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## **'Stories of those moving out' – Refugees of Trianon: Two contemporary descriptions and their analysis**

After World War I Hungary has lost two-thirds of its territory, one third of the Hungarian speaking population, most of its natural wealth of minerals, forests and its railway system was also disrupted; moreover, Hungary's remaining territory had to take care of 430 thousand displaced persons as well. Not only the members of the elite but also the general public were of the opinion that the personal and collective grievances could be best expressed in writing. The present essay analyses two novels: *Menekültek* [Refugees] by the today almost unknown Judit Beczássy, published in 1933, and *Urak, Úrfiak* [Gentlemen and young masters] by the still popular Rózsa Ignác.

Besides the apparent economical, political and territorial losses, Hungarian society had suffered long lasting and severe spiritual damage as a consequence of Treaty of Trianon as well.<sup>1</sup> Due to mostly political reasons, the digestion of losses and the exploration of consequences have been carried out imperfectly or have not been done at all in the last ninety years. Although several scholarly, issue-related writings came up in the last decade, only the minority of them were concerned with the Treaty's micro- social consequences.<sup>2</sup> It is true in spite of the fact that the effects of Trianon can possibly be best comprehended by examining the never apparent spheres of everyday life. It is ineludible to get acquainted with the social phenomena that are direct consequences of the Treaty and the change of empires in order to examine these social effects.

The refugee question is a widely-known although less examined issue related to the disintegration of historical Hungary. Besides the well

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Gergely Kunt for his valuable and useful reflections.

<sup>2</sup> The writings of Miklós Zeidler, Csaba Csóti and Balázs Ablonczy are all exceptions.

known catchwords as „entrucked” or „clerks”, the fate and life conditions of those 430 000 refugees fled from successor states to Hungary following World War I and the Treaty of Trianon is scarcely known. This fact is even more puzzling since the majority of contemporaries were personally touched – most Hungarian families were involved in the matter – and they experienced those years as tragedy. Determinant actors of Hungarian elite all dealt with the subject and - depending on their personal worldview and attitude - they all expressed what the detached cities, lands and their memories ment to them.<sup>3</sup>

Not only the literary elite but also many other felt their imaginary or real, collective or personal grievances can be best expressed in writing. Thanks to this attitude, thousands of poems, short stories and plays were born, all of which gave certain answers - although mostly a very common one - to Trianon. Only a handful of these - known or little known - works of art concerns the issue of emigration and its complex aftermaths. We state this in spite of the fact that refugees and their families as characteristic figures of those times turn up in many works of art, however, besides the ones we review and examine here there is not any story particularly about them.<sup>4</sup> Even the historian István Weis called the attention to the lack of works dealing with this topic in his analytical work about Hungarian society in 1930.<sup>5</sup> As he noted, the massive crowd of people immigrating to Hungary after the decision of Trianon fundamentally influenced the everyday life of Hungary and of those Hungarian cities, towns and villages that accomodated them.<sup>6</sup> The issue of refugees did not only have an impact on the refugees’ personal lives with lost or temporarily lost existences, but on the social, economic, and cultural life of their new habitats, too. It would not be easy to define general characteristics that are true for all the settlements refugees found asylum in because of the differences within the flood of that almost half a million souls. We state this in spite of the fact

<sup>3</sup> Béla Pomogáts: *Querela Hungariae. Trianon és Magyar Irodalom*. Nyitott Könyvműhely, Budapest, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Rózsa Ignác: *Urak, úrfiak*. Budapest, 1985.; Judit Beczássy: *Menekültek*. Budapest 1933.

<sup>5</sup> István Weis: *A mai magyar társadalom*. Budapest, 1930.

<sup>6</sup> The participation in public life of refugees in Szepes settled down in Sátoraljaúlyhely provides a good example. More on the topic see: Gergely István Szűts: Öndefiníciós kísérletek a trianoni határon. Irredenta kultusz a két világháború közötti Sátoraljaúlyhelyen. In: Századvég (új folyam) 46. 2007/4. 41-70.(being published)

that by profession they seem to be homogenous at the first glimpse (the majority of them formerly were public servants or wore public offices), however, a closer examination shows that their existential differences were far more greater than one would think.

The heterogeneity of the jobholder middle class, the politics of the successor states, individual necessities and decisions make it impossible and maybe pointless to establish a model of refugees which could give explanation to this rather complex problem. It seems more appropriate to follow and understand the individual fate and difficulties of those who lost their former offices and tried to integrate into their new environment. Although the scale of emigration and social change was unquestionably enormous, only a few sources have been explored until today. This is one of the reasons why it is worth analyzing such literary products – two novels in our case – which give us examples for the phenomenon. The question whether a literary product about refugees' lives can ever be used as a source for historians obviously arises here. Can reality (if it really does exist) be examined through fiction? If we accept that every text, and a scientific work too, constructed by an author, is based on the individual interpretation of sources, the borderline between reality and fiction blurs and it seems more appropriate to use the concept of possibility as a real entity.<sup>7</sup> Thus a literary product can also be interpreted as a possible explanation instead of a solely existing fiction. To put it concisely, a literary product is also able to be seen as a potential source because its author can never be independent from the historical context, so the narrative constructed can be considered as a footprint of the era in question. Carrying on with this chain of ideas, the choice of topic, the characters and their relation to the narrated issues in the story will become of crucial importance. It comes natural then that not only the story but all the impressions it is based on will prove to be important sources.

Thus, the novels chosen by us will give the opportunity to gain information on the refugee question because it plays central role in them and in contemporary discourses based on the experiences of their authors. So we reckon that not only the dialogues in the novels but the characters, scenes and the way of their representations are all truly revealing.

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<sup>7</sup> Gábor Gyáni: Történelem és regény. A történelmi regény In: *Tiszatáj* 2004. 4. szám 78.-92.

