György Kövér

Intra- and Inter-confessional Conflicts in Tiszaeszlár in the Period of the “Great Trial”

At around noon on Saturday, April 1, 1882, Eszter Solymosi, a 14-year-old girl disappeared without a trace from Tiszaeszlár, a village in Szabolcs county in the Tiszántúl region. The case remains unsolved, despite the fact that a number of attempts have been made to track her down. At the request of her mother, a warrant of capture—complete with her description—was issued. The district officer and the county investigating judge tried to reconstruct what may have happened to the girl. During the criminal procedure, one of the charges that slowly took shape was that the Jews living in Eszlár had murdered the girl and used her for a ritual blood sacrifice. Nearly everyone in the village was interrogated regarding the events of April 1. Even the Jews living in Eszlár tried
to discover the potential whereabouts of Eszter. Numerous reports were made
concerning the various places where the missing girl had allegedly been seen.
None of these reports could be confirmed.

Then, on June 18, 1882, the corpse of a woman was found at Tiszadada. At
first, many thought she was Eszter Solymosi. During the official identification
procedure, neither her mother nor her sister identified the partially decomposed
body as Eszter, nor for that matter did many of the locals. The local physicians
performing the post-mortem examination ruled out the possibility of the corpse
being Eszter’s. However, they clearly recognized the clothes found on the body.
With this, a new count of indictment was made: the charge of “floating a corpse.”
Timber raftsmen from the northeastern county of Máramaros were accused of
having dressed an unknown female corpse in Eszter Solymosi’s garments. But
even though an elite group of medical professors who arrived from the capital
city tried to identify the body after it had been exhumed in December 1882, and
even though in an extended trial held between June 19 and August 3, 1883 in
Nyíregyháza a select team of defense attorneys headed by Károly Eötvös tried to
clarify what might have happened, the accused were acquitted in the absence of
proof, without any sentence being passed concerning what may have happened
to Eszter Solymosi. The courts of appeal also remained silent on this matter.

When Károly Eötvös—the defense attorney who had fought arduously
and eventually won the case—wrote the history of the trial two decades
later, he used the phrase “great trial” in the subtitle of his book. He was not
only making reference to the one-and-a-half-month long criminal procedure
conducted in Nyíregyháza; he gave the phrase a wider interpretation. When
mentioning “the great trial that has been going on for a thousand years and has
not yet concluded,” he was making reference to the Christian–Jewish conflict in
general: the animosity, or, to put it differently, the embers of anti-Semitism that
sometimes barely glow under the ashes but occasionally burst into open flames.
In his foreword, he actually outlined the international context:

Throughout the entire duration of the great trial, Hungarian society
was overcome by a rush of excitement, as if it were ready to launch
a religious war against the Jewish confession. It saw the examples of
Russia and Romania, while even among the ranks of the German-
speaking nations, both in the territories of Austria and Germany,
there were serious phenomena indicating surging hatred of the Jews.
Hungarian society is not isolated enough to remain entirely insensitive
to these developments. Especially when a case so regrettably distorted into a blood libel had also emerged on Hungarian soil.¹

It is not difficult to see how right Eötvös was in his prophecy; one only needs to think of the events of the 20th century, which had clearly been unforeseeable at his time.²

If one were to try to understand the events in a millennial framework, it would be necessary to take a few steps back into the past. It is very difficult to envision any dynamic theory that encompasses all of universal history. Theories of religious conflicts explain outbursts of tension either by the internal peculiarities of the individual denominations (although, as is well known, measuring proneness to conflict is problematic at best) or by changes in the external/internal environment (for example, modernization). Structural interpretations link such events to changes in the relationships between denominational or confessional elite groups, religious institutions, and the state (for example, secularization or the separation of state and church). As might be expected, there are also certain hybrid models that operate with various, occasionally conflicting variables.³ Religious studies apply the conceptual apparatus of inter-confessional conflicts to history in a highly sophisticated way. The two historical eras typically studied in this context are the period of early Christianity and the age of the Reformation in the Early Modern Period. The four key categories of the model proposed by the Religious Rivalries Seminar are coexistence, cooperation, competition, and conflict.⁴ Naturally, these concepts are not mutually exclusive; not even coexistence and conflict, provided that the terms are taken in a strict sense.

Without trying to sum up the vast literature on the topic, there are a number of questions that may be worthy of our attention in the context of the local case of Eszlár. Do purely inter-confessional conflicts even exist? Are we not only

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¹ Károly Eötvös, A nagy per mely ezer éve folyik, s még nincs vége, vol. 1 (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1968), 12.
² As early as the 1930s, in the foreword to a collective volume published by a Hungarian Protestant student organization, Soli Deo Gloria, the case was already thematized as “the Jewish question.” Arnold Kiss et al., A nagy per (Zsidókérdés) (Budapest: Soli Deo Gloria, 1933), 4.
⁴ This system of four categories proposed by the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies defined the potential mutual relationships between the religions present in the marketplaces of early Christianity. The history of the research was summarised on the basis of Terry Donaldson’s original project plan by Richard Ascough, “The Canadian Society of Biblical Studies’ Religious Rivalries Seminar: Retrospection, Reflection and Retroversion,” Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses 32, no. 1–2 (2003): 158.
talking about conflicts essentially rooted somewhere else, in the “environment,” and only masquerading as “confessional”? (The question, of course, is equally pertinent to intra-confessional conflicts.) It might be worth taking a closer look at the answer that is most commonly proposed on pragmatic grounds: “an inter-confessional conflict is a conflict that has a confessional aspect.”

Is the conflict under review personal or collective in nature? That is, does it only concern persons that belong to the given confession, or does it concern the whole of the confessional group? And, last but not least, in what “arena” or “field” does the conflict emerge? Is it in the public space (in the street) or in the private sphere (within the yard of a household or at property boundaries)? At what strata of the social space did the events take place? Did they become institutionalized or did they remain informal?

In the case of Tiszaeszlár I try to touch on all of these problems: dynamism and proportions among denominations (coexistence and rivalry), intra- and inter-confessional conflict-management, everyday conflicts, and Christian–Jewish animosity behind the scenes in the public sphere.

“Confessional Fields” (Pierre Bourdieu)
The population and its settlement

Four denominations lived in Eszlár: two mother churches (Roman Catholics and Calvinists) and two filiás (Greek Catholics and Jews). The individual confessional groups all differed in their degrees of autonomy: there was no local Greek Catholic parson, nor was there a local rabbi in Eszlár. Government census data in Eszlár reflect a dynamically growing village (an increase from 1,280 people in 1785 to 3,392 in 1910). The appearance of the settlement changed accordingly. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Eszlár continued to expand in an east-southeasterly direction in two ways. On the one hand, just southeast of Ófalú (the Old Village) and Tő(t)falú (Lake Village or Slovak Village), the village now had a third section, Újfalu (the New Village), populated from 1858 on in the wake of the flood of 1855. On the other hand, the village was surrounded by

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vast open fields to the east-southeast interspersed with several manors (puszta) and hamlets (tanya).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Central areas</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Greek Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>389</td>
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<td>1889</td>
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<td>156</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>1840</td>
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<td>1880</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central areas and outskirts together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>540</td>
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<td>898</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The confessional distribution of the population of the central areas and the outskirts of Tiszaeszlár on the basis of the schematismi of the Catholic Diocese of Eger (1831–1889)⁸

The population records collected by the church indicate that population levels, which had been in decline during the Hungarian Reform Era, actually hit rock bottom during the 1850s, only to bounce back in the long run. While

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the population of the central areas of Eszlár fluctuated and even declined after 1860, the dynamism seen in the total population numbers of the village reflected the impact of demographic changes in the outskirts. The Israelite community was the only confessional group where the dynamic population growth seen in the 60s and 70s was limited almost exclusively to the central areas of the village. Their concentrated presence implied greater visibility. In the 1880s, Catholics also produced higher population numbers on the outskirts than in the central areas (and by 1889, this pattern had come to prevail among Greek Catholics as well). The two confessional groups that were most involved in immigration were the Catholics and the Jews.

