

THEMATA OF A PHD TREATISE

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The process of ethnic and social re-arrangement in the life of a village in Gömör during the  
20<sup>th</sup> century

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## 1. The objective of the treatise and the definition of the theme

The problem of depopulating villages attracted attention of ethnography as early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the only-childism in Ormánság. The depopulation of small villages from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century connecting with other factors and the phenomenon of „gipsyzing” in Hungary attracted attention of social geographical researches focusing mainly on Transdanubia and Borsod. The researched settlement, Baraca would connect to Borsod geographically, but lies on the Slovakian side of the border. Ethnography knows the village by folklore researches. István B. Kovács's book, *Baracai népköltészet Tóth Balázné Csák Margit előadásában (Baraca Folk Poetry In The Interpretation of Mrs Balázs Tóth Margit Csák)* was published in 1994 as the 25<sup>th</sup> volume of *Új Magyar Népköltési Gyűjtemény (New Collection of Hungarian Folk Poetry)*.

It is not proved from the datas of censuses, but the population during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century almost completely altered. Four gipsy families lived in four houses (15-20 persons) in the 1910s and 1920s, but by now their number has increased to 372 persons. Parallely most of its non-gipsy inhabitants (in Baraca this category is called peasant, so further on I use this expression) – from 1940 374 persons – moved away. Consequently in the case of Baraca the „gipsyzing” is the reason of a complex process. During my work I tried to analyse beside the result of this process its details, components and finally their general effect. During my research I looked answers for the following questions:

- What is the reason of the dynamic decrease of the peasant community?
- Does the migration relate to the outside interference to the village?
- Does the migration mean total dispersion, or shows certain ways, or certain destinations were advantaged?
- Where are the gipsies who form the majority in Baraca from?
- Can their emergence be traced in official or other written sources?
- What kind of contacts formed between the gipsies and peasants living next to each other?

The purpose of my study is to characterize extensively almost 100 years of the life of the village as community, which was strongly limited in several points of view. Despite my original aim eventually I could not fulfill the study of the whole population based on registrations, and from that results the reconstruction of the families, because I wasn't allowed to research the registers (alleged to the Slovakian law of data protection). The datas after 1945 of church registers cannot be regarded as wholly accurate sources (according to the restraining of political authorities). I neither attempt to show at completeness the encounters of two ethnic groups now living next to each other in Baraca, their forming notions of each other, the character and frequency of their contacts. Nevertheless I shortly deal with this issue in the end of my paper, for it is unavoidable by its nature (meets the end of the process).

## 2. Methods, sources

During the writing my treatise on the one hand I relied on the literature, and on the other hand on my own research. The nature of the literature is different according to the three main parts of my work, but the mutual character of the three different types is that I couldn't find concrete datas – apart from one or two exceptions – on the settlement I analysed. So the disposable sources were used as parallels to my researches, as additions or methodological examples, precedents. I needed the results of other (beside ethnography) sciences in several times. In few cases historical, social geographical, statistical, sociological approaches drew me near the dealing with particular problems. Beside the published written sources (literature,

censuses) I tried to apply other written sources and church registers as additions. However most of the data are from the results of my own researches. I could rely on my results during the writing of my treatise at every section. In the case of the first two major sections – regarding they deal with the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – older informants, listed in the introduction, helped me. So far the information having from them can be seen as only sources in several themes (establishing the farmers' agricultural co-operative, relocation, reslovakization) on the analysed settlement. Similarly I got information (unavailable in other way) dealing with persons who moved away from Baraca, because official records on them are not at disposal (neither cumulatively nor namely). During my researches – with the help of my informants – I counted them together with their family members. Beside the synoptic charts made from the draft I also represent on map the present day „virtual” Baraca (the maps were edited by István Balcsók). I enlarged the methodological armoury during the writing the next section. Beside interviewing the expediently chosen informants I tried to give representative sample of the forming notions of each other of the two ethnic groups with the tools of sampling known from sociology. The characterization of the ethnic and generational composition in the settlement based on the whole census of the household. This also meant the base of the composition of multi-generational gipsy families who do not live in the same household, and it was used to „confirm” the characteristic child-number, which variable generation by generation. The use of estimable but random data, information was enabled (chiefly to model the differences and border between the two ethnic groups living next to each other) by my researcher position, the observing attendance which can not be referred to the attendant observant.

