

Szélpál, Livia. "Márkus, Beáta. 2020. "Csak egy csepp német vér." A német származású civilek Szovjetunióba deportálása Magyarországról 1944/1945 ["Just a drop of German blood:" The Deportation of German Civilians to the Soviet Union from Hungary in 1944/1945]. Pécs: Kronosz Kiadó. 469 pp." *Hungarian Cultural Studies*. e-Journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, Volume 15 (2022): <http://ahea.pitt.edu> DOI: 10.5195/ahea.2022.478

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"*Csak egy csepp német vér*" ['Just a Drop of German Blood'] is the title of Beáta Márkus's 2020 monograph, which is a reference to a common saying about the German origin of those Hungarian civilians whom the Soviet officers deported eastward in 1944/45, around and following the Soviet invasion of Hungary at the end of World War II. According to this genealogical category, and based on their oral narrations, those with just a drop of German blood flowing through their veins were considered German ["*csak egyetlen csepp német vér folyik az ereiben, német*"]. Historian Beáta Márkus, of the University of Pécs, begins her book with the following sentences:

In January 1945, thousands of civilians, women, and men were transported in unheated, closed cattle wagons east of the Carpathian Basin. The trains set off for Soviet camps, according to Resolution No. 7161 of the *Állami Védelmi Bizottság* ['Soviet State Defense Commission'] issued on December 16, 1944, where the prisoners were detained for many years and were forced into so-called *jóvátételi munka* ['reparation work'] under inhumane conditions. They were selected based on German descent [translation mine, L.Sz.] (13).

Márkus continues her book with the personal history of her family, who were affected by the deportations, and follows with other stories, changing the names of those involved to protect the privacy interests of these individuals. She focuses on two main issues in her research: first, which Hungarian settlements were included in the deportations, and how many people were affected; and second, by what method and reason were the civilians of the regions selected for deportation (15). Márkus concludes that the Soviet forces were allowed to act as they liked and that their designated or voluntary Hungarian assistants did not have a uniform interpretation of

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This journal is published by Pitt Open Library Publishing.

ISSN 1936-8879 (online)

the relevant Soviet basic provision. There was no further explanation about the selection method and who was considered German in the listings. In most cases, the victims of deportations were German-speaking or of German descent and bore a German surname, and there were also cases of personal revenge that the author elaborates on from Chapters Four through Eight showing the regional differences in listings of such.

Quite a few Hungarian officials tried to cover up and protect the German origin of their fellow citizens, while others, out of personal revenge or political hatred, "Germanized" their fellow Hungarian citizens to condemn and list them. The Soviet military commanders of the settlements instructed the local Hungarian officials to compile a list of the Germans living in the country. Márkus's complex and comparative research based on hitherto unexplored archival sources and ego documents highlights the regional differences and the historical context of the Hungarian memory culture and practice. In addition, in the regions that she examines, the proportions of the "German" population were divergent, which caused a nonunified execution of the Soviet command and – decades later – a varied narrative on the part of the local victims and witnesses, which also had to be accounted for in her work. Márkus's approach provides a solid and cohesive theoretical framework for the volume, and her book serves as a pivotal contribution to the unexplored archival history of the deportations, a topic on which, as far as I am aware, no similar volume has been published. An additional merit of her book is that it offers a nationwide comparison with a fairly broad source base. In many respects, this study transcends the black-and-white picture of the subject suggested by the contemporary memory policy, as it seeks and answers the silent question about the role of the Hungarian administration in carrying out the action as part of the collective guilt of the German-Hungarian minority.

*Málenkij robot* ['маленькая работа'/'small work'] is a delicate term preserved as part of Hungarian historical memory (18). The Soviet prisoner-gathering campaigns in the Carpathian Basin were part of a series of retaliation, ethnic and political cleansing, and forced labor campaigns. According to personal narratives, which survived mainly in people's memories or through "oral tradition," the *Málenkij robot* meant hard physical work (e.g., demolition, construction, mining), for which both men and women were selected and then worked in forced labor in the Soviet Union for years. As Márkus emphasizes, the origin of the term is unknown, and the subject was taboo during communism and only publicized and explored in the 1990s (33). Márkus highlights and clarifies terminological inaccuracies related to this topic and argues that in previous works focusing on the *Málenkij robot*, several different notions such as gulag, captivity, relocation, internment, deportation of the population of German descent, and more, were often mistakenly merged into one another. As a result, the term *Málenkij robot* itself became an umbrella term for forced labor (20). As Márkus argues, the very first German narratives about the deportations used another expression of *elhurcolás* ['dragging away'] to the Soviet Union: "*Verschleppung nach Russland*" (33). Márkus introduces precise and innovative terminology that differs from the canons of both Hungarian and German historiography. One of the underlying foundations of her work is the explanation of the cultural and collective memory of deportations and the *Málenkij robot* that became a *topos* in the victims' personal histories.