Tiszaeszlár has always lived in the threat of regularly returning spring floods (1830; 1855; 1876). On March 23, 1888, “the Tisza river rushed into our village, wreaking so much havoc and damaging our embankments to such an extent that the villagers unanimously decided not to stay where they originally had lived,” wrote Tiszaeszlar parson Ödön Jenő Oldall to his archbishop.9 The deputy lord lieutenant then issued a decree banning the rebuilding of the collapsed houses and new construction sites around Újfalu for about 140 houses were allocated to those who had been evacuated.

At this point, one should review the debate surrounding the confessional aspects of this belated colonization. Minister of the Interior Count Géza Teleki proposed that 8,000 forints of the resettlement fund should be allocated to the Calvinists and 4,000 forints to the Catholics.10 Oldall, the parson of Eszlár, mainly emphasized population data. He wrote that “only 992 Calvinists but as many as 1,044 Roman Catholics [live] in Eszlár and in the filias that belong to the village; if Greek Catholics, who go to the same church, are also added, their numbers reach as many as 1,452.”11 The Ministry of Interior yielded to the argumentation of the Catholics.12 The leaders of the Calvinist community believed that the only correct principle on which to base the allocation of the funds between the two parties would be the extent of the damages sustained by each.13 But they had to accept the challenge of the Catholic (demographic) argumentation:

9 Egri Főegyházmegyei Levéltár (=EFL), Tiszaeszlár (=TE) 1765/1888 (April 23, 1888).
11 EFL TE 2580/1889 (June 1, 1889).
12 Cited by Szomjas, February 25, 1890; Tiszántúli Református Egyházkerületi Levéltár (=TrREL) I. 1. b. 209.
13 Ibid., Parson János Lápoissy, chief curator Géza Ónody (1889, undated copy).
The three parts of Tiszaeszlár on the map: Ófalu [Old Village] (designated on the map as Tisza Eszlár), Tótfalu [Slovak Village] (designated on the map as Tisza Eszlár Tótfalu), and Újfalu [New Village] (designated on the map as Tisza Eszlár Újfalu).
The ministerial justification mentions 1,044 Roman Catholics; however, the majority of these persons are mostly foreign and temporary farmhands (according to the statistics taken by the Roman Catholic cantor, there are 695 Roman Catholics living in hamlets) […] while this same ministerial justification mentions 992 Calvinists, who, in actual reality, number 1,065 souls confessing the Calvinist faith, who—with the exception of very few—have always been inhabitants of Tiszaeszlár.15

The social dimension of the discord therefore manifests itself in a dichotomy pitting “foreign” and “temporary” Catholic farmhands against “Calvinist villagers of Eszlár who have always lived there.”

Conflict Management within a Denomination
The Calvinist flock and its pastor

Within the Protestant congregations, the established renewable term system—reappointing or replacing pastors at the end of the year of service—caused much discord between the flock and their preachers.16 In Tiszaeszlár, pastors either served very long terms or soon left of their own accord to take up the same office in another, more affluent congregation.

Sámuel Csiszár Jr. was the pastor in Eszlár between 1866 and 1878. In retrospect, presenting his case as a model seems fully justified. As soon as he was elected, he got down to work with vengeance. First off, he set about to consolidate the financial matters of the parish. He consistently collected all church taxes.17 The pastor also tended his flock spiritually: he had a list of school-age children drawn up on the basis of the registry of births, and, “their parents were encouraged, on more than one occasion, to provide for their schooling.”18 These measures inevitably caused frictions. Moreover, in 1873 the reverend filed a complaint with the office of the district officer against Pál Ónody, the

15 TtREL I.1.b. 209. (April 22, 1890).
17 Előterjesztés… TtREL I.28.c. 24 (February 1, 1867); Előterjesztés… Ibid., 25 (January 15, 1869).
18 Előterjesztés… Ibid., 24 (February 1, 1867).
chief curator who had just resigned, “for his failure to pay the church tax.”

The escalation of the conflict was reflected in the fact that on February 20, 1874 Gábor Farkas, a member of the formerly tax-paying petty nobility, filed a complaint with the dean in which he made reference to a “pasquillus (pasquil or satirical piece) signed by 65” that he had found in his garden that included a plea to have the pastor relocated to another parish. Letters of complaint came one after the other. The one dated March 4 was signed by as many as 100 people. The accusations started slowly to take shape: by humiliating the school teacher, the pastor disrupted the schooling of the children of the parish; using “physical force,” he committed battery against some shepherds and even against his housekeeper; and, finally, he slandered “the magistrate of the Greek Catholic congregation and the officials of the Roman Catholic house of the Kállays.”

Csiszár, instead of offering an explanation, launched a counterattack: “Your Excellency the Dean has no idea of the vile souls that inhabit this parish, where the bread and the whip are inseparable companions.” On May 23, the people of Eszlár “appeared in the same place with yet another letter full of complaints and accusations, this time also expressing verbally that the people were ready to lock the church down in the afternoon of the second day of Pentecost (!) unless their demands were satisfied.”

The case was examined during the canonical visit, which took place in early June 1874. The complaints and the minutes clearly indicate what the conflicts were actually about. The pastor was not willing to tolerate certain earlier economic practices. In addition, when it came to disciplinary action, he never hesitated to rely on the assistance of any power, earthly and celestial. He punished one culprit by proclaiming that “the death knell will not be tolled and no church funeral services will be rendered” either for him or for his family. A good many Calvinist villagers must have had the feeling that the pastor had turned against the norms of the community.

In the meantime, Lajos Borus, the Tiszalök priest, an old friend of the dean’s, and himself well known in Eszlár, warned the dean: “What great sorrow

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20 TtREL I.28.j. 15 (Gábor Farkas, February 20, 1874).
21 Ibid., 15, Miklós Pásztor, Gábor Farkas, Sámuel Erdőss, and others, March 4, 1874. When they delivered the complaint personally on March 7, Miklós Pásztor threatened that “he would convert into Catholicism.” Ibid.
22 Ibid., 15, Csiszár–Pápay, March 17, 1874.
23 TtREL I.28.c. 30, Egyházlátogatási jegyzőkönyv, TE, (June 3–4, 1874).
it would be to see my neighboring congregation—the congregation where I spent the most beautiful 18 months of my life—convert to Catholicism.”\textsuperscript{24}

In the spring of 1875, another letter of complaint was delivered to the dean. This time, it had only been signed by twenty people, although—with the sole exception of Gábor Farkas—all of them had been signatories to the previous letter of complaint dated March 1874.\textsuperscript{25} According to this letter, not all of the accusations made during the previous year’s procedure had been recorded in the minutes. The gravest of them was the contention that Csiszár had raped his maid, Mária Tilk.

In April 1877, the twenty signatories addressed the bishop himself, denouncing a case of blatant immorality that had taken place back in 1876: Sámuel Csiszár first got his maid Mária Fogarasi pregnant and then sought illegal medical help to induce abortion. The district officer conducted the preliminary investigation and then forwarded the case to the Royal Court of Law of Nyíregyháza, where Sámuel Csiszár “was detained for eight days awaiting trial. The detention was reported by the most respectable domestic dailies.”\textsuperscript{26} Once again, the signatories ask that Csiszár be removed and a replacement parson be sent.

During the trial held on August 28 and 29, 1877, the court acquitted Csiszár in the absence of proof.\textsuperscript{27} At the same time, the court fined the defendant 100 forints (or, if unpaid, 20 days in simple custody) because he had “breached public order by threatening and making promises to the witnesses heard.” As the Tiszalök pastor Lajos Borus commented, Csiszár, “seated before the very eyes of the audience right next to the slut, was told face to face on more than one occasion how many times he had raped her, yet he showed no shame or remorse whatsoever. A terrible disgrace for all the community of pastors!!”\textsuperscript{28}

Later, the council meeting of the court of law of the diocese held in Püspökladány on September 11, 1877 suspended Sámuel Csiszár from his functions and launched an investigation against him.\textsuperscript{29} In October 1877, János

\textsuperscript{24} TREL I.28;j. 15, Borus–Pápay, Tiszalök, July 29, 1874.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 15, (April 5, 1875).
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 15, (April 28, 1877). The complaint was delivered to the bishop as an attachment to a letter written by chief curator Géza Önody on April 30. Talking about the case, he makes reference to “a scandal of a trial.” Ibid., April 30.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 15. Nyíregyháza, August 29, 1877.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., Borus–Pápay, Tiszalök, August 31, 1877.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., Az egyházmegyei törvényszéki tanács jegyzőkönyve, Püspökladány, September 11, 1877.
Lápossy (1848–1902), still single at the time, was appointed substitute pastor.\textsuperscript{30} When the dean showed him the anonymous letter denouncing his actions, Csiszár concluded that “this campaign of terrible defamation against me was headed by Jews.”\textsuperscript{31}

In the middle of November 1877, with the help of the new pastor, the presbytery and the school board were reconstituted.\textsuperscript{32} Out of the 12 members of the presbytery, only four had been members before, the other eight members having been elected for the first time. (Three of them, namely Ferenc Farkas, József Farkas, and Sándor Farkas, were members of the Farkas clan, a family representing the petty nobility that had lived on serf plots before 1848.) In July, the dean ordered that another investigation be launched.\textsuperscript{33} The parish made sure that people were duly mobilized.\textsuperscript{34} As the chief curator testifies in his letter, the next morning “at least 100 complainants presented themselves to be heard” in front of the vicarage. When Sámuel Csiszár saw the crowds, he submitted his resignation.\textsuperscript{35} On August 25, in the presence of the aforementioned judges of the ecclesiastical court, the congregation elected János Lápossy as their ordinary pastor. Lápossy remained in his new position until his death.