## Refugee question

Based on the report of Országos Menekültügyi Hivatal (OMH) (National Office for Refugee Affairs - NORA) in 1924, 350 thousand refugees arrived to Hungary from the successor states between November 1918 and December 1923.<sup>8</sup> The Hungarian government established its formal authority over the coordination of refugees' affairs in spring 1920 and the first great wave of immigrants arrived to the country more than one and a half year later, but we have to bear in mind that those who illegally crossed the border are not recorded in the files, therefore it seems more appropriate to count with a far greater number, approximately 430 thousands. In spite of the huge difference (almost one hundred thousand) in the numbers of the refugees, the report of NORA is still to be considered as an important source because, as far as we know, the numbers given by it are the only macro level database until today. Based on the report it seems obvious that nearly two thirds of the bread-winners arriving to Hungary were formerly state or private employees.<sup>9</sup> The country was in a deep crisis due to the lost war, revolutions, internal and external conflicts, therefore it was not able to provide this huge amount of people with jobs or lodgement. Neither the offices of the state, counties, nor the offices of towns were able to employ and accommodate this well and partly well qualified crowd of officials who together with their families meant more than three hundred thousand people. These causes led to that common experience of the time that the formerly highly recognized refugees took up jobs never imaginable before and settled down in places they never ever would have chosen before simply because of existential reasons. Clearly, the restart of life did not cause such hardships for all. The community of refugees was significantly differentiated, so the change was rather sweet for

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<sup>8</sup> The Országos Menekültügyi Hivatal (National Office for Refugees Affairs) was established on 16th April 1920 to coordinate refugees arriving from successor states and to take care of their lodgement and boarding. After its 1924 abolishment the affairs of refugees were handled by the Ministry of Welfare and Labour. For more information on NORA see Emil Petrichevich-Horváth: *Az Országos Menekültügyi Hivatal négyéves működéséről*. Budapest, 1924.

<sup>9</sup> From the 350.000 persons registered by NORA 104.804 were breadwinners and 245.196 were dependents. From breadwinners 44.253 were formerly state employees and 24.473 worked in the industry or trade. Petrichevich-Horváth 1924. 37.

those who possessed considerable wealth and had sound connections. A warm home and featherbed waited for some of them even in the moments of their flight or a couple of days after their arrival.

It is peculiar that the main characters of the novels also belong to that envied social class for which it was relatively easy to tide over the change of regimes, thanks to their status and connections. But the majority of refugees suffered a severe and long lasting moral and material loss. Most of them were not able to establish a new existence relying on their wealth they had left at home, partly carried with them or which has never existed. Seeing the irresolvable tension in social and economic relations caused by continuously arriving waves of refugees and the need for stable Hungarian communities beyond the border articulated in the Hungarian revisionist politics, the Hungarian government decided in October 1920 to officially keep emigration under control.<sup>10</sup> From that date permission to reside was only possible in case of family reunion, already started studies or verifiable expulsion. The decree did not stop emigration entirely as it allowed refugees to settle down in case of real coercion but tried to prevent the emigration of those who wanted to leave the successor states only in hope for a better life. Our protagonists in the novels were not affected by this restriction but there are other characters who had not arrived from Transylvania to the capital because of real coercion.

### **Novels of refugees**

The first writing about refugee question appeared in 1933 by the today almost unknown writer Judit Beczássy. Beczássy was born in Szeged, 1888 with the name of Katalin Szobotka as the daughter of Calvinist parents, the engineer Rezső Szobotka and his wife Júlia Beczássy. Unfortunately, we know little about the Szobotkas but it is certain that the father worked for the City Council as an engineer and hired a flat for his family in the building of Postapalota (Palace of Post Office)

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<sup>10</sup> On the proposal of István Bethlen, director of NORA the National Assembly decided on the legal foundation of settling on the basis of edict No. 8352/1920 issued on 23rd October 1920.

in Széchenyi Square.<sup>11</sup> Beczássy finished her elementary school studies in the city, but earned her teacher degree in the neighbouring city of Szabadka. She started her career as a newly graduated schoolmistress in Székelyudvarhely in 1911 where she met and soon became the wife of one of her colleagues Sándor Balázs (Breiner), a teacher of Latin and Hungarian languages and writer. Probably at the time of the Romanian invasion the couple gave up their former lives and moved to the capital city. We know just as little about their life in Budapest as about their life in Transylvania, and the reason for this is that the location of their bequest is still unknown. Based on the few available sources there is one thing we can know for sure: after their arrival to Budapest Sándor Balázs was employed by Verbőczy Grammar School in Krisztinaváros District. The enthusiastic writer and teacher is not mentioned in the history of Hungarian literature by the right of his novels or short stories but because he was one of the examiners at Attila József's (well-known Hungarian poet) entrance examination. Just like the protagonists of the novel, the couple lived in Buda, in District I so it is not surprising at all that Balázs was one of the regular guests of café *Philadelphia*, a well know venue in contemporary literary life.<sup>12</sup> From fragments of their personal records we also have knowledge of a critical period of the family's life with all its emotional and pecuniary hardships caused by one of their children's illness.<sup>13</sup>

Beczássy presumably chose her mother's name (a name common in Transylvania) as pen-name while living in the capital city before the publication of her first book instead of the Slavic sounding Szobotka. In a book review in Erdélyi Helikon sometime in the 1930s she is already mentioned as an offspring of an ancient Transylvanian family who could have been physically torn away from her roots by nothing else but the Great War.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Special thanks for Tibor Berta archivist in Szeged for registry data.

<sup>12</sup> Noémi Saly: A Krisztinaváros és a Philadelphia. *Budapesti Negyed*. 1996 2-3.szám

<sup>13</sup> Judit Beczássy wrote a personal letter to Oszkár Gellért to ask his help for her desperate family. We know nothing of the answer but her thanking letter to Mihály Babits allows us to think that Babits gave a helping hand to the family in need. Unfortunately the exact dates of the letters are not known in: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Kézirattár, *Babits Mihály iratai*. III/252-253.

<sup>14</sup> *Erdélyi Helikon* 1931. 2. szám

She wrote her first novel on the encouragement of his husband and it took only a few years for her to become at least a known if not well-known figure of Hungarian literary life. The fact that she was honourably mentioned on a literary competition organized by the book publisher Athenaeum in the first year and got a prize in the second year plays a significant role in her career. The recognition evoked a massive resound which was amongst others signed by the fact that Dezső Kosztolányi himself gave an appreciation on the columns of *Nyugat* of her novel *Tóth Eszter élete és halála* (*Eszter Tóth's Life and Death*) published in 1921.<sup>15</sup> The few letters available prove that Balázs and his wife were accommodated in the literary life of the capital.

