

Széchenyi, Kinga. 2007. “Megbélyegzettek. A kitelepítések tragédiája” [Stigmatized: The Tragedy of the Dislocations]. Pomáz: Kráter Műhely Egyesület. 614 pp., illus.

Hantó, Zsuzsa. 2010. “Kitiltott családok” [Banished Families]. Második, javított és bővített kiadás (Second, corrected and extended edition). Budapest: Magyar Ház Könyvek. 475 pp., illus. + CD.

Reviewed by Katalin Fenyves, Budapesti Kommunikációs és Üzleti Főiskola.

In Hungary between 1950 and 1953 more than twenty thousand people were subjected to forced relocation without any court order, only by administrative decision. More than half of the dislocated people were taken into *Hortobágy*'s 12 family camps in 1950. From May of 1951, the so called “class-enemies”, members of the upper class before the Second World War, were dislocated from Budapest and other rural cities, including aristocrats, former government officials, “lord lieutenants” (főispán), police officers or widows of policemen, and tradespeople were placed with “kulák” families. Thus, the authorities punished the host families, as well. The dislocated had to leave all their properties behind, report regularly to the police, while the authorities held headcounts and repeatedly searched their residence. Their new “homes” were extremely crowded, and often were nothing more than barns or auxiliary buildings. When, due to the amnesty following Stalin's death, those displaced could come back from the work camps and rural forced residencies, they were not allowed to live in the capital, they could not get their properties and jobs back, and they had to continue to work below their level of education. Their children did not have access to universities until 1963, and even in the following years, at best they had to apply numerous times to be admitted. Having recognized the hopelessness of their situation, many from the younger generation left the country in 1956.

In her book, *Stigmatized. The Tragedy of the Dislocations* (Megbélyegzettek. A kitelepítések tragédiája), Kinga Széchenyi undertook the task of exploring the history of the dislocated people from Budapest, while Zsuzsa Hantó's volume, *Banished Families* (Kitiltott családok) gives a summary of the four-part book series, *Outcasts* (Kitaszítottak), taking issue with the fate of the nearly ten thousand people who were dislocated to Hortobágy's twelve family camps. The CD published as an appendix to the book contains the complete database of the archive on the people dislocated from Budapest, information on all three of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian population swap (1945-1948), the dislocation of the German population of Hungary (1945-1950), and the internment camps in the former socialist countries, as well as legislative documents supporting the practice of dislocations, various maps and other illustrations.

Both volumes consist of a historical introduction, a series of narrative recollections by the dislocated, and various documents. Kinga Széchenyi unfolds the dislocations' political- and event history. She touches upon the ideological background and international context of the collective sanctions implemented after the WWII. She reviews the categories of the sanctions, elaborates on the methods of implementation, and on their direct and far-reaching consequences. Zsuzsa Hantó, first describes the stages of how the communist regime came into power, then discusses the causes and forms of the restrictions imposed on the kulaks, the establishment and operation of the family camps, and the circumstances surrounding the amnesty of 1953. The first half of her volume also includes Tamás Gyekiczky's take on the history of the Hungarian juridical system between 1945 and 1990, and Barbara Bank's and István Bandi's study on the Domiciliu obligatoriu (D.O.), that is, on the Romanian practices of dislocation.

The volumes are based on impressive archival research. Kinga Széchenyi's book is the first to publish archive documents on the Budapest-dislocations. Her 300 page-long introductory essay is like a book on its own. Széchenyi is an English teacher, literary translator and sculptor, and as such, she uncovers the collective sanctions following WWII with exceptional precision, using numerous pieces of relevant literature and international press material. She reveals, early on, in the dedication of her book that she and her family belonged to the persecuted, and she was dislocated from Budapest at the age of ten along with her sibling, mother and grandmother, and she dedicates her work to their memory. Zsuzsa Hantó's personal involvement, however, is not so apparent in her volume. Only in the acknowledgement's last paragraph does she hint at the painful memories of the shared past with the dislocated and thus she only implies that she also had her share of suffering. (14) Nevertheless, both authors intended their work to be an act of restoring history's hidden voices, a memento, but also an articulation of a moral and humane stance. In the subtitle of her book, Széchenyi talks about the tragedy of the dislocations, while Hantó, in her introduction, writes about the calvary of the banished families (13). "Maybe we can offer some comfort to the victims of the era even if we cannot bring justice for them" states Széchenyi in her introduction (VII). Their act is well justified. Surprisingly, despite the nearly 90 memoirs and documents listed in the two volumes' bibliographies, a comprehensive, analytical historical study on the various dislocations is yet to be published.