There are lessons to be learned from this conflict for the present-day historian much as there were for the elite of the Calvinist community of the village. The conflict of the 1870s may have confirmed the opinion of leaders of the Calvinist congregation that success did not depend on the number of signatories backing a petition (the letter written in 1874 had as many as a hundred signatories, while those of 1875 and 1877 were only signed by twenty). They must also have realized that success took more than just getting the respectable land owners of the village on board, having them sign the petition, following the standard procedure, or even hand-delivering the letter of complaint to the dean. In fact, the alternative approach, when the chief curator—a young, ambitious, local medium landowner—bypassed the dean and approached the bishop directly, may have seemed more efficient. However, Soma Csiszár’s downfall was not brought about by the judgments of any secular or ecclesiastical court of law. Rather, it was caused by the fact that the members of the presbytery were willing

\begin{footnotes}
\item[30] Ibid., October 28, 1877.
\item[31] Ibid., Csiszár–Pápay, TE, October 16, 1877.
\item[32] TEREI Jegyzőkönyv I (November 18, 1877).
\item[33] TtREL I.28.j. 16 (August 1, 1878).
\item[34] TEREI Jegyzőkönyv I (July 31, 1878).
\item[35] TtREL I.28.j. 16 (August 1; August 2, 1878).
\end{footnotes}
and able to mobilize about a hundred people who all appeared in the courtyard of the vicarage when the new investigative procedure was launched. Seeing this, the reverend realized he had no future in the village.

To understand the social history background of the conflict better, the historian can analyze the composition of the signatories of the petition. He can establish that there were only nine signatories who took a stand for themselves both in 1874 and in 1877 (and only four who had also signed the petition of 1875). The Farkas clan played a leading role among them. The historian can also study the changes in the composition of the presbytery, where, once again, he or she may establish that the male members of the Farkas family were gaining ground in 1877. However, the feisty hard core included more than just members of this family; other respectable landowning families were also represented among their ranks. It is also beyond any doubt that the Calvinist elite of the village had the chance to travel beyond the boundaries of their village and obtain valuable experience and, indeed, skills in the local (or county-level) techniques of conflict management, and that the experience they had gained in previous conflicts inevitably filtered through and into the rituals used both for stirring up and attenuating future conflicts.

The Catholic parson and his critics

Tensions between pastor and congregation were not limited to the Calvinists, of course. A good example of discontent within a given denomination came in 1884, when a group within the Roman Catholic congregation filed a complaint with the archbishop of Eger against the Reverend József Adamovics.36 While investigations in such cases were also common within the Catholic church, power relations, the available forms of crisis management, and the chances of a priest being removed may have been fundamentally different.

Of course, this specific conflict cannot be classified as one of the antecedents of the “Eszlár case” of 1882–83. Nevertheless, it is striking to see how many fairly overt allusions were made in the complaint to local confessional power relations. The complaint, dated March 1, 1884, begins with a comment to the effect that “there are but a handful of people of the Roman Catholic confession” in Eszlár. Also, when quoting the allegedly offensive words with

36 EFL Acta Personalia 1460/1884, József Adamovics (1845–1887) was appointed as the parson of the Eszlár parish in 1878.
which the pastor chastised his flock, the letter reads “our first thought was that if the Calvinist congregation learns about the words our priest uttered we would be even more exposed to their mockery.” The complaint, which lists the “sins” of the parish priest, ends with the following words:

We must therefore expose these cases and all his wrongs, because we live among villagers of mixed religions and it happens that our sons marry women of other religions, and lest this become even more widespread, and lest our congregation disperse, for if we have to live under the care of such a pastor, we may be forced to place ourselves and all our families under the guidance of a pastor—of whatever confession—who leads us in a sensible manner.

Once again, it seems a never-failing tactic to attract the attention of the higher ecclesiastical authorities was to threaten them with the possibility of conversion to other religions.

In the spring of 1884, having received the five-page long indictment, József Adamovics filed his 22-page long response, in which he claimed to unveil a plot organized against him by the former Greek Catholic judge. Luckily for posterity, he exposed a lot more of the conflicts than the people who had filed the complaint ever mentioned. The specific accusations were fairly run-of-the-mill: the parish priest was frequently drunk; he behaved in a scandalous way while celebrating the wedding of a drunk groom; he used derogatory and offensive language when preaching; he had paid a band of musicians and had his own name day celebrated on March 19, during Lent; etc. They added verbally that the reverend also collected twice as much parish tax in the village as in the manors. In response to the “excitement” following this incident, Adamovics delivered a sermon on February 17, 1884 chastising his flock, the most offensive part of which was, as we know from an account given by the parish priest after the fact, the following adage: “Pigs... the dirtier they are, the more they scratch and whine.”

At the height of the conflict, one evening a group of congregation members paid a less than friendly visit to the vicarage. They nearly came to blows. The visiting congregation members claimed Adamovics called them names like

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37 In comparison with the Csiszár case, it is interesting to see how often the offensive statements made by the reverend allude to the “dirtiness” of the people attacked, regardless of the denomination to which they belonged or the sensitivity of the congregation.
“marha” and “ökör” (“bovine” and “ox,” both used in vulgar language to mean “imbecile” or “idiot”).

In March, Lőrinc Halasy—the Rakamaz parish priest appointed to carry out the investigation—visited Eszlár on two Sundays to hear the parties filing the complaint. Ferenc Ajler stated that “the discord is solely attributable to how the timber obtained from the felled logs was sold off.” János Kobzos Sr. claimed the wrong done to him: the parish priest “grabbed me and tried to throw me out.” Following the choreography of mutual accusations, Adamovics called Ajler “földosztó” (“a leveller,” in the sense of redistributing large-scale land holdings among the landless poor) and “a big mouth,” and Kobzos “a rambunctious type” and “a drunk.”

In his response, Adamovics also made a statement about inter-confessional rivalry:

Has anyone, even a single soul, apostatized ever since I have been the parish priest in Eszlár by the grace of God Almighty and your High Excellency? On the contrary, I take pride in pointing out that I myself have gained two souls for the mother-church, something that has not happened in this village for a long time. I can also point out without boasting that ever since I have been here there have only been a handful of mixed marriages. Even though a few mixed couples announced their intentions to marry, I succeeded in dissuading them and convinced them to marry either a Catholic or at least a Greek Catholic person.

He openly stated that “if need be, I apply the necessary strictness in guiding my flock, as is justified in the case of the rabble that inhabit this village.”

The Roman Catholics of Eszlár had inferiority complexes not only towards the Calvinists but also, in a certain sense, towards Greek Catholics, even though Greek Catholicism was considered a “sister religion.” The Greek Catholic community of the village was under the guidance of the Tokaj parish. While they were much fewer in number, they were slowly but surely expanding, and they formed part of the elite of the village in terms of their wealth and power positions. Based on the historical distribution of lands, the Greek Catholics contributed relatively more area to the cemeteries than the Roman Catholics.

