével kapcsolatos műszaki munkálatok.

<sup>90</sup> ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, III-Wpol/Grenzen 2 Ungarn, GZ.103.828-WPol/49, Z.103.828-WPol/49.

<sup>91</sup> ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, II-Pol/Ungarn 9, GZ.120.292-pol/50, Z.122.836-pol./50, Grenzzwischenfall an der ungarischen Grenze bei Schattendorf am 9.4.1950.

<sup>92</sup> ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, II-Pol/Ungarn 9, GZ.519.073-Pol./56, Z.511.037-Pol.56, Bundesministerium für Inneres, Abteilung 2, 511.909-pol/56.

<sup>93</sup> For an example see ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, II-Pol/Ungarn 9, GZ.120.292-pol./50, Z.126.694-pol./50, 021519/1950, Szóbeli jegyzék.

<sup>94</sup> BgLA, A/VIII-14/II-2, Bezirkshauptmannschaft Oberpullendorf, Zl.Pr.26–1950. Oberpullendorf, am 30.1.1950. Situationsbericht für den Monat Jänner 1950.

in Hungary, bolstered the legitimacy of the Austrian state in northern Burgenland. Fraudulent elections and the repression directed against the Catholic Church in Hungary offended public opinion,<sup>95</sup> as did the material hardship inflicted on Austrian property owners by their inability to cross the border to work their land after 1949.<sup>96</sup> The way in which this consensus strengthened the state was demonstrated during a crisis in the wake of the Fourth Wage and Price Agreement during September and October 1950, the latest of a round of agreements that cemented Austria's post-war 'social partnership' between capital and labour, through which the national trade union leadership had agreed to a process of managed real-wage reductions as part of a generalised economic stabilisation package. The resulting rebellion in factories was backed by the KPÖ, enabling the federal government, union establishment and the SPÖ to break the strike movement by denouncing it as a Communist plot.<sup>97</sup> Despite the unpopularity of government economic policies caused by the real material hardship for those living on fixed incomes in Burgenland as a consequence of almost constant pressure on real wages, the anti-communist consensus ensured that there was little industrial protest, even in many industrial communities in the region.<sup>98</sup>

On the other side of the border, despite its deployment of considerable violence the Hungarian state was weakened by its failure to generate real legitimacy for itself. While it used repression to secure its rule against the majority of the population that opposed it, which included religious believers and much of the rural population – which it attempted to force into agricultural co-operatives – it had built some conditional legitimacy through mobilising the industrial working class and rural poor by promising material improvement. By 1950, as forced industrialisation, the regime's attempts to feed the urban centres and collectivisation led to severe cuts in living standards, even this conditional legitimacy was gone.<sup>99</sup> In the western borderlands its position was far weaker. When it nationalised church schools in 1948, one of the few places in the country where it provoked open protest was in Sopron, where local priests, teachers and pupils marched against the measure. To assert its authority the local regime was forced to bus in 15,000 activists from the rest of the country to stage a counter-protest against the machinations of the 'clerical reaction'.<sup>100</sup> The fury generated in villages by collectivisation, high taxation and the government's attacks on organised religion meant that in many borderland villages, while a semblance of order was maintained through a heavy police presence, the local regime lacked

<sup>95</sup> BgLA, A/VIII-14/I-2, Bezirkshauptmannschaft Oberpullendorf. Zahl: Pr.-244/19. Oberpullendorf, am 30 Sept. 1947. Lagebericht für September 1947.

<sup>96</sup> ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, III-Wpol/Grenzen 2 Ungarn, GZ.103.828-WPol/49, Z.144.476-WPol/49.

<sup>97</sup> Jill Lewis, 'Austria 1950: Strikes, "Putsch" and their Political Context', *European History Quarterly*, 30, 4 (2000), 533–52.

<sup>98</sup> BgLA, A/VIII-14/II-2, Bezirkshauptmannschaft Mattersburg. Mattersburg, 27.9.1950; Bezirkshauptmannschaft Mattersburg. Mattersburg, 30. Oktober 1950.

<sup>99</sup> Mark Pittaway, 'Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State, 1948–1958', Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1998; Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 131–60.

<sup>100</sup> GyMSM.SL., XX1/11,13d.../1948. főisp.szám.

any positive authority at all.<sup>101</sup> Even in Sopron's factories local party activists were forced to concede that the regime had no real support among the working class, for even most of the Stakhanovites – its exceptional workers – were ethnic Germans, alienated from the regime by its policies of ethnic exclusion during the period of its construction.<sup>102</sup>