She published ten books between 1920 and 1945 included *Menekültek* (*Refugees*) and up to her passing away in 1961 three of her novelettes came out. Her writing concerned with refugees of Trianon was published by Singer and Wolfner book publisher in 1933. Although she was not as well known as before by this time, a critique of the book came out in *Nyugat* by Aladár Schöpflin.<sup>16</sup> Schöpflin spoke about the significance of her book in describing the history of the era with real enthusiasm and true jubilation however, he was not as much content with its literary qualities. He mostly criticised the overdone ethical judgement that was immanent in the story and the far too typical character portrayal. It seems that a well-elaborated critique and a descriptive portrayal hand in hand with a continuous moral judgement of society characterize not only the novel in question but all her works between the two world wars. In spite of Schöpflin's and other book reviews in prominent daily papers, the novel could not evoke considerable interest although the title and subject were more promising.

It is also curious that Rózsa Ignác's name (author of the other novel) didn't become well-known in the Hungarian public discourse, although she was a relatively recognized writer in her lifetime. It can partly be explained by the fact that Ignác wrote the novel during World War II and it was published in 1947 on the eve of nationalisation only in a small number of copies without any advertisement. The well known and acknowledged authoress of the era was born in 1909 in Kovászna as a descendant of old Transylvanian families. Her ancestors, the Makkai-s

<sup>15</sup> *Nyugat* 1922. 4. szám

<sup>16</sup> *Nyugat* 1933. 9. szám.

in Enyed on her mother's side and paternally the Ignác-s from Csík moved to Szolnok- Doboka. Although she attended her schools in Transylvania and graduated from grammar school in 1928 in Kolozsvár she moved to Hungary in the same year. She graduated from Academy of Drama in Budapest and for the encouragement of her friends and relatives she began to write prose, too. She achieved her first literary success in 1937 with her novel *Anyanyelve Magyar* (Mother Tongue: Hungarian). She wrote the novel *Urak, Úrfiak* (Gentleman and Young Masters) discussed by us in 1943-44 a decade later than *Menekültek* (Refugees) was published. The book published in a small number of copies was reprinted after her death only in 1984, following many years of compulsory silence. The publisher in Csíkszereda which had issued her life-work earlier also published the book again in the recent past, but despite of its third-time edition, the novel still remained one of her less-known works.<sup>17</sup> This argument is supported by the fact that the *Ignác Rózsa Emlékkönyv* (*Rózsa Ignác Memory Book*) published in 2009 mentions the novel only concisely.<sup>18</sup> Despite this fact the *Memory Book* contains several pieces of indirect information from which the background and the possible causes of her choice of topic can be relatively easily explained. It also can be seen thus that the chosen locations, the characteristics and lives of the characters are packed with real and imaginary features. Similarly to *Beczássy*, Ignác also lived through the 1916 flight. Since she was a child that time, she remembers the few weeks long (for her) adventurous ordeal in an utterly different manner. The flight was a personal experience for both authors thus the choice of titles is worth a more close examination.

The message of *Menekültek* (Refugees) is obvious with a title as direct as this; it aimed to focus on the contemporaries' attention on all the tensions interlacing Hungarian society for a decade as consequences of the Treaty of Trianon. On the contrary, *Rózsa Ignác* was not concerned with the complex effects of the refugee question but only with the fate of a number of refugees and especially their attitudes. She talks about her motivations in the second edition of her book published in 1985 where she indicates that originally she

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<sup>17</sup> Pro-Print Kiadó published the life-work series of *Rózsa Ignác*.

<sup>18</sup> Edited by László Neményi: *Rózsa Ignác (1909-1979) Memory Book*. Csíkszereda, 2009



wanted to give *Törtetőők* (Go-getters) as title to her book referring to the predominancy politics of Transylvanian refugees and only after a long deliberation and with regard to the state of public affairs did she finally choose the less provocative *Urak, úrfiak* (Gentlemen and Young Masters), which refers to the story of two generations.

The choice of title, the leading motives, and the interpretation of events leading to the flight show a significant difference between the two writings. While Beczássy sees her protagonists as victims of Treaty of Trianon and exonerates them nearly from everything, Ignác accuses certain refugees with sinful recklessness and with taking advantage of their situation. Not only their approaches to the question but also their analyses are different. Contrary to Ignác, Beczássy discusses the trauma of refugees of Trianon and Hungarian middle-class in a shorter and less elaborated manner. Unlike Ignác, who focuses on the everyday lives and integration of refugees living in Budapest, Beczássy chiefly emphasises the tragic features of the flight and its immanently encoded consequences. The cause of the differences between the two approaches might be that they lived through the trauma of Trianon in different circumstances. The almost one generation difference, the fact that one of them was a child at the time of the flight while the other one was already an adult, so the direct and indirect experience of belonging to a minority could altogether cause the different interpretations of the issue.

Moving backwards in time, the representation of events that evoked the flight and the way of leaving the homeland become fairly different in the two stories. The protagonists of Judit Beczássy, the members of the Deésy family were forced to flee from an unspecified settlement in Transylvania after the head of the family had been arrested by the Romanian authorities with the charge of capital treason. The father, Dénes Deésy Senior probably had led the office of the High Sheriff in one of the Districts of Csík County until the Romanian occupation in 1918. He was arrested and transported to Bukarest because of his participation in a would-be nation-wide underground movement after the following months of the change of empires which could not even evolve due to the Romanian attack. The trial was to be held in the autumn of 1919 at the court in Nagyszeben after his half-year detention in remand but owing to his wife's intercession he was allowed to return home for a few days without supervision until his

summoning. During the given time the family successfully smuggled the former High Sheriff out of Transylvania in a cattle-truck used for the transportation of repatriates. In other words, the protagonists of *Menekültek* (Refugees) acted under coercion and had to leave their homeland within a few days.