### **3. The thesis-like specification of the results**

1. In the first section of my treatise I show the character of the village society, the everyday life of the community, and to a lesser extent their feasts. The first longer part treats the features of the village society until 1940s. This part is divided into further units which is well-known in the Hungarian ethnography, according to the structure of the questionnaire made for the research of the popular life of Abaúj by László Szabó. It emerges from the self-characterization and the analysis of outside connections that making of connection with neighbouring mainly Calvinist villages was strongly limited by the catholic faith of Baraca. Even if not the neighbouring settlements formed its marrying area, Baraca had some connections with most of that villages, it could make possible to characterize itself compared with others (too): firstly with religiousness and diligence. Among its Calvinist neighbours with its vicarage and church had relatively high importance. In contrast to the most of the lower noble settlements in the historical county Gömör the legal status of the lower nobles in Baraca got on well with their Roman Catholic religion. In connection with the inner social articulation of the village I attempted to show not only the differences between the former villain and lower nobles, but I characterize the classes formed in the point of view of estate and property. The articulation of the village society mainly apprehensible in the case of the differences of estates. The fact that it was kept in evidence shows that it was the most important measure of value and in point of social discretion it firstly had the function of a sign for the families. Baraca was touched by the emigration to America but as most of the emigrants returned, the motivation of the temporary emigration can be seen: obtaining the position of a higher rank (i.e. more land) in the community which judge in the point of wealth. The other directing force of the village community is the aggregation based on blood and kindred i.e. the family institution and the system of kindred whose features of naming and function are analysed. The large and small families were common in Baraca in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is also well traced that – otherwise this is well known from literature –

the potency of the husbandman remained in the small family. The meaning of the puissance faded, but the „institution” activated in the time of outside „attack”, so it proved temporarily organizing force. The other „peculiarity” of the system of kindred in Baraca was the extraordinary importance of mock-kinship. The choosing of the „crony” was a decision for life. Beside that its importance was in a village society getting in a crony-relation with someone meant a chance to strengthen the net of family relations through the individual, heighten the position and shift the estimation into positive direction. Therewith for the smallness of Baraca the kindred completed with mock-kinship interwove the whole village, in the net of relations everyone related to everyone in some way. Analysing the groups of sex and age it can be established that the marriage has the role of watershed in organizing such interim small communities. After that the communal occasion with the function of amusement in the case of men becomes strongly limited, but in the case of women almost ceases. Surveying the local relations it came to light that they are – compared with the case of other settlements known from literature – not too intense, but positive. The members of the community take precious good care of maintaining that. The outline of the forms of work-organizations connects more emphatically to the statements of the literature, because in spite of the well-researched of county Gömör this subject (and business-organization) was not dealt with, László Szabó is the only exception. In the course of my work I followed László Szabó’s interpretation, I constructed the show of work-organizations according to his system: I characterize not only the simple co-operations, individual and family work, but I also aggroup the joint-work according to the reasons of forming the fellowships. Among these features of work-organization emerges a specialty for the situation of Baraca, the total lack of wagework. The lack of voluntary co-operative help is prominent and seemingly without reason. My informants gave reason for that without question that this form is incompatible with the concentration on the own benefit and own work, which featured the families in Baraca as early as the 1940s. I demonstrate the function of business-organization forms with the help of farming of four different families with different extent of land and legal status. Behind the nature of business-organizations the mental differences of families can be seen in each case. Comparing with datas on other settlements known from literature, my research results in Baraca confirm the estimation of László Szabó, who expressed that the forms of work- and business-organizations show regional variations like other fields of culture. That’s why they – as a slice of culture – are fit to characterize groups, regions and settlements in the possession of appropriate research results. It can be estimated that in conformity with the opinions of my informants on the village-organization and ruling legal system, Baraca was a well-controlled and well ordered village in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My datas show that each field had its own responsible, who wholly harmonized their activities for the sake of function.

The first part of the treatise shows an image of Baraca characterizing the life of folk life formed around junctions and from that it can be seen that the healthy proportioned articulation based on wealth caused a really successful economical—social co-operation. The village as a community formed a „rounded” whole, the levels of poorest and the richest, and the ones between them favourably complemented each other in the co-operation based on economy and work. The later depopulation in this period was denoted by only-childism in most of the families of the biggest landowners (which gave example). Families moved away from Baraca even in this time, but it didn’ take dangerous dimensions. Emigrating to America was established that it served only as a tool of rise, and most of the persons trying their fortune returned.