38 EFL Acta Personalia 1460/1884 (March 1, 1884).
39 Ibid., March 15, 1884. One might recall Soma Csiszár’s “bread and whip” (carrot and stick) approach to managing his congregation.
In 1879, Adamovics threatened to revoke the right of the Greek Catholic congregation to bury their deceased in the cemetery. However, the Greek Catholic curator let him know that, “I might have the right to come to an agreement with them about obligating the members of our congregations to keep the line but I have no right to exclude them from the cemetery.”

During the investigation of the case, Adamovics convinced Calvinist pastor Lápossy to testify in his support, but he also had a group of 14 members of his congregation who signed the statement in his favor (mostly members of the local intelligentsia). In fact, Adamovics got a bit overconfident. He requested that the archbishop return him the letter of complaint filed against him so he could sue his enemies “for the crimes of making false accusations and fraud committed by the forgery of documents.” He must have been very disappointed when archbishop Samassa sent him a letter closing the case in which he not only dissuaded Adamovics from taking legal action but actually chastised him, saying that “the church is no place for making personal statements of any sort, let alone for using the sort of low language employed in the sermon notes filed; words like those are not fit for a church setting and do not become a priest or even a common person of a certain level of education.”

In the Catholic case, the religious congregation as a community was not particularly well-organized. If Adamovics was right, the “first mover” of the complaint came from outside, from the Greek Catholic “sister religion.” The “excitement” was expressed rather occasionally and emotionally. The subtle mobilization technique inside the parish was used first of all by the pastor himself in favor of the local hierarchy and controlled totally by the archbishop.

**Affairs inside the Jewish community**

I have not found any evidence of confessional animosities within the Israelite community of Eszlár. Possibly the community was too small, or perhaps the sources are too limited. The case I examine here only exemplifies the conflict management customs that existed among the Jews.

The Lichtmanns settled in the village as lessees of feudal *iura regalia* landlords’ rights, but later they hired the estate of the landlord, Ferenc Wesselényi, who lived outside the county, in Transylvania. By the 1880s, they had their own

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40 Ibid., 1651, Tiszaeszlár, ad 392/1885 (January 26, 1885).
41 Ibid., 1460/1884. Eger, April 17, 1884 (draft).
regalists or lessees, something that was certainly one of the pillars of the power they wielded in the village. Once the investigation clarified all the events that took place on April 1, 1882, the Jews of the Újfalu section of Eszlár met in the foyer of the house of prayer in order to try to reach an agreement concerning a market-related conflict, Jakab Lichtmann acting as the arbitrator. There were two inns in Újfalu, one operated by Szüszmann, the other by Einhorn, both being regalists or lessees of Lichtmann. The two parties had a row over one of them selling pálinka or fruit brandy at a lower price. At the time of the trial held in Nyíregyháza, Jakab Szüszmann claimed that he had approached “Mr. Jakab Lichtmann, who was, after all, the head of our community, to settle the issue. For it is our custom that, instead of filing court action right away, we first try to come to an out-of-court agreement if it is at all possible”. As far as József Einhorn remembered, he told Lichtmann (the owner of the inns), “How come he [Szüszmann] sells spirits at a lower price? You either ban him from doing that or I will also start selling at a lower price.” Jakab Lichtmann explained that such arbitration was not only customary within the Jewish community, but also made sense financially:

I was approached to broker some sort of an agreement between the two parties in order to avoid them doing damage to one another and prevent either of the two from ending up in a situation in which he would be unable to pay the lease. For this purpose, we met not in the temple per se but in its foyer, this being the customary place to settle business affairs between [Jewish] parties or to hold council, not only in Eszlár but everywhere: such affairs are settled in the foyer of the house of prayer...

Instead of ordering his lessees to report to his mansion in Ófalu, he himself went to the synagogue in Tótfalu to do justice in the foyer of the house of prayer. Formerly, Jewish communities had had their own Jewish judges, but this institution had not existed in the village for a long time. Still, Eszlár Jews considered Lichtmann “the head of our community.” However, the visible

43 Ibid., Jakab Szüszmann (June 24, 1883). Until May or September 1879 Jakab Lichtmann formerly held the office of the ‘chief curator’ in the Jewish religious community. Afterward Szüszmann became ‘curator’ only. Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Kézirattár (=OSZK Kt) Fol. Hung. 1847/1 (Bary) 583 (Italics: Gy. K.).
44 Ibid., József Einhorn (June 23, 1883).
spatial influence of the Lichtmanns in the central places of the settlement (the manor house in Ófalu and residence in Tótfalu) spread over the whole village.

The Public Sphere and the Christian–Jewish Animosity

Frequent conflicts inside Christian denominations create good opportunities to foster other animosities among all of the inhabitants of the village. In my study of Eszlár prior to the trial held in Nyíregyháza, I have found only one open conflict that took place in the public sphere which was thematized along Christian–Jewish confessional interests.

The issue of Jewish education

At the time, there were only confessional schools in the village. From 1871 on, there were already two Calvinist schools (in Ófalu and in Újfalu) and one Catholic school (in Ófalu) operating locally. But how were the school-age Jewish children of the village schooled? As far as this period is concerned, only the Calvinist schools kept a record of the names of their students in Eszlár. In 1876, all Jewish names on the list are girls, and all of them went to school in Ófalu. In 1883, however, we also find Jewish children in the Calvinist elementary school of Újfalu. Furthermore, Jewish boys also attended school both in Ófalu and Újfalu. It may be assumed that in earlier periods the Jewish school that operated in Eszlár was made out to look like private tutoring. It had to be kept secret because the school inspector was systematically hunting down unauthorized Jewish schools that operated in a clandestine manner, as they were considered unsuitable by the state. What is certain is that the first time that an unauthorized school of the Israelite community was officially closed in Eszlár was in 1883. We do not know whether this was the school that educated all the Jewish children missing from the system during the 1870s or not. All we can assume is that Jewish boys must have received an education somewhere, at least

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46 TrREL I.28.c. 49; I. 28. h. 20. d.
47 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Levélta (=MNL SZSZBML) IV.B.404. 34. d. 590/880.
because of religious reasons. This assumption is supported by the autobiography of Móric Scharf, who played a crucial role in the Tiszaeszlár trial.  

After the 1876 flood, the secular municipal authorities of the village adopted a decree according to which the three teachers would receive 160 forints each from the budget of the village for providing what was called recapitulative education to students who would not proceed with secondary education (the decree also cancelled the obligation to pay a tuition fee for normally daily schooling). However, the elder of the Jewish congregation, Jakab Lichtmann—who was also a virilist, one of the biggest taxpayers to the state—filed a complaint with the general assembly of the county against the decree. After this, the general assembly of the county was forced to strike the 480 forint expenditure line from the proposed budget of the village. After several rounds of discussion, the village approached the minister of the interior. By 1879, Ministerial Counsellor György Lukács had finally approved subsidizing the teachers from the budget of the village.

The background to the case was that the Calvinist schools of the village collected an additional contribution in the form of a tuition fee from non-Christian students with the justification that the parents of non-Calvinist children did not contribute to the maintenance of the confessional school. The Catholic parson understood that the Calvinists “demanded a total of 27 forints (Gulden), nine forints for each of his three children, from an Israelite family father.” Eventually, the Calvinist council of the village adopted a new regulation in 1883 concerning the school fees of the children of the non-Christian denominations:

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49 “Initially, just for a few weeks, I went to the school of the village, but then my father enrolled me in the Jewish elementary school.” Móric Scharf, “Emlékeim a tiszaeszlári pörből,” Egyenlőség, 46, September 17, 1927, 6.
51 MNL SZSZBML IV.B.402. 7. k. Szabolcs megye közgyűlési jegyzőkönyve (November 28, 1878).
52 MNL SZSZBML IV.B.404. 33. d. 1069/79. The application contrasted public interest with private interests: “in such a noble case as the spiritual well-being of an entire village, which indirectly also affects the advancement of our country, the selfish objections of a few who claim that they and their families do not benefit from this arrangement should not be considered when they go against the general intentions of an entire village.” (March 15, 1879).
54 The minutes of a 1871 meeting of the presbytery expressis verbis only stated that “Any child belonging to any Christian denomination shall pay the same tuition fee in both schools.” TEREI Jegyzőkönyv, vol. 1 (May 6, 1871).
55 EFL TE 974/1878 Bertalan Ferenczy (March 14, 1878).
“in addition to the tuition fee, they shall pay, upon their enrolment, [...] another 80 krajcár towards the maintenance of the school.”