Unlike Beczássy's Deésy family from Székelyföld (Szekler Land), Rózsa Ignác built her narrative around the Göncze family originally from Fogaras County and the Bákody family living in Erzsébetváros. It is interesting to compare the choice of scenes and the social status of the characters. Both authors chose their own homelands or a settlement or region personally important for them or for their families as the scenes of their novels. Whilst Beczássy places her story to Szekler Land inhabited by an absolute majority of Hungarians, Ignác's narrative takes place in counties only dispersedly inhabited by Hungarians. Although the scenes are different, the social status of the characters is quite similar. They both place their protagonists on the ever-changing verge on upper- and middle-class: the High Sheriff Deésy, the large acred man László Göncze and Gerő Bákody, Erzsébetváros' Director of Public Prosecutions. Although they are similar characters, their differences in ethical questions get unraveled weeks or months after of the change of empires and in their everyday lives in the capital city. Rózsa Ignác placed the most crucial ethical dilemmas of Hungarians existing in a minority, the choice between personal and group interests, the question of staying or leaving into the focus of her narrative. In the spirit of the "Transylvanian thought" she opposes emigration based on personal interests, comfort and desire for a career to staying and persistence in the homeland. Even so, all of her characters leave their homeland in the end; some on their own will after the Romanian occupation and some by necessity in the middle of the 1920s. The *Urak, úrfiak* (Gentleman and young masters) gives a lively description of those coercive circumstances the Hungarian minority in Transylvania and most of all the former employees of the state had to face.

Beczássy's protagonists were even left without the dilemma, the possibility to choose; a conspiracy against a new state in those parlous times would have led to severe consequences. Thus the trauma caused by the violence of the successor states and the deprivation from free decision making can be seen as starting points. Although it is highly

likely that the Hungarian born political and administrative elite could not have found real alternatives to maintain their former existences, the suspension of their right to decide and the violent pressure they had to endure plunged them into a case of necessity. It was a common experience at that time since the newly governing power tried to get rid of the administrative class that had worked for the Hungarian state before. An oath of allegiance was demanded from those who were not expelled immediately, however, the majority settled upon the emigration driven by remonstrance, fear or hope. Although the interpretations of the problem differ, the basic features as existential crises caused by Trianon or the splitting families and outsliding careers are particularly present in both stories.

### **Environment**

The author reveals only a very little about the lives of Refugees at home. It is certain though that High Sheriff Deésy and his family used to live in a settlement somewhere in Transylvania where, besides his office, Deésy possessed considerable amounts of land and before their emigration they were able to sell their properties and the majority of their movables so successfully that they could live the life of the upper-class in the capital city for many years. We only got a picture through their fellow refugees in Budapest about their former social connections at home. In the capital Dénes Deésy mostly meets the members of the former County's elite but he was widely known for his self-maintenance at the time of change of empires, his imprisonment and character assassination. Due to his attempt to an open resistance, which made his name famous not only in Transylvania but also in the capital, he was able to restore the family's broken existence within a relatively short period of time. It is peculiar though that except for the householder's partly official connections he lacks friends and does not participate in any social movements that were so characteristic in the era. This is of course not accidental; as it was mentioned previously, above all the author emphasizes the tragedy, the disintegration of personal and communal connections.

Unlike Beczássy, Rózsa Ignác devotes a whole chapter to characterize Transylvanian circumstances. She writes about the short term

consequences of the change of empires, the way emigration influenced the lives of refugees and also of those who stayed at home in a much more detailed and sophisticated manner. She chose her husband's, János Makkai's hometown, Erzsébetváros with its pro-Hungarian but pointedly not only Hungarian born community in Kis-Küküllő County as the scene for the admittedly traumatic events of the change of rule.<sup>19</sup> One of the central characters of the story is Gerő Bákody, director of public prosecutions of the town until the Romanian occupation in 1918. As Ignác himself reveals, he is the only character in the novel whose characteristics were modeled after a real person, probably after her father-in law, Crown Attorney Dr Jenő Makkai. The newly organising rule discharges the well-respected Bákody who did not want to take part in the work of the Romanian Prosecution. His formerly higher-up friends made the same decision so after the refusal of the oath of allegiance not only the by then unemployed prosecutor but the former director of the court and the station-master also had to support their families by doing manual labour. The Hungarian elite of the ethnically heterogeneous town or at least the families pictured in the novel left the banks of Nagy-Küküllő river in august 1920. Thanks to the Romanian authorities' active assistance their journey - similarly to those of several hundred thousands of repatriates or optants - was not easy to realize.<sup>20</sup> The main reason for this was that neither the Romanian (mostly with the use of the carriages of the former Royal

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<sup>19</sup> The city is mentioned in the novel as Ebes on a part of its name used until 1733. Erzsébetváros (Dumbraveni, Elisabethstadt) situated on the banks of Nagy-Küküllő river was counted as one of the centres of Armenians in Transylvania. Besides the Armenians the city was inhabited by Hungarians, Romanians, and Saxons. Due to the records of 1910 census from the 4408 inhabitants of the city 2613 were Hungarians, 940 were Romanians, 496 were German and 332 were Gipsy. The Armenians significantly responsible for the atmosphere of the city were not mentioned in the last census of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy due to the fact that the questions were related to the mother tongue and religion of the respondents and the by then almost entirely assimilated Roman Catholic Armenians avow themselves Hungarians.

<sup>20</sup> To be an optant meant the obligatory choice of citizenship. According to the paragraphs 61-66/VII of the Treaty of Trianon all formerly citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy who after the decision were out of the borders of Hungary lost their Hungarian citizenship. The decision gave the opportunity for all those adult (over 18) citizens to maintain their former status if they required it in the following year of the Treaty. It meant that they had to repatriate and make the decision on their citizenship within a year or a half depending on the successor states after the approval of the Treaty of Trianon on 26th July 1921.

Hungarian Railways) nor the Royal Hungarian Railways was able to provide enough carriages for the repatriates and their chattels. It often happened that Hungarians who had by that time already sold their properties were forced to camp for weeks on the sidetracks of the local railway station, staying in its stores or in rented flats.