2. The second main section deals with the social—political interventions (from time memorial) which remodelled the village as a community and domiciliation. Among them the first was the appearance of Slovak families settled down in the waste around the village in

1920. As it became certain for me during the research, this phenomenon can not be estimated in the same way as the appearance of Hungarian families from Medvesalj. Analysing the register entries it unequivocally turned out that the village did not admit the Slovak families, but the Hungarian families could integrate. The reason of this dissimilarity was not necessarily the lack of mutual language, but the lifestyle of families from Medvesalj almost completely the same as the families' in Baraca, so it could be familiar and could be estimated, whereas the Slovak families' had absolutely different. There was 14 victims of the second world war from Baraca. Despite the fact that it meant human lives, in the community's point of view the translocation and the reslovakization proved greater shock. This was the first time when the village had the bitter experience of the fact that it could not be able to intervene to form its own fortune. The number of recollections of the subject has increased in the last 5—10 years, but the story of one of my informants from Baraca on his family I think, has value as a source. Establishing the farmers' agricultural co-operative was the following outside intervention in 1953. In the previous years the community lost its self-confidence, but positively accepted the forming of the co-operative. The account for that may not only be the acquiescent attitude, but the farming was considered unsuccessful under a certain extend of land in Baraca. (This was emphasized during conversations about the aggregation of the village society by my informants, it is impossible to live within an „eighth“.) After the initial resistance and difficulties, after about 4 years, the farming turned from ungainful to gainful. In this period the leaders of the co-operative emerged basicly from the the leading farmer class of the village. If the chairman wasn't always the biggest farmer, the actual leaders were whose private farmings were also successful. The approx. two decades history of the co-operative can be designated as history of success. It can not be proved better than with the image of Baraca, its buildings show the face of the 1960s and 1970s. Apart from few homes, all of the houses were built in the time of the co-operation, all of them bear marks of the peculiarity of that period. Families also sensed the success of the farming, the material growing was not indicated unequivocally to the community by the extension of the domain, but the modernization of homes.

The abolishment of the co-operative in 1976 was the phenomenon what the community could not fit in its life and order. In the possession of the instruction of reslovakization the village which accepted quite well reached the state of doubtfulness (that way does not good, nor the other). In addition, almost at the same time the village was administratively annexed to Füge, was made it subordinate. I fortified the description of these processes with numerical particulars. Graphs made of tables in the appendix exemplify how many persons were lost the village, how many moved off after these processes. All along I managed separately the men and the women, because in the case of women the marriage could and can cause the migration. For that, estimating the datas I did not take the number of their migration into consideration.

Regarding the annual shaping of the migrations it is noteworthy that they did not begin in the 1970s, despite the estimation of the persons in Baraca. If we ignore women the survey of the migrated men shows several peaks in the years of 1950s and 1960s. So we can not state that the **sole** reason of migrations was the co-operative join to the state estate, and the loss of the administrative independence of the village. During the many decades of living together dictated tight competitions, almost inhuman work-speed. For that it would have been disallowable for the members of the community not to make visible, apparent and interpretable for the controll the reasults of their hard work. Who did not want to take part in this competition, or did not want to live the new form of their old familiar life changed by outside effects, they moved off as early as in the 1950s. The forming of the other wave of the migration was **also** needed something else. There are several other villages around Baraca which history were similar, and got similar strikes, but did not depopulate. Here we can

mention that the migration and the accompanied home purchase became the tool of the competition. (For the extension of the domain, house building or the rich espousal weren't the tool anymore, they were already exceeded.) In this case an abstract norm (financial—social rise) concretized in the guise of migration. The last wave of the migrations – in my opinion – can be explained mainly by this element. The communal control dealt with the migration of the families (primarily financially), the dissolution of the former peasant community was inseparable from this contention. The fact that the target settlement wasn't all the same can be seen from the survey of the new homes of the migrated persons. Most of the migrated people targeted two towns exactly the same distance from Baraca: Rimaszombat and Tornalja. It was important not to be the physical distance insuperable and not to be out of each others eyeshot, but it was also expected to be the new settlement a town.

I developed, supported by the materials stated in the second main section, that the reason of the migrations and such degree of depopulation must have been the effect of several factors, not an only phenomenon. However it is certain that the process became irreversible after the years of closing the co-operative, similarly the demographic dynamic of the peasant community wasn't „forceless”, but under the influence of suction force the settlement stepped on the way of ethnic re-arrangement.