Jakab Lichtmann probably hired a private tutor. He may have raised his objections in defense of the children of his older brother, József, who lived in Újfalu. Both on personal and confessional grounds, he believed that this discrimination—and especially the extent of it—was unfair. It cannot be ruled out that when Jakab Lichtmann resigned as the chief curator of the Jewish community in 1879, one of his reasons for leaving was his failure in the affair of the ministerial decree. The two events are certainly very close to each other in time. It follows, therefore, that in 1882 he was formally not an elder and therefore not a legitimate representative of the Israelite community, which certainly weakened its resistance.

ELECTING THE VILLAGE JUDGE (JANUARY 4, 1882)

In another case that took place in the public sphere, confessional aspects seem to play only an indirect role if any. On December 28, 1881, local elections had to be suspended in Tiszaeszlár, because of “the brawl” between “two rather angry parties.” The required forces (40 troops) were mobilized on January 4 to keep order.

Local scuffles of this type were a rather common form of expressing political intentions in this region, but what roused the passions of the community to such a degree at the end of 1881 in Tiszaeszlár? Ecclesiastical documents give us some insight into the origin of the tensions.

When parish priest József Adamovics was defending himself against the accusations in the spring of 1884, he also brought up a number of older conflicts. He suspected that the complaint filed against him was really backed by former Eszlár judge Ferenc Nagy, who, as Adamovics put it, wanted to take revenge, since Adamovics had played a role in Nagy losing his position. Tódor (Ferenc) Nagy was born in Eszlár in 1834 in a well-respected Greek Catholic family of peasants with a half plot, as defined by the urbarium. He married Hermina Roth,

56 TEREI Jegyzőkönyv, vol. 1 (July 22, 1883)
58 Ibid., (December 30, 1881).
a Lutheran widow,\textsuperscript{60} in 1864. In February 1872, he took his oath of office as a judge.\textsuperscript{61}

Adamovics claims first having gotten into a conflict with Ferenc Nagy when Adamovics was chairman of the board of auditors. Adamovics was the \textit{rapporteur} on a case involving “funds missing because of misappropriation” in which the judge was found “to have embezzled, conniving with a Jew, 170 Austrian forints from the village funds.”\textsuperscript{62} Eventually, Adamovics broke all ties with Ferenc Nagy when he refused to hand over an estate: “Then I told him openly that […] in fact I would do everything in my power to rid the village of him.” In fact, Adamovics did achieve his goal: Nagy “was not even registered as a candidate when the time came for electing a new judge.”\textsuperscript{63} Thus, at the end of 1881 Ferenc Nagy could not openly head his “party.” The most he could do was organize a plot from the background.

While he served as a judge, Ferenc Nagy also had conflicts with other leaders of the village. The complaint related to the missing village funds was reported to the county by Géza Ónody.\textsuperscript{64} This was one of the reasons why János Lápossy, a Calvinist pastor, welcomed the elections of January 4 as a favorable turn of events:

after a heavy siege taking several years, we have finally managed to approach Gábor Farkas, who is known for the interest he takes in the matters of the church, his good will, and his sensibility, and to get him to make a clear statement that he would accept the position of judge, and we have been able, at the expense of great efforts, and much to our pleasure, to elect him as judge.\textsuperscript{65}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{60} MNL OL A 4677 G. kat. anyakönyvek (Tokaj) 83 (September 10, 1834); A 2568 Ref. anyakönyvek (TE) 38 (October 3, 1864).
\item \textsuperscript{61} MNL SZSZBML IV .B.411. 1. d. 101/1872, Dobozy Ferenc jelentése [Report by Ferenc Dobozy] (February 27, 1872).
\item \textsuperscript{62} EFL Acta Personalia 1460/1884. According to the register of the county archives, Géza Ónody submitted an application in 1880 “concerning 117 forints missing from the accounts of the village judge Ferenc Nagy.” MNL SZSZBML IV.B.411. 1153. k. 1880.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Ibíd.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibíd., 99. d. 7935/1881. Ónody Géza levele [Letter by Géza Ónody] (September 9, 1881).
\item \textsuperscript{65} TtREL I.28.j. 16. 3/1882 Lápossy János, TE–Pápay Imre alsószabocs-hajdúkerületi esperesnek, Hajdúböszörmény [János Lápossy, TE to Imre Pápay, the Dean of Alsószabocs-hajdúkerület, Hajdúböszörmény] (January 12, 1882).
\end{itemize}
During the race leading to the election of the judge, the Calvinist community supported Gábor Farkas, who, being from an old and well-respected local Calvinist family representing the petty nobility, had already played an important role in the drive for the removal of pastor Soma Csizsár.66

The municipal assembly of the village consisted of 40 delegates, half of whom were virilists, the biggest tax-payers of the village. The other half of the assembly were elected delegates, out of whom 10 people had been selected by a draw for replacement; it was their mandates that now had to be filled by way of elections. As far as the confessional composition of the elected delegates is concerned, the most apparent observation that can be made is that 15 delegates out of the 20 were Calvinists. Ferenc Nagy held the 11th position, which apparently indicates that the efforts to completely disqualify him from local politics were not entirely successful. One of the new names was József Klein, a day worker, who was the only Jew elected as a delegate in the municipal assembly.

As far as the actual numbers of the votes cast are concerned, only the data for the election of the judge is available. The real challenger of Gábor Farkas was a Catholic candidate, Ferenc Ailer (Eiler).67 This may be of some interest because Ailer was not one of the wealthy men, yet he must have been one of the leaders in community opinion: he appears as one of the key figures of the conflict that surrounded Adamovics in 1884. Gábor Farkas received 110 votes in favor and 97 against, a clear win, but a rather tight result. He was probably not very confident about his success, which may have contributed to things getting out of control. The fact that more than 200 votes were cast suggests that there was considerable mobilization; in the case of the municipal assembly of the village, every adult male had one vote to cast. Confessional fault lines may also have played a role in the election propaganda: Adamovics believed that some of his opponents were convinced to join the camp of his rival “party” by people who had spread the allegation that “the priest himself wants to convert to Calvinism that is why he wants Gábor Farkas to take the office of the judge.”68

Other officials were elected by acclamation. Looking at the final results, the vague outlines of a certain proportionality seem to appear: the judge was Calvinist, the magistrate of the adjunct judge was Greek Catholic, and the treasurer was Roman Catholic. Two of the sworn officials were Calvinists, two

66 As far as the person and family of Gábor Farkas are concerned, see Kövér, A tiszkeszlári dráma, 285–94.
67 (Guszti) Ferenc Ailer was born around 1839–40. MNL OL A 900.
68 EFL Acta Personalia 1460/1884.
were Catholics (Kobzos and Ajler!); one of the elected municipal sergeants was also Roman Catholic, while the other was Calvinist. Can such careful political proportionality be purely accidental? One might say that while the composition of the municipal authorities reflects a moderate balance between the various confessions, all signs indicate that the elections had an effect of adjusting power relations in favor of the original Calvinist population. Without doubt, it was the Jewish community of the village who were least favored by such adjustment. After the elections, no former Jewish delegates remained among the members of the authorities. And “the great trial” was nowhere to be seen yet.

During the trial held in Nyíregyháza, in which Ferenc Nagy was not involved even as a witness, one of the defendants, Sámuel Lustig, finally spoke his mind: “Had Ferenc Nagy, supported by the Jewish vote, become the judge, the disappearance of Eszter would not have caused so much trouble.” 69 In other words, even if the conflicts emerging in the public sphere did leave a mark on the discourses of the Nyíregyháza trial, they did so only very indirectly. The weak and hidden signs of public rivalry, however, do not mean that one cannot search for further interactive mechanisms inside the local community, in everyday practice of coexistence and conflicts on a smaller scale, and in the private sphere of the peasant households.

The Hidden Networks of the “Incriminated Case of the Girl Gone Missing”
Coexistence: the neighborhood

The best way of reconstructing the subtle network of relationships (secular and religious as well) connecting the villagers is to expose the capillaries of the “female public opinion” of the village. To do this, one must analyze the background of the discourses of the trial. I present three cases, one from each of the three sections of the village.