The villa of Gerő Bákody found its new owner within no time after Bákody's emigration in the person of the new Romanian Director of Public Prosecutions. He could consider himself lucky as after the property had been sold he was allowed to stay in until the day of his journey. The endless bidding farewells, last meetings and card games all pictures this state of transition, the moments of leaving. The author personally experienced all this when her family moved from Kovászna to Fogaras in 1918 and their introductory visits were soon repayed by their hosts' visits of farewell. Repatriates got more and more envied amongst those staying in the ethnically mixed, quickly changing settlement, with the Hungarians in minority. It was true even if the many times perspectiveless and humiliating situation of the refugees in Hungary was already quite obvious by then. The Hungarian population of Ebes, i.e. Erzsébetváros had to continuously experience the feeling of loss and homelessness and not only on the day of the Bákody family's journey but during the following years as well. Most of those who took the road because of necessity or in the hope for a better life had to physically endure the feeling of homelessness for months or years and maybe emotionally until the end of their lives.

The other thread of the story leads us to a village purely inhabited by Romanians not far from Fogaras where until the autumn of 1918 the authority of the state was represented by the gendarmerie and by the lord, László Göncze and his family. By the time of change of empires the gendarmerie representing the Hungarian public administration had left the settlement but the head of the family decided to stay after returning from a two-year imprisonment. He and his actions symbolise everything that characterised the Transylvanian way of thinking and its famous representative minister László Ignác, the author's father, during the interwar period.

Just like the Ignác, and unlike his son Péter who emigrated to Budapest, László Göncze also wanted to stay and do everything he could for the people living in diaspora to ease the severe consequences caused by the decision at Trianon. He organized a school for children living in

the diaspora and as a Member of Parliament he raised the problems of Hungarians of the former Fogaras County to an official level. The fact that László Göncze operated a school for children in diaspora besides his work as an MP shows that the author's father, minister László Ignác inspired the portrayal of the character. After his untimely death his widow Máli Bákody and his daughter Rika left Transylvania and moved to Hungary. After her father's death, just like the character in her novel, *Róka* (Fox) i.e. Rózsa Ignác and her mother also moved to Budapest already packed with family members and friends.

### On the road

After the official announcement of their emigration High Sheriff Dénes Deésy and his family were waiting for the two freight cars allocated for them. It was a common practice that refugees were given two freight cars to store their goods in one and to temporarily accommodate themselves in the other one. The author reveals nothing about the journey of the family while fleeing from Transylvania as the reader only meets them again on the Hungarian-Romanian border but the ritual rescuing of the householder through the border as the final step of their flight is accurately detailed. The main reason for this is that the border here symbolizes the dividing line between security and insecurity. The act of crossing the border is such a physical and emotional event which drives the characters' lives onto a path that can only be left by those who lived through these hardships as a child. Being a refugee could have meant very different ways of life but fundamentally it was accompanied by a certain existential and above all moral crises. The characters of the story embody the models of the trauma of a refugee which, according to Aladár Schöpflin's review, are too simple and schematic explanations of this highly complex phenomenon.<sup>21</sup>

Rózsa Ignác also tells us nothing about the journey of Gerő Bákody and the fleeing Hungarians from Erzsébetváros in August 1920. Thus the passengers of the train finally leaving after weeks of waiting appear only several months later as the members of their now locally reorganized cultural society, the Ebes Association.

<sup>21</sup> Review of Aladár Schöpflin. *Nyugat* 1933. 9. szám.

### Life strategies in the capital city

After the arrival to the capital the concepts of the two novels show differences again. Whilst Beczássy chronologically carries on the narrative and focuses on the existential and moral questions of the recommencement, Ignác jumps forward in time and examines the characters already integrated or still struggling with the integration into the life of the capital city six years after. After almost a month-long journey, Beczássy's protagonists finally end up on one of the side-tracks of a railway station (possibly in Józsefváros) in Budapest. Instead of being a temporary place of short stay as usually, the station and the freight-cars ment home for most of the refugees that time and in the following years. It is not accidental that still today the best-known picture about the situation of refugees after Trianon is the one which informs us of the tragedy of families living on the side-tracks of railway stations. From spring 1919 on, real quarters came into existence on the railway stations of the capital and of bigger cities due to the constant shortages in housing and the increasing number of refugees. Some might lived in freight-cars, the physical embodiments of their existence as a refugee even for up to five years. According to the records of NORA, several times ten thousand people lived on the side-tracks of railway stations between the years of 1920 and 1924. The culmination of the situation was in summer 1921 when their number reached almost fifteen thousand. By 1924 this number significantly decreased but there were almost three-hundred in the capital city and two thousand five-hundred people in bigger cities who were still forced to live their lives in freight-cars.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike others, the Deésys, owing to their social connections and position, stayed „only” a couple of weeks on one of the railway stations in the capital city. Although the author did not devote a full chapter to them, the events depicting the everyday lives, problems and conflicts of people living in freight-cars turn up several times in the story. It seems that Beczássy paid a counscious attention to the historicity of the plot's backgrounds. This is confirmed by the representation of people living in freight-cars and their accurate portrayal. She detailedly writes about the main activity of their days, the search for acco-

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<sup>22</sup> Petrichevich-Horváth 1924. 38.

modation, and the adaptiveness of the different types of people. In spite of their different possibilities, successes and resultlessnesses in their integration, it seems that the events happend to them remained uncomprehensible for a long time for refugees. It is all understandable if we keep in mind the fact that, in spite of the change of empires and the unstable political atmosphere, some of them had still lived their ordinary lives at home or at their posts merely a few months or weeks earlier. But of course there were some who gave up their several months long ambiguous situation in favour of the futurelessness after a long agony because it seemed more secure. These of course are all general characteristics which can only provide a certain frame in the stories about refugees.