The examined period covers the years between 1944 and 1947/1949. To achieve her goals, Márkus consulted regional archival sources. The list of archives and appendices is impressive, covering nine pages. Among foreign collections, she visited the archives of the German *Bundesarchiv*, within which the focus was on the eastern documentation of the

*Lastenausgleichsarchiv* in Bayreuth. In addition to the archival material, Márkus processed materials not ordinarily available in Hungary, published by the expelled Germans from 1946 to the present day. To explore the events, she scrutinized local administrative records in eleven county archives (including the county, district, and settlement levels) from 1944 to 1949, when the last group of deportees could return home. She also reviewed ecclesiastical government records in several archives, including the interwar period and the era of deportation, as they provide many astonishing additions to the issues of interethnic conflicts at the local level. Among her sources were the *Historia Domus* of the local priests, casualty records, ego documents, personal interviews, eyewitness reports of *Heimatbuchs* published in Germany, local newspapers, and the *Magyar Hadifogoly Híradó* [‘Hungarian Prisoner of War News’] published from 1945 to 1948 (30). Márkus critically rethinks and sequentially processes her sources with social responsibility. She is not focusing on the Soviet archive materials since many of those sources are still unavailable publicly. After the publication of her book, in 2020, a new website created by the Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár [‘The National Archives of Hungary’] was dedicated to the topic of Soviet deportation with the title of *Szovjetunióba elhurcoltak* [‘Dragged away to the Soviet Union’] (<https://adatbazisokonline.hu/gyujtemeny/szovjetunioba-elhurcoltak>).

“*Csak egy csepp német vér*” includes ten chapters conceptualizing the research questions, working paradigms, and notions bracing new critical perspectives. The well-organized structure of the research focuses on seven main topics that emerged as the outcome of the author’s scrutiny and coding of her archival sources, which are then discussed in the separate chapters of her work: (1) introduction, (2) the historical context, (3) the perspectives of the research (4) five regional and geographical sites of deportations explored in Chapters Four through Eight, and (5) the follow-up history of the deportation, (6) conclusions and (7) appendices. The Introduction in Chapter One presents the topic and research questions, the current state of the art, the sources, and the methodological framework. The second chapter introduces the historical context of the German civilians’ deportations to the Soviet Union. The third chapter presents the assessment criterion of the research, the interpretations of German descent and minority, and the identity question in Hungary.

Chapters Four through Eight explore the regional differences of the deportations by scrutinizing (a) the method, the actors, the ordination of deportations, (b) the regional differences concerning the ethnic composition and conflicts of the regions, (c) the number of deportees, (d) the destination, and (e) the reason behind deportation and the different interpretations of German origin in the regions under study. The examined regions are: Békés-Csanád, Északkelet-Magyarország, Bács-Kiskun, a Sváb Törökország (“Swabian Turkey,” namely the historical counties of Baranya, Somogy and Tolnai) and Budapest and its surroundings. Chapter Nine raises questions about the follow-up history of the deportations concerning the homecoming of the deportees, how they were silenced and treated during the communist regime, and the current state of cultural memory in Hungary. The final, concluding chapter emphasizes the social responsibility of the study and the fault of the Hungarian government in the period from 1945 to 1947/1949 (377).

The novelty of Beáta Márkus’s new work is threefold. Firstly, it is based on her regional research in local archives. Secondly, it focuses on dragging away civilians of German descent and connecting, comparing, and analyzing different geographical locations in a unified manner based on a standardized set of criteria. Thirdly, its innovative perspective lies in its regionally

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comparative way embedded in the international academic literature (363). All these turn “*Csak egy csepp német vér*” into a fundamental reading and a point of reference for researchers, graduate students, and teachers, as well as for a more general readership, possibly of those interested and affected by the deportations and their descendants.