The two volumes contain almost 50 memoirs (written or transcribed), diary excerpts and letters, along with Széchenyi's recollections, first published in the *Magazine* of the daily *Magyar Nemzet* (Magyar Nemzet Magazin) on 2001 May 26, the fiftieth anniversary of the dislocations. Almost two-thirds of the subjects providing narratives about their experiences are women. Even though, the sociologist Hantó writes in her introduction that "the families' stories, recorded by the life-story method, were completed by documents and letters" (17), in the majority of the cases, it is still unclear who, when and where collected these narratives. Even when we are provided with some data about the texts, the context of their origin remains scantily explored; the questions of the interviews are often omitted, while the dates and places of origin are never provided. Széchenyi's book is similarly uninformative in this regard, as it contains summaries of interviews complete with questions, seemingly intact texts, but does not differentiate them methodically from already deceased authors' memoirs or from the letters by those peers she asked to provide their personal narratives about the dislocations. The context of the conduction of these interviews also remains hidden.

This seemingly methodological shortcoming, in fact, leads to more complex questions. Since we are not made aware of the actualities of the interviews, and there are numerous texts that either had been already published elsewhere or had been provided by the families of deceased authors, we can only vaguely deduce the authors' methodological intentions. Hence, we can only approach these subjective documents analyzed in the two volumes, from the perspective of the purpose they seem to serve. Regardless of their origin or genre, they all function as "in-depth, structured interviews", in which case, the remembering subject is seen primarily as mere provider of data. The conduction of such in-depth, structured interviews is reasonable in the absence of other sources and previous knowledge, when the research is likely to lead to new results, as it is the case here. However, this method is problematic if one considers that the narrator of the recollection is reduced to a one-dimensional "witness": the victim. In this way we are not gathering knowledge *about* the narrators of the recollections, but rather *from* them. And they are also aware of their own purpose, and of what is expected from them. And they thus tell their stories with this in mind. "When I started to put down my memories about the dislocations, I did not think that it would not be so simple" writes Tamás Farkas, one of the remembering subjects of Széchenyi's book. Presumably, he was asked by the author, although she does not offer any information about this. "These are more than 50

years old, fading memories, the memories of a back then twenty-year-old young man. And if we consider that man is prone to remember the good and forget the bad, at first try, I saw those two years through rose-colored spectacles. But since they were surely not so happy and careless, I got together with my brother, Egon, to collect those memories as accurately as we could” (470). Similarly, Gizella Somody reports in the excerpts of her diary, which she wrote between 1951 and 1953,

today I know that the dislocations were way more grim than they appear in my diary. No matter how much I would have liked to describe the events and our miserable, vulnerable position as realistically as possible, my words are involuntarily shot through with cheerful serenity and the joy of life. I am sure that the others, the adults, saw our situation differently, saw the bad things as worse and the good things as less good. (469)

Many of the younger generation, like Tamás Farkas and Gizella Somody, felt these unquestionably hard years to be less tragic than their parents and grandparents. It is not by chance either, that Farkas is one of the few sensitive to the hardships felt by the local people. In his narrative, he relates how the dislocated believed at first that the reason behind the austere accommodations in the state farms was their dislocated status, but how they “realized eventually that the local villagers had to live in similarly harsh conditions” (474). (From 1948, after the improvement following the war, living standards started to decline radically, falling way below the level of the last year of peace.) We have no way of knowing whether the others did not notice these dire conditions or the silence simply stems from the position of the remembering subject, who believes his recollections serve only one purpose: the restoration of the so far silent memories of the dislocation.