As it was mentioned earlier, we are in the possession of a very little amount of information on the life conditions of refugees. Thus it is worth following the changes of housing conditions of the families in the novels. The Deésys, similarly to the colony in Erzsébetváros, arrived to the capital city in the summer of 1920 and it seems that they could adapt to the pace of the daily lives of other homeless refugees very soon. With the exception of the head of the family and the servant responsible for guarding the freight-cars, the family visited Pest's and Buda's warrens. Although the Housing Office established in 1917 should have taken care of the housing of refugees it was not able to fulfill its function due to the continously increasing number of claimants and the already expensive housing shortage. The situation forced the refugees – as examples in Miskolc also show – seeking for empty flats, tenancies and other places suitable for moving in.<sup>23</sup> The Deésy family also followed this way when wandering around the Districts of the city; they tried to rent at least a small flat even without modern conveniences. After they had been searching for several weeks, finally they met old Steinerm, one of the most important characters of

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<sup>23</sup> Tens of thousands of refugees had arrived to Miskolc between the years 1919 and 1922 and finally around 3500-4000 people settled down permanently in the city. Similarly to Budapest the housing of such a crowd ment serious difficulties for the city. Therefore refugees tried to solve their accomodation individually or as a part of a smaller group which sometimes led to serious conflicts. On the crises of housing see: Gergely István Szűts: „A szükséglakások felét menekültek kapják...” Érdekkonfliktusok és előítéletek az 1920-as évek első felének lakásügyeiben Miskolcon. in: Korall (40.) 2010. 114-133.



the story, knocking on a door of a first floor flat in one of the warrens in Budapest. After their short and fruitless endeavouring, the Deésys, due to the unselfishness of this Jewish merchant, found themselves in a five bedroom villa on Rózsadomb (*an area inhabited by wealthy people in Buda – the trans.*) and they were able not only to rent but to purchase it from the money received for their country seat back in Transylvania. They found no other reason for Steiner's humane and nearly incomprehensible gesture than that the old man considered the former High Sheriff as a kind of national hero thus he offered the property acquired not long ago for himself on a favourable price.

By quickly reaching this new and successful existence, the family soon found itself in the everyday life of the capital city's top middle class and they even could easily assimilate to their new environment with the exception of the householder. Unlike the masses of other refugees, the now property owner householder, the former High Sheriff had no desire to fulfill a position and apparently it was not necessary for him by all means either. He was able to provide the financials needed for maintaining the living standards of the capital's elite from the money they received for their property in Transylvania and from certain honorariums. Their children could attend to the most renowned schools and, according to their social rank and following the fashion of the time, they played tennis and went rowing in their free time. Besides their old Transylvanian friends, soon the young members of the most important families in the capital paid a visit in their home on Wednesdays, the day assigned for receiving guests. The reader can follow the everyday life and integration of the Deésy family until the late 1920's so we are able to get a picture of the characters of both novels from the second half of the decade.

As it was mentioned earlier, Rózsa Ignác deliberately focuses on the generation of fathers and sons already after having accommodated themselves in the capital instead of the moments of arrival and initial difficulties. Thus she continues the story from the year 1926 with the exhibition of the specific sub-culture of social and political associations, groups and organisations run by refugees living in the capital city. Due to the lost war and also as a mean to protest against the Treaty of Trianon, numerous well-organized and nation-wide organisations and associations were formed whose members were mostly refugees. Some of these like MOVE (Hungarian National

Defence Association) and Revíziós Liga (Revisionist League) came into existence because of the collective losses and the trauma that afflicted the nation, while others as Szepesi Szövetség (Szepes Association) or the one in Ignác's novel, the Ebesiek Egyesülete (Ebes Association) were organized on the ground of common locality, or another one called Heimat because of the losing of old-homeland.<sup>24</sup> The threads of the story all lead to these official or non-official organizations run by refugees.

The intellectual leader of one of these groups was Péter Göncze who left Kolozsvár after its Romanian occupation in 1918, the son of László Göncze the landowner, who chose to stay in Transylvania. The young man in his early twenties becomes an important icon of the organization that assembled the young revisionist refugees during the following years. The movement led by him and the newspaper behind it with the expressive name 'Honfoglalás' (Conquest of the Homeland) mostly gathered emigrated university and college students, not counting few exceptions. The author follows the integration of these young folk without livelihood who had suspended their studies because of necessity, and - although in a less elaborated way, - the integration of their more successful fellow-sufferers.

After one and a half year the other protagonists of the novel, the prosecutor Gerő Bákody and his son follow Péter Göncze to Budapest. While the young Göncze not only then but six years later still grubs along in a rented flat without any fixed income, his relatives from Ebes can afford to purchase a flat in Lipótváros and soon get fine employments. The situation did not change significantly even by 1926 for Péter and his friends who had fled after the change of empires. Ignác finds the main reason for this phenomenon in the attitude of Péter Göncze and the members of his revisionist movement as they considered themselves victims and they solely accused

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<sup>24</sup> Hungarian National Defence Association was established in January 1919 with the leadership of Gyula Gömbös. Its aim was the defence of territorial integrity of Hungary. After the Treaty of Trianon due to internal affairs the association and its leader gradually dwindled and from 1928 the seceding of Gyula Gömbös it became absolutely insignificant.

Revisionists League was established in 1927 to support and coordinate irredentist movements. The organisation led by Ferenc Herczeg until its breaking-up in 1944 did national and international propaganda.

Trianon for their existential crises. On the contrary, the middle aged Gerő Bákody and the majority of his contemporaries could integrate in a short period of time owing to their connections and will. Although the contrast exists not only in the generational differences since there are ample examples for young people in their early twenties who were able to make a career in their new environment as well. The main differences should be looked for in their different attitudes. This is what Rózsa Ignác emphasizes in the preface of her book. She wanted to draw the reader's attention to the behaviour which characterized groups and individuals in the society of refugees. She speaks of a type of human nature which tries to get on by using his status as a refugee as well as communities for which the only bonding force was the lamentation over the lost past.

It is worth examining the types of protagonists the authors used to characterize refugee question. Judit Beczássy, who fundamentally considered refugees as victims, mainly gave positive features for her characters. Let us take the old maidservant of the Deésy family into consideration; she was the only one from the household staff after many years of service who followed her employers to Hungary. The fact that she was entrusted with the guarding of the freight-cars for several weeks in a railway station in Budapest shows her reliability and relationship to the family. She is also the one who later stays with the family in spite of their bankruptcy, though by the end of the '20s she had better and more remunerative jobs, too. Her character both represents the taintless behaviour of Transylvanians (a common public opinion) and the topos of the faithful maidservant as well.