The first case is related to the events of April 1. The investigation began in late April or early May 1882, one month after the case of the girl gone missing, investigating the statements made by five-year-old Jewish boy Samu Scharf in the

69 Függetlenség, June 22, 1883. A tárgyalások képe [The Standing of the Trial]. Even József Bary, the investigating judge of the affair remembered to reference this sentence in his memoirs. Bary seems to have either not known or forgotten the antecedents of the election of the judge in early 1882 in Eszlár: “Had Ferenc Nagy, *the person we wanted to elect*, been the judge, Eszter’s disappearance would not have caused any trouble.” (Italics – Gy. K.) *A tiszteslári bűnper. Bary József vizsgálóbíró emlékiratai* (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1933), 37.
goose grazing land near Tótfalu. Allegedly, he saw Jews take the blood of Eszter Solymosi in the Synagogue. Who else heard what this child allegedly had said? Eötvös (defense attorney in the case and writer of the documentary novel about it) believed that, in addition to village judge Gábor Farkas, the key people were “his female relative Eszter Farkas, the wife of András Sós,” whose “daughter may have been” twelve-year-old Erzsébet Sós, and two “young women whom they knew: Julianna Szabó and Eszter Tanyi. It was these four women who produced the first Jewish child witness.” Eötvös also tried to reconstruct kinship relations in the case of Erzsébet Tanyi, but he failed.

Without casting doubt on the importance of kinship relations in rural societies, the most common feature of the people testifying in the case seems to have been that they fit equally well into a certain spatial structure based on neighborhood. The space between the upper part of Tótfalu (just a few houses) and the rectangular, recently settled part of Tótfalu was very special in many respects (in brackets the cadastral number of the site): it was where the old Catholic cemetery, then used for grazing geese, was located (666); the road leading from Ófalú to Újfalu crossed it (2159); it was where the embankment surrounding Ófalú ended; it was where the synagogue was located, along with the warden’s (shamash) home (668); and, finally, it was where Eszter Solymosi allegedly disappeared. It was this part of the village, “the throat of Tótfalu” as I will refer to it, that “swallowed” Eszter. This was the space of the everyday lives of all of the people who “supplied” the data for the investigation. Erzsébet Tanyi (Mrs. Pásztor) was driving her geese from the grazing land in the old cemetery to their house in the middle of Tótfalu (701) when little Samu jumped in front of her on May 2, saying “I won’t tell you what my father did to the Hungarian girl!” It was Mrs. Gábor Bátori, a widow who lived behind the Synagogue (669) who questioned Mrs. József Scharf, Samu’s mother standing outside at the time, about what they had just heard. Eszter Tanyi was on her way to see Mrs. Mihály Soós, who lived in the northeast part of Tótfalu (681), to have some feed milled. On the April 30, Mrs. András Soós (690), on her way home, was standing in the gate of Mrs. István Lengyel, the blacksmith’s widow, who lived right under the Synagogue (672) and allegedly had heard Samu talk. All the hearsay and gossip circulated within a tight network of neighborhood relationships, in “ecumenical turnover” among Calvinist and Catholic women.

70 Eötvös, A nagy per, I 82–83.
71 T-E (Napi Értesítő), June 22, 1883.
72 Ibid.
Map 2. The “throat” of Tótfalu

73 MNL OL S 78 225. téka.
Eötvös believed it was “unusual and, in fact, unprecedented” that this system of neighborhood relations should also include the Jewish child. However, the witnesses considered it fairly normal that little Samu would be playing together with the other kids. Mrs. Mihály Soós did not feel any need to explain why Samu had been at their house: “I too have a child, Samu was playing with him.” However, by “inviting him into the house,” she had indeed granted him access to a more intimate inner sphere. It is not entirely implausible that this may have had to do with a desire to question the child. The dimensions of the rather closed micro-world of Samu are well reflected by the fact that, in his statement made in front of the investigating judge of the affair, József Bary, all the Jewish actors he listed as being involved in the imagined “murder” were somehow linked to Tótfalu.

Of course, neighborhoods also have their everyday female conflicts, after all, it is women who are at home all day long, that time. For example, the trial shed light on a dispute between Mrs. József Scharf and Mrs. András Sós. Although Mrs. Sós tried to give the impression that after April she and Mrs. Scharf “continued to visit one another as [they had] before,” the comments made by József Scharf, who interrupted the hearing, make it clear that a good many things had changed. For example, according to Scharf, when his wife wanted to buy “a small goose for 40 krajcár” from Mrs. Sós, the latter responded: “Why, neighbor, you don’t need geese, for the Jews will be expelled soon; I’ll be there myself driving them with the fire iron.” Mrs. Sós admitted having said this; in fact, she shed light on the background of the incident: “On one occasion she drove my geese off to the estate steward, and now she is angry at me for making a witness statement against her.” During the trial, the neighborhood seemed to be very peaceful on the surface, but underneath this veneer there was a silent, suppressed tension probably best put into words by Eszter Tanyi, who said “we are quiet among the Jews.”

Another example, which took place at the time of the trial in Ófalu, involves the case of witness Julianna Vámosi. Eighteen-year-old Julcsa Vámosi (in the trial, she was consistently referred to by her nickname), who was in the third year of her service at Jewish shopkeeper Löventhal’s family, first testified in the

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74 T-E (Napi Értesítő), Mrs. Mihály Soós, June 23, 1883. In fact, she even remembered that “his mother never allowed [Samu] to go there ever again. I asked her why. She told me »because he always gossips.«” Ibid.
75 Ibid., Mrs. András Sós, June 22, 1883 (Interruption: József Scharf).
76 Ibid., June 23, 1883.
trial that she had seen Eszter walk home from the shop as late as 1:00 o’clock in the afternoon.\footnote{Ibid., Vámosi Julcsa [első] tanúvallomása [The [First] Witness Statement of Julcsa Vámosi], June 25, 1883. It was evident, that after the end of the Jewish sermon, at noon, all the members of the community had left the synagogue and returned home.} Later, yielding to pressure from her parents, she changed her statement, in spite of the fact that she could have been charged with making a false witness statement. At the end of the day, the parents practically denounced their own child to the municipal authorities.

The mother, Erzsébet Tóth (Mrs. József Vámosi), a 48-year-old Calvinist woman, stated that her daughter “had been asked to swear that she had seen Eszter Solymosi at 1:00 o’clock. What she told us, though, was this: »Yes, mother, I did see her, but that was between 10:00 and 11:00«; however, her master, an Israelite, had asked her to »swear that you saw Eszter Solymosi at one o’clock and you shall be greatly rewarded«.” The mother even added that her daughter used to be “a proper anti-Semite”:

This girl, she used to be the type that could have killed Jews; she would not have talked the way she does now. These last few days, however, she must have been somehow cajoled into saying these things... I am her mother, I have been a married woman for twenty years, and I have never seen such a thing, her not knowing something and then, just a few days later, all of a sudden knowing what she had not known before, that she had seen Eszter Solymosi, even at that time.

When Eötvös warned her that other witnesses had also seen Eszter later, Mrs. Vámosi responded: “The entire village can prove that she could not have seen her at that time; she could only have been seen at 11:00 or 12:00.” When the defense attorney asked her “did the villagers confront either you or your husband about your daughter testifying in support of the Jews?”, she first refused to answer. Later, she admitted that her husband had brought their daughter home from the Löventhals, where she was a maid, because he had heard that they wanted to beat her to death. “Friedmann: »Who told you that they wanted to beat her to death?« Witness: »It was word of mouth in the village.« Friedmann: »And why did your husband go there?« Witness: »To calm folks down.«”\footnote{Ibid., Vámosiné tanúvallomása [The Witness Statement of Mrs. Vámosi], July 9, 1883.}
Intra- and Inter-confessional Conflicts in Tiszaeszlár

convinced her to say 1:00 o’clock. By then she allegedly remembered having seen Eszter before the bells were tolled at noon, and she noted that she had not received anything other than the 50 krajcárs that the court of law offered to witnesses. In response to a question asked by Eötvös, she recalled a scene that had taken place in the village:

Eötvös: “Did they want to beat you to death, did they swear at you?”
The witness: “They often said so.” Eötvös: “Was that when you went to fetch water from the Tisza?” The witness: “Yes, Sir.” Eötvös: “Who told you there that you had sworn falsely?” The witness: “Mrs. András Farkas, Mrs. Bálint Cseres, and the third one was Mrs. József Ardai.”