3. The third section of the treatise deals with the forming of the present ethnic aspect of the settlement. The problem of „gipsyizing” as well-known in the literature in the case of Baraca is the result and outgrowth of the above treated processes. Paralelly the former inhabitants of the gipsy row at the village-end moved to the tenantless houses. By the 1970s their number considerably increased, they extended their living space into every possible direction in the village. The former gipsy row then disappeared and today all the gipsy persons live in the inner district of the village. Only few gipsy families were in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but by now their number has increased to 372 persons. This increase does not mean settling down in Baraca from other places, this means that families in Baraca increased. If we draw the family trees of the present multi-generation gipsy families, we can find that more than 300 persons are from 12 multi-generation families. As the mental image of the village is different in the cases of peasants and gipsies, the two ethnic groups in the level of consciousness do not live in the same settlement. This difference can be seen in the use of public and private places. The everyday of the living together can be characterized by not only definite ethnic classification and self-classification, but we can feature it if we have a relatively thorough knowledge of each other. In the relation of the two ethnic groups we can experience the influence of the ethnic rates of fifty years back, namely the traces of the influence of the strong peasant community. The insignificant number of mixed marriages mark that the experiences of several decades resulted in not only the cognition of the other ethnic group but resulted in awakening to the consciousness of the margin between them. It could be the reason of the living together with the lack of ethnic conflicts so far. Today the 61 persons in Baraca form a truncated community and this community is not even able to „create” their own elite which is necessary for the viable administration. Ties of family and kindred not necessarily link them each other, rather they link to the already moved off persons this way. However the gipsies living next to them do not mean base of comparison. Their scale of values and manners do not affect the peasants at all, and it can be seen even in the case of populous peasant community.

On the other hand it can be remarked on gipsies in general that they are slightly affected by peasants' scale of values. It can be clear not only by their „peasanting” manners, not only by the decreasing number of gipsy children, but they declare in the course of interviews and meetings. It can be also explained by the many-decades coexistence – on the contrary to the gipsy inhabitants of other villages – that they mark themselves off from stranger gipsies, and they do their best not to accept them.

The gipsy—peasant relation can be named asymmetrical even in the frames of today ethnic ratio (or despite that). The peasants deal with gipsies the very same way as it became fixed 50-60 years ago, when the gipsy population consisted less than 10% of the entire population of the village. The question may arise, whether the expression asymmetrical fit to that relation, because gipsies themselves accept this point of view.

During the decades of coexistence, in the forming a notion of each other of the two ethnic groups not the negative features increased, but the knowledge of each other. Naturally this does not mean idyll without friction, but everyone knows where is the border and no one wants to cross it.

I am of opinion that not accidentally effectless the governmental ideas of solving the gipsies' problems in Baraca. Here we face a finely wrought practise of coexistence, the form of „not to solve, but yet operating”, which can be hardly shifted (to positive or negative direction) without outside interference, physical force.

The village seems to be in cumulatively disadvantageous position for the outside spectators, and its hard, nearly hopeless condition and estimation are accurately known and felt by its inhabitants. However they have the possession of the unique, unreproducible, inaccessible „treasure” of communal experience: no one can state that they have prejudice against the other ethnic group. It is absolutely excluded by the experience of several decades of coexistence.

#### **4. Publications on this subject issued so far**

1. Adatok a Gömör megyei Baraca paraszti társadalmának tagolódásához. In: TISICUM. A Jász – Nagykun – Szolnok Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve XII. Szolnok 2001. 293-301.
2. Az egyház szerepe a faluközösségben. (Egy szlovákiai magyar falu példája). In: Ethnica 2001./3. sz. 95-99.
3. A terek használatának etnikai sajátosságai Baracán. In: Gömörország 2001/3. 5-9.
4. „Föld a földhöz...” Az életmód és a gazdálkodói gyakorlat néhány összefüggése a XX. századi Baracán. In: Laczkovics Emőke – Viga Gyula (szerk.): KÉVE. Ünnepi kötet a 60 esztendő Selmeczi Kovács Attila tiszteletére. Debrecen – Veszprém, 2003. 251-260.
5. Cigányok, parasztok Baracán. In: Ethnographia 2001. 125-149.
6. Népi vallásosság egy változó faluközösségben. In: Ethnica 2004/3. sz. 77 – 81.
7. „A koma a rokonnál is előbbrevaló...” Baraca családszervezete és rokonsági rendszere a 20. század első felében. In: Gömörország 2005/1. 2-12.