Nationally the Hungarian state compensated for its lack of legitimacy by a reliance on repression, which made the regime dangerously unstable and prepared the ground for its rapid collapse during the 1956 Revolution.<sup>103</sup> It discriminated against the borderlands, whose urban centres, especially Sopron, were starved of new investment and lost industrial establishments and cultural institutions. It also restricted the freedom of border region residents severely, creating a border zone in order to cut residents off from the rest of the country, and deported those it regarded as 'class enemies' to other parts of Hungary.<sup>104</sup> This combination of retribution and control did not strengthen the regime, but generated complaints. When the regime crumbled during 1956 as a result of splits within the party and chronic lack of legitimacy and support among the population, these complaints shaped local political demands. In summer 1956 residents demanded the lifting of restrictions of travel between the border zone and the rest of Hungary and the legalisation of small-scale cross-border traffic with Austria.<sup>105</sup> While such hopes were dashed after the suppression of the 1956 Revolution, border region residents accommodated themselves reluctantly to the regime under which they were forced to live. With the post-1956 regime more aware that its survival depended on tacit compromise with those it ruled than its immediate predecessor had been, the authorities in the border region constantly pressured Budapest to make the lives of its residents more tolerable.<sup>106</sup>

The terms of the peace established after 1945 in the borderlands were unequal, in that those who lived in Austria found the peace they were offered easier to accept than those on the Hungarian side of the border. The state established in Hungary was weaker, even though, seemingly paradoxically, it was more repressive. This was because of its relative failure in establishing legitimate state authority, which rendered the regime in Budapest vulnerable to outright collapse in 1956, and left its leaders profoundly insecure between 1957 and 1989.

<sup>101</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., Az MDP Győr–Moson–Sopron Megyei Bizottság (Győr–Moson–Sopron County Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party, hereafter Xf.402)/2/Mezőgazdaság/86.e.; M.D.P. Járás Bizottság Mosonmagyaróvár, Sallai Imre ut 3 sz, Jelentés. Mosonmagyaróvár, 1950. augusztus 9-én., 1.

<sup>102</sup> GyMSM.Gy.L., Az MDP Sopron Városi Bizottsága (Sopron City Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party, hereafter Xf.412) /1/96.e., Jegyzőkönyv, felvéve 1952. július 16-án, 1–4.

<sup>103</sup> Mark Pittaway, 'A magyar forradalom új megközelítésben: az ipari munkásság, a szocializmus széthullása és rekonstrukciója, 1953–1958', in Gábor Gyáni and János M. Rainer, eds., *Ezerkilencszázötvenhat az újabb történelmi irodalomban* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2007), 49–71.

<sup>104</sup> MOL, XIX-B-1-j/45d., Kimutatás a deli és a nyugati határövezetbe tartozó városokról és községekről.

<sup>105</sup> Mark Pittaway, 'Challenging and Confirming Europe's Cold War Divide: The 1956 Revolution and the Austrian–Hungarian Borderland', paper delivered in the series 'Revolution in the Soviet Empire: New Perspectives on 1956', Department of History, University of British Columbia, 10 October 2006.

<sup>106</sup> MOL, XIX-B-1-z, 14d., Szigoruan Titkos! Előterjesztés a határsáv csökkentésére vonatkozóan.

If the events of the mid-1950s in Hungary confirmed that for as long as the post-war settlement held its socialist regime could not be replaced, they also underlined the fragility of that regime. In Austria the mid-1950s underlined the strength of legitimate authority possessed by the state that had been built since 1945. A year before the outbreak of the 1956 Revolution, Austria's leaders had signed a State Treaty with the allies that restored their sovereignty on condition of neutrality. The treaty allowed for the withdrawal of the Red Army from Burgenland. During the Hungarian Revolution and its suppression neutrality was tested as a consequence of the upheaval on its eastern border and the temporary housing in the country of tens of thousands of refugees.<sup>107</sup> The way in which this revealed the strength of the formula of the protective state, through which the new Austrian state constructed its legitimacy after 1945, was indicated by the changing attitude to the army, established by the State Treaty a year previously. At the time of its establishment many had argued against its creation, on the grounds that in the war years 'enough fathers and sons of this land died for nothing',<sup>108</sup> and that money to be spent on the new military 'should be better put to more productive uses'.<sup>109</sup> By early 1957 the army could make its case credibly to the Burgenland population by arguing that 'the events in Hungary threatened military action on our eastern border. Does anyone now doubt that we need an army to defend our homeland?'<sup>110</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Ibolya Murer and Zoltán Fónagy, eds., *Die Ungarische Revolution und Österreich 1956* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2006).

<sup>108</sup> BgLA, A/VIII-14-I-5, Sicherheitsdirektion für das Burgenland, Zahl: SD res.27/55, Eisenstadt, am 1.5.1955. Lagebericht für den Monat April 1955.

<sup>109</sup> BgLA, A/VIII-14-I-5, Sicherheitsdirektion für das Burgenland, Zahl: SD res.30/55, Eisenstadt, am 2.6.1955. Lagebericht für den Monat Mai 1955.

<sup>110</sup> BgLA, BH Eisenstadt, I-1957: 'Offizier. Ein Beruf für Mich?'