Another but far from positive refugee character is Tamás Kuthy, a former friend of Dénes Deésy, who, contrary to the High Sheriff, instantly occupies a position in one of the ministries after his arrival. He appears only a few times in the story but when he does it happens because of some ethically questionable venture in most cases. The character of Kuthy represents the envied and (at least for some people including Ignác Rózsa) antipathetic figure of a refugee who is able to create a new existence within a short period of time only by taking advantage of his status and connections. The only fully negative character amongst the ex-Transylvanians is Pétery mentioned always on his surname. His reputation is further worsened by the fact that as a founder of a bank he intemperately exploited those wealthy but

confused refugees who could not or would not want to do anything with their new situation. Utilizing the help of the members of refugees' upper-class such as Dénes Deésy, Pétery had founded a bank in Pest, after a few years he declared bankruptcy and finally left his family and the country and moved abroad with the remaining capital. In order to safeguard his pseudo-activity he nominated honoured personalities as members of board of directors who ment guarantee for the investors. As a member of board of directors, Deésy invested almost all his money in his „own” bank, so the crash affected the family's financials severely. It was common amongst wealthy refugees during those decades to try to secure their money by purchasing properties or to multiply it on the stock exchange. Of course, this attracted land-jobbers, stock-brokers, and private-bankers who tried to take advantage of people who were not familiar with the financial world.

The portrayal of refugees in *Urak, úrfiak* (Gentleman and Young Masters) is less schematic than it is in *Menekültek* (Refugees). The roots of existential crises are primarily to be found in ethical and not in financial defects. It is especially true in the case of the „young masters” who arrived to the capital in the early 1920's and who still tried to take advantage of their status as a refugee to gain positions even at the last third of the decade. Péter Göncze also quotes the motto of their (initially probably not conscious) philosophy, „*Trianon Ruined our Lives*” when he asks his relative, public prosecutor Gerő Bákody, to subsidize his irredentist organisation. Not only he but also those other white collar worker refugees in an insecure situation who symbolically gathered around the irredentist paper *Honfoglalás* (Conquering of Homeland) used the same means and terminology in their effort to put their things straight.

Parallely to the refugees called „go-getters” by Rózsa Ignác, those groups which tried to reorganize and continuously relive their lost communities due to the change of empires also appear in the book. The tens of thousands people settled down in the capital city contributed to the coming to life of memories of the old homeland within the walls of pubs, restaurants, groceries or barber shops opened by refugees. The haunts of young masters and refugees from Ebes were also those places whose owners provided space for the re-creation of home. Péter Göncze and his fellow editors spent a part of their days in a Transylvanian refugee's, Zoltán Czinna's chop-house. We do not

know if Czinna's restaurant really existed but it seems certain that Ignác Rózsa partially used original Transylvanian and Hungarian locations for her novel. One of these is the Kovácsévics restaurant in 29 Rákóczi Street in District 8, a place well-known and respected by refugees and where people from Szepes went on every Thursday for many years.<sup>25</sup> This place appears in the novel as the place where anybody with any social background from Ebes met to commemorate the glorious past. The author demonstrates the everyday lives of associations and clubs devoted to the past and to revisionism with the representation of their communal events. There are members who establish living ethnographic collections at their homes or give Transylvanian names to the objectives of their excursions in Buda. These all were strategies of survival for those driven out from their homelands by necessity. A massive part of refugees could not or did not want to leave behind their mythicized world, which is well-represented by the fact that a significant part of the young people around Honfoglalás (Conquering of Homeland) tried to make a living by irredentist cultural performances or artwork even at the end of the 1920s. This type of character sticks to the sacrosanct and unquestionable past, which was criticized by Rózsa Ignác.

Before we return to the discussion of the financial downfall which fundamentally influenced the life of the Deésy family, it is worth looking back to the years when the family lived the everyday life of the capital city's civic elite. Let us first examine what their acquaintances thought about them. Although not amplified in the novel, we can come to the conclusion by the reactions of a poor relative and other people living in freight-cars that the successful integration of the family evoked jealousy. It is probable that not only the Deésys but all immigrants who managed to adapt quickly and effectively – the 'outlanders', as they were called by the contemporaries – often generated opposition amongst the 'natives', that is, their hosts. The deliquescent and sometimes even open animosity between the recipients and those moving in can be considered if not a common but an existing phenomenon. It is confirmed by the report of NORA as

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<sup>25</sup> The life of refugees in Szepes in Budapest see more in: Gergely István Szűts: A szepesi menekültek sajtója 1920 és 1944 között. in: Fórum, Társadalomtudományi Szemle, 2012/1. 23-34. (under publishing)

well, which particularly mentions and opposes these – in the eyes of NORA – dispersedly occurring deeds.<sup>26</sup>

Although the official propaganda of the period scarcely ever mentioned hostile manifestations against refugees, suspicion, condemnation and sometimes animosity could have been prevalent in social reactions especially at the beginning of the 1920s.<sup>27</sup> We say this in spite of the fact that the novels contain only a few references to such events of conflicts. The reason for this is that the characters could avoid most of the sources of conflicts (such as searching for employment and lodgement) owing to their social status. Naturally it is only partially true; the creation of an existence must have been accompanied by grave sacrifices and compromises for those arriving to the capital city at a young age – as Péter Göncze did – and without considerable connections.

The story of the families ends at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s. After their seemingly fast and successful integration, the Deésys got into severe financial conditions due to their aforementioned abortive investment by the end of the decade. In spite of the inevitable bankruptcy, they did everything to maintain the guise of their former life in accordance with their social rank for months, even at the expense of the exhaustion of their reserves. It is a typical example of the declassing of middle class. The fall seemed inevitable; but instead of total breakdown, the family's morality (that is immanent throughout the story) helped them to bear the loss of their status. Their former benefactor Mr Steiner shared with them the potential life strategies of an impoverishing citizen and advised them to put up lodgers or boarders, to dismiss the servants and to rent a tobacco-shop as a modest but stable source of income. The Deésyés did not undertake these possibilities because of their child and moved from the villa in Buda to a two bedroom (with, bathroom, kitchen and servants' hall) fourth-floor flat of a block of flats instead. This happened at the end of the 1920s on the eve of the Great Depression.