The girl’s father and even the Jewish woman she had served were heard the same day. The father, a 42-year-old man employed as a servant guarding the vineyards of the village, stated that he had met and had talked to Mihály Cseres—who was also heard in Nyíregyháza—in the vineyard, and Cseres had said “your daughter did not say the right thing, … so no wonder the villagers almost beat her to death.”  

Mrs. Löventhal, the 30-year-old Jewish woman, gave an account of how their maid had been taken out of service:

[Mrs. Löventhal, asking the mother]: “When are you bringing her back? I ask her. Look, I cannot give her back to you right now, folks are way too agitated around here.” Mrs. József Papp, the wife of the adjunct judge [the second elected official of the village] confronted me and told me, “I will kill your daughter myself if you ever allow her to come back!” Judge Gábor Farkas said, “Your daughter had better not come back to the village, it wouldn’t end well.”

Mrs. Löventhal also recalled the incident that took place along the road to the Tisza. “We went to the Tisza and those four women surrounded her right away, »You Jewish witness this, you Jewish witness that.« “ Asked by Eötvös, she identified the four women they had encountered on their way to the river. Eötvös was not especially interested in the chorus of the four women along the embankment; it is, however, of interest to this inquiry. The women surrounding

80 Ibid., Vámosi József tanúvallomása [The Witness Statement of József Vámosi], July 20, 1883.
81 Ibid., Löventhal Salamonné tanúvallomása [The Witness Statement of Mrs. Salamon Löventhal], July 20, 1883.
Julcsa lived in the same general area, but were not next door neighbors. The shop and home of the Löventhals was located right in the middle of the circle along the road leaving Ófalú towards the south. It was a narrow plot of land with a long house on it. Originally, they were not listed among the persons accused; however, they were now heard as witnesses because of their maid. Salamon, the father of the young Jewish grocer, had had a shop in Eszlár already in 1848. The women who surrounded the Vámosi girl all represented socially well embedded fates, with strong links to one another, coming either from lesser noble or wealthy peasant families, or they were descendants of former cottagers (zsellér). In contrast, the Vámosi family held a peripheral, highly dependent position in the society of the village. They lived in the vineyard guard’s house outside of the village limits, and the wife was not even from the village to begin with. Having heard the threats of these angry women, all of whom were influential in public opinion in the local society, they may well have feared for the life of their daughter and for their home, which they could only keep as long as they served the village by working in the vineyard. During the trial, there was gossip according to which the father, perhaps to release stress after the great scare, beat his daughter in order to impress upon her the importance of solidarity with the village community.

The third example took place when the trial was already in process and Mrs. András Cseres, who lived in Újfalu on the row of the cottagers, volunteered to make a witness statement to the municipal authorities. The Cseres family lived in Újfalu, across the street from the Groszberg family, and as is even more important from the perspective of this inquiry, the woman spoke “Jewish.” She had learned the language in Tiszalók, where she had served the local shochet for one and a half years. On April 1, her husband had been hoeing the vineyard on the slopes of the Tokaj mountain and had come home very tired. She was trying to wake him, in vain, to show him what she saw, looking out the window, across the street, which was just a few meters wide: Jews gathered in the courtyard of the Groszberg family late in the evening. The husband objected to the wife testifying, although the wife, allegedly, did not tell her husband what she had seen. “One should not tell him things of that sort because he does not like gossip,” the woman said. The husband tried to convince the wife not to testify, saying “We are poor people; we must work... I’m telling you, you’ll get yourself into big trouble.”

82 Ibid., July 9, 1883.
of 1883, she still decided to make a witness statement: “Witness: »There was talk in Tiszaeszlár that Christians were about to lose and Israelites were about to win; that’s what drove me to go and talk to the judge lest my soul should burn in hell.«” Eötvös put some pressure on her, asking:

“Who told you the Christians were about to lose and the Jews were about to win?” Witness: “It was word of mouth all over the village, all the righteous people said so.” Eötvös: “Were folks upset?” Witness: “Very much so.” Eötvös: “Was there a gathering of people?” Witness: “Oh, yes, indeed.” Eötvös: “At whose house?” Witness: “We never went to that house; I was just coming home from hoeing when I heard so.” Eötvös: “Who told you?” Witness: “The Lord Almighty knows.” Eötvös: “What did you mean by saying that the Christians were about to lose and the Jews were about to win?” Witness: “That the Christians wasted Eszter... that they wasted Eszter and were now going to put the blame on the Christians.” Eötvös: “The Jews did?” Witness: “Yes.” Eötvös: “So did the Jews waste Eszter?” Witness: “It’s supposed to be them, isn’t it, not the Christians.”

I have presented three examples, one from each part of the community: Ófalu, Tótfalu, and Újfalu. One incident took place on the way to the river, one took place on the way home from the goose grazing land or on the way to the mill, and one took place on the way home from hoeing the vineyard. The sites are everyday locations. The communication is purely oral. A bit of hearsay, a bit of gossip. However, the situation is extraordinary. The point of reference that weighed most (“It was word of mouth all over the village...”) suggested that Christianity as such was at stake. For if it was not the Jews who had killed Eszter Solymosi, then the sin would revert to it was the Christians, or rather some person or people belonging to one of the (competing) Christian denominations. The peasants followed the imperative of their instinct for self-defense, and that imperative was mediated by everyday coalitions consisting of neighborhood and kinship networks among women. The mobilization of the witnesses during the investigation and trial forged the majority of the Christian inhabitants together against the Jews. Although the Lichtmanns were not sitting in the dock in the

83 Ibid., July 9, 1883. Of course, it turned out that there were petty conflicts between the women in the background. Mrs. Groszberg shed some light on the conflict: “I had March chickens and her swine ate all of them up. I asked her to come to the parish hall; there, she told me she would work for me because of the chicken. The judge told her to go and come to a settlement with me, and now she refuses to even put in that one day of work.” Ibid.
court (they were present also as witnesses), the thinly veiled message to intimidate
the whole Jewish community had been sent to its informal leaders.

“Popular excitement” (May 29, 1882)

On one occasion during the investigation, emotions flew so high in Eszlár that
there was a real chance that things would get out of hand. At the time, there
were already dozens of news reporters on the lookout for any new development
in the investigation. On May 30, 1882, dailies reported in their dedicated “The
Eszlár Case” column that the previous day, which was Pentecost Monday, a group
of Jews had gathered at the southern end of Tiszaeszlár alongside the road to
Tiszalök, something that created major tensions and revived old memories of
collective violence in the villagers. It is therefore an essential component of
this conflict that by this time the case was gaining significance beyond that of a
village affair in a narrow sense. Wider localities (the manor, the district, and the
county) exerted more and more influence on the course of events.

The story was reported by Verhovay’s Függetlenség (“Independence”), a
newspaper known for its anti-Semitism, which emphasized, that “several
hundred Jews gathered from within and outside of the village, raiding the house
of Mrs. Solymosi”.84 According to Miksa Weinstein’s account, it was not only
the Jews or people from outside the area who participated in the search for
Eszter.85 The explanation: a reward was offered to whoever might succeed in
tracking the girl down.

The case cannot be interpreted simply at a local scale. “People from the
neighboring villages continuously provoked and incited the people of Eszlár:
“We can hardly wait for the people of Eszlár to start beating the Jews so we can
follow suit.”86 Not even three weeks after Pentecost, the population of Eszlár—
due to the efforts of both pastors—appeared a paragon of calmness—at least
according to the report. All these journalistic interpretations show that the Eszlár
case (the conflict) was not simply mirrored but at the same time was also shaped
by the agents of the local and national press (and politics).

During the semi-annual county assembly, deputy lord lieutenant János Zoltán
presented an official report on the events that took place around Pentecost

84 Függetlenség, May 31, 1882 (Királytelek, May 30).
85 W. M. A tisza-eszlári eset [The Case of Tiszaeszlár] (Dated: TiszaLök, May 30). Debreceni Eldenőr, May
31, 1882 (later, as a publicist of Jewish weekly, Egyenlőség, he changed his name to Miksa Szabolicsi).
86 Egyetértés, June 22, 1882 (Nyíregyháza, June 21, 1882).
Intra- and Inter-confessional Conflicts in Tiszaeszlár

(Also outlining the types of county-level measures he believed necessary to implement). The deputy lord lieutenant also had to report to the minister of the interior. It is worth taking a look at the original minutes surviving in the estate of Investigating Judge József Bary. Bary was indeed personally present on site adopting measures, and he provided the information on the basis of which the deputy lord lieutenant drafted his report. According to these minutes, village judge Gábor Farkas approached Bary at about 9:00 o’clock in the evening, saying:

large groups of villagers are heading towards the part of the village called Újfalu where, people say, large numbers of Jewish strangers are gathering and standing around at the end of the village with unknown intentions, whose unexplainable appearance has provoked the Christian population of the village, whereby it is to be feared that the people, partly agitated over the events and partly fuelled by the alcohol they have consumed during the Pentecostal festivities, might resort to physical violence against the suspicious strangers.