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<sup>26</sup> Petrichevich- Horváth 1924.1.

<sup>27</sup> In one of my former studies I examined conflicts due to housing shortages in a city north of Hungary. During my research it became apparent that clashes occurred not only between immigrants and locals but amongst only the immigrants, too. Housing shortages further divided the local community already in a deep crisis and along their different values, beliefs or purely due to material interests. Szűts 2010.

The author tried to place her characters into a different social class by moving them from their villa on Rózsadomb to the world of employees and to give an insight to the everyday lives of those living on the fading boundaries between middle and lower middle class. The fate the Deésys could avoid in 1920 finally befell them. The head of the family formerly honoured as a national hero and his wife had to live in circumstances that were unimaginable before; sharing a sofa-bed in the parlour of their flat and converting the dining room and kitchen to the children's bedroom and servant's hall for the night. As a sounding example of the period's exigency they also had to take in a lodger, which represents not only their come-down but that of the lower middle class' as well. Events end here in the simple tenement house in Buda on the eve of the Great Depression. The Deésy family could integrate only partially even a decade after losing their home, still by rather bearing than accepting their loss, and it is mainly due to the fact that the members of the family were young at the time of their emigration.

Families fleeing from South-Transylvania followed a different path from that of the former High Sheriff and his family's. Gerő Bákody had previously ensured financial safety for himself and his son long before their arrival to Budapest. His career remained untouched in spite of - or maybe because - he was the public prosecutor in the infamous French franc fraud trial.<sup>28</sup> In reality, Jenő Makkai after whom Bákody was modeled, stood for the French state in the lawsuit.

In spite of their financial safety, the son of Gerő Bákody as a member of Trianon generation was not able to find a profession easily. But he was not the only one; those young people in their early twenties living under the shock of Trianon had to face the same difficulties. These refugees still lived in the past their problems can change only by the end of the story. While some of them (typically the minor characters) still vegetate or commit suicide, Péter Göncze, owing to his connections and his marriage, gets as high as the position of under-secretary of State and becomes well-known. Not only him but the majority of young people gathering around Honfoglalás (Conquering of Homeland) get into important positions by the end

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<sup>28</sup> See more on the infamous trial on falsification of French franc in: Balázs Ablonczy: Összeesküvés a frank ellen. In: Rubicon 2005/9.

of the 1930s thanks to their toughness (which is disapproved by the author) and their public work.

Besides their personal successes, the opening of the borders as a consequence of Second Vienna Award brought significant changes in their communal life lived in their Transylvanian stlye homes and in the corners of their restaurants.<sup>29</sup> Almost all of the former travelled back home as soon as they could after the reannexation of North-Transylvania but after a short stay the majority of them returned to their homes in Budapest. Péter Göncze as under-secretary of State was present at the ceremonial recapture of Kolozsvár (Cluj) with an offical delegation, while Gábor Bákody became disappointed in Hungarian public life and therefore was moving from Paris to London at that time. Only the Armenian couple, the Gabradiáns, settled back to Transylvania From the refugees from Ebes, apparently not accidentally. As Erzsébetváros (Ebes) and Kisasszonyfalva (where the former estate of the Göncze family was located) remained on the other side of the border, the Gabradiáns applied for a job in Szamosújvár, centre of Transylvanian-Armenians. Events and the social-political phenomena following the return of North-Transylvania represent well what Rózsa Ignác demonstrated against. The attitude of a certain group of refugees portrayed by the author becomes perceptible in 1940 when the possibility of repatriation was given to them. The idea of moving back to Transylvania was not seriously considered by the onetime refugees who became involved in revisionist movements. Most of them - after a long but in some cases ethically questionable struggle - finally succeeded in creating a new existence which they were not ready to give up even for the recaptured homeland or for Greater Hungary. This was the point when those refugees who lived under the spell of revisionism, exploited their status as a refugee and finally for whom the reconnected territories bore only a symbolic significance, became discredited for Ignác.

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<sup>29</sup> Following the first Vienna Award on 2nd November 1938, - which gave back to Hungary the areas of the Uplands (*now south-Slovakia-trans*) inhabited by a Hungarian majority-, on 30th August 1940 north-Transylvania also returned. The almost 2.5 million people living on the reconnected territory were ethnically inhomogenous as due to the census carried out in 1941 only a littlebit more than the half of the population avowed itself Hungarian.



## Conclusions

The portrayal of the characters of the stories describing almost two decades of the lives of the refugees drew attention to the unrightful and in many cases irrational consequences of Trianon Peace Treaty. The authors wanted to draw attention to the social crises of interwar Hungary with the life stories of refugee families. The approach and exposition of the question is different in the two novels, but both novels can be used as source material for the refugee question of Trianon, which is a still unexplored issue today. The authors chose as the theme of their novels a contemporary phenomenon that directly or indirectly affected the lives of almost all Hungarian families. Beyond personal relations, the presence of almost half a million refugees in Hungary and their lack on the other side of the border had a fundamental impact on the lives of Hungarian communities both in Hungary and in the successor states in the Charpatian Basin.

Judit Beczássy saw her protagonists as victims of the Treaty of Trianon and exonerated them from every blame and responsibility. The ethical tragedy of the Deésy family inevitably gave an easily acceptable explanation for the refugee question, although the novel could not have significant attention. Rózsa Ignácz considered the question to be more complex and difficult. Instead of explaining the decisions of her characters always on the basis of their existence as a refugee she puts the emphasis on individual responsibility. Thus the novel became the critique of refugees and the Hungarian upper middle-class and irredentist cult at the same time. This is symbolized very well by her original choice of title and its later revision.

The portrayal of the characters' can be criticized especially in the case of Judit Becássy, but it is also certain that both authors drew attention to a less discussed question of an era which, as we saw, is not only about leaving your homeland by necessity but about being an alien or the possibilities and impossibilities of integration as well.

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