Riding on a cart, the investigating judge, the deputy prosecutor, the judge, and a municipal bailiff passed the groups walking towards Újfalu, checking the identity documents of three Tiszalök Jews in Újfalu and of another eight at the end of the village and ordering them to leave the settlement, “or else they will be held responsible for any and all consequences of the popular excitement provoked by their unjustified presence.” The Tiszalök Jews complied with the order. Soon after this, “a group of some 200 to 300 locals” appeared armed with “pitchforks, sticks, bars, and similar utensils suitable for striking.” As they claimed, “they were afraid that the suspicious Jewish strangers would set fire to their houses at night, so it was their intention to remove them from the village and its vicinity by any means necessary.” The next morning, Bary had a number of witnesses testify to the veracity of his report. Actually, it was he who—writing about the sequence of events he had just experienced—came up with the term “popular excitement” to describe the events in the title as well as in the body of his report.

89 József Juhász, a 53-year-old farmer living at the very edge of Újfalu saw a total of more than ten, and, later, a cartload of Jews in the area. OSZK Kt, Fol. Hung. 1847/ I. (Bary) 114.
The press continued to report on the events for quite some time. Author Sándor Teleki asked Eszlár judge Gábor Farkas why he believed “the Jews came to the village and rushed to the house of Mrs. Solymosi. »Just to provoke, so that they can call in the military. Much to our luck, the investigating judge was right there with us; our good village folks listen to reason, and those gentlemen clearly told the villagers that there was no point in picking a fight.”

These reports—divergent as they may be—help one reconstruct the sequence of events in a highly plausible manner. The tabloid-style exaggerations and absurdities presented by some of the newspapers can also be discarded. It is highly improbable to assume that, as a result of the atrocities allegedly committed, the house of Mrs. Solymosi suffered any damage without this ever being even mentioned in the Bary report dedicated to the disappearance of Eszter. If, as some stated, 600 Jews gathered with the intention of launching such an attack, could 200 to 300 drunk locals armed with pitchforks and sticks have really driven them out of the village? The estimates concerning the number of people who allegedly gathered at the outskirts of the village vary widely, from ten to several hundred. Did the Jews of Eszlár really need to have all the strangers arriving from the neighboring villages beaten up only to have an excuse to provoke the deployment of the armed forces in the village? How can one speak about collective violence when people standing around in groups must face the full force of the law while those unnamed few instigating an atmosphere of lynching are “tactfully” dissuaded by an investigating judge?

The “quasi violence” of Pentecost was not the sole anti-Semitic excess in the village. The synagogue of Tótfalu, where Eszter Solymosi had been murdered according to the accusation, was vandalized as well. The fact itself that Bary conducted an investigation on the spot two times (May 20, September 11) emboldened some rabble-rousers (leading to window smashing and damaged interiors). The decisive impetus, nonetheless, came again from the outside: on July 25, 1882, Gyula Verhovay traveled to the settlement in the company of adjunct judge József Papp. He wrote of the “filthiness of the ghetto” in his newspaper. Moreover, according to some reports, several days later a few women from the village took a wooden crucifix into the building. After this

90 Teleki, Sándor, Solymosiné [Mrs. Solymosi], Debreceni Ellenőr, July 6, 1882.
92 *Az eszlári zsinagóga és a fürdőház* [The Synagogue of Eszlár and the Bathhouse], Függetlenség, July 30, 1882. In his anonymously published article, Verhovay did not state that he had entered the synagogue, but otherwise the description of its inner space could not be given.
gesture of “sacrilege,” the Jewish community allegedly left the synagogue and held the Saturday sermons in Lichtmann’s nearby residence.\(^{93}\)

Of course, an interpretation of the local “popular excitement” would also be possible within another framework of reference, that of mass psychology or, possibly, mass hysteria—these concepts were emerging right in the era under review, even though the study of the related symptoms only really commenced in the twentieth century.\(^{94}\) However, what makes this phenomenon special is that the promise of legality and fair procedure did appeal to the reason of those concerned. Nationally, things only got out of control when on August 3, 1883 the Nyíregyháza court acquitted the defendants. Once again, for the last time, sentiments flared up in Eszlár. Péter Soltész wanted to throw one of the daughters of Weiszstein, an acquitted defendant, into the fire, and he hit Farkas Wertheimer (the estate steward) in the head with a hayfork, although Wertheimer had not even testified. In his own defense, the perpetrator claimed having been drunk at the time.\(^{95}\) He was duly punished. And in the spring of 1884, the emperor decorated judge Gábor Farkas with the crowned silver medal of merit for the role he played in keeping order.\(^{96}\) However, cantor and schochet Salamon Schwarz, who was the number one defendant in “the case of the girl gone missing,” and synagogue sexton József Scharf, who was accused of aiding and abetting (and after whom the trial was named), were never able to return to the village, and neither were their families.

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\(^{93}\) A tiszaeszlári zsidó hitközség nyilatkozata [The Communiqué of the Jewish Community in Tiszaeszlár], \textit{Egyenlőség}, November 5, 1882, 8–9. The Communiqué of the local community had been not signed by the Lichtmann family members. The action was interpreted in different ways in the press. \textit{Pesti Napló}, August 9, 1882.

\(^{94}\) Károly Eötvös himself was also thinking of offering a description: “The masses, once they have had their tempers roused, seek success in revenge, and will not only excuse but in fact demand all the violence that may be needed to achieve that goal, so much so that they will easily resort to violence themselves. They do not care about the law, about formalities, about any sacred protections, or about the natural rights of man.” Eötvös, \textit{A nagy per}, I, 80. As far as the phenomena related to the psychology of the masses and to mass hysteria in the early phases of these academic fields are concerned, see Gustave Le Bon, \textit{La psychologie des foules} (Paris: Alcan, 1895).

\(^{95}\) These events were reported by \textit{Egyenlőség} (August 12, 1883, 7); I have not found pertinent data in the documents of the deputy lord lieutenant.

\(^{96}\) \textit{Egyenlőség}, February 10, 1884.
Victor Turner’s concept of social drama has proven especially inspiring when interpreting all these cases in the history of Eszlár. Going beyond the limitations of the positivist concept of structures, he drew a distinction between formalized structures on the one hand and temporary structures generated by social dramas mainly in the course of conflicts. These are open, and the observer may recognize them in retrospect. Their organizational focus is not in the intersection of diagrams. Instead, they surface in the minds of the actors as objectives of actions and efforts. They encompass alternatives and they can be grasped through analyses of psychological factors.\(^{97}\) When examining various conflicts, apparently everything happens the way it usually does, as might be expected, and yet, everything might change completely in a split second. Coexistence, rivalry, and conflicts are inevitably intertwined. Rivalries between the approved Christian denominations manifested themselves either in conversion or in mixed marriages. There was never a plan to crowd out the other party, though. However, in this region, in this time period, after the emancipation of the Jews, the Christian–Jewish conflict could still take the form not only of blood libels\(^ {98}\) but also of the ritual forms of intimidation and violence. This is what international literature calls “exclusionary violence.”\(^ {99}\) However, after the trial ended with acquittals, and after the flames of collective violence went out, the various forms of local coexistence once again reorganized themselves in a business-as-usual manner.

It is no coincidence that, speaking of the Dreyfus affair, social psychologist Serge Moscovici makes the following claim: “Great thunderstorms, great discharges of human energy, great breaks of tension in society remain opaque to contemporaries and are seen in their true light only after a time. But their riddle never seems to receive any unquestionable solutions. This is what makes their fascination, which can last a long time.”\(^ {100}\) In our case hopefully not for another thousand years.


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