The fact that even though the three-quarters of the remembering subjects are women, but their voices are not “feminine”, can also be considered to be a result of this situation. Any search in these women’s memoirs for the alternative narrative that has begun to emerge in the last years, for the presence of those physical and emotional issues (and joys) accompanying women’s existence is futile. Such problems must have been present in their lives, however, since the dislocated were deprived not only of any local medical care, but even of specialist medical attention. As the autobiographical film by Ferenc Téglássy, *Never, Nowhere, for Nobody* (Soha, sehol, senkinek) demonstrates, women sometimes had to give birth alone, without any assistance from either doctors, midwives or adult acquaintances. In such dire circumstances, it is inconceivable that the hard physical work and grave deprivation would not lead to such consequences for women (and for their children, as well) as either spontaneous or induced abortions. Yet, there is no trace of reports on such cases in their memoirs. Women also remain silent about rape and domestic violence as well as about any conflict, dispute or quarrel within the group. Only one remembering subject, a man, Miklós Beliczay, former “lord lieutenant” (főispán) of Békés county, reports such incidents, although briefly, in his memoir written in 1958.

Those trying times provoked lapses of ethics on the part of our fellows, too. It was saddening indeed, when the thief of food, underwear, or whatnot that was left unattended sometimes turned out to be someone from the “higher circles”. Once when we were cleaning one of the open field latrine, we found the corpse of a live-born infant (339).

That reports about the gender- and familial roles are so rare can also be the effect of the narrative position of the “witness”. In these extraordinary circumstances, however, the traditional roles also had to be overturned. When housewives, mothers and adolescent girls had to take over the tasks of the breadwinner, it had to subvert the relations within the family.

Even though there are reports of such cases, the emotional reactions deriving from this altered situation remain hidden. The excerpts of Gizella Somody's diary make a refreshing exception, in which the 15-17 year-old adolescent girl stands out against the other remembering subjects not only with her passionate, straightforward and vehement voice, but also with "the self-awareness of her awakening femininity" (470). Even though, many mention how the dislocated people became reserved and introverted later, she is the only one who explains what kinds of experiences led to them becoming this guarded, and even distrustful.

I have not touched my diary for a week now. Why? Because my mother tore to shreds the one I copied beautifully in ink. Now I only have this ugly scribbling. She read it, and since she found a lot of embarrassing things, she tore it up out of fright. How angry she was, and what things she said! That I want to put the family deliberately in the way of execution, etc. etc. I became really furious. Why one always has to be afraid of everyone? Why would my true words get us into trouble? Everything happened just as I put them down. These things did happen, didn't they? They should be ashamed instead, that these could happen. And anyway, how did Mom dare to read it? A diary is not for anyone else's reading, even though that anyone else is a Mom (456).

In Széchenyi's book, many subjects talk also about their lives after the dislocations. Understandably, however, they remember these times primarily as victims. They could not return to their flats, or even to Budapest, or wherever their original homes were. The members of the parent generation had to work in badly-paid jobs far below their education, and for longer, since they were deprived of a pension. For the young adults, even secondary schools were hard to access, many were only admitted into one of the church schools, which later became yet another disadvantage for them. The most persistent ones, who wanted to go to university, tried to pass the entrance exams repeatedly and sometimes they were only successful at their eighth attempt; and then not always to the university or to the department where they wished to study. Many dislocated consider this lack of access to education the greatest affliction resulting from the dislocations.

Both volumes contextualize the events within the totalitarian narrative of the communist regime. This theory of a society seamlessly supervised by the party-state and its institutions of power, however, goes against the different (micro-historical) perspective of not only these narratives, but even some studies of the history of jurisprudence. One can find examples of humane exceptions not only amongst the police, local and state executives, but as Tamás Gyekiczky points out for instance, the regime could not fully enforce the concept of "class-enemies" even in the civil juridical practice. Furthermore, paradoxically this totalitarian theory undermines the exceptionally high moral expectations of the two authors. It does allow for the appellation and the public, moral impeachment of the perpetrators, which the dislocated have been awaiting in vain since 1953. However, if we think of the heinous crimes and atrocities in Hungary prior to and after 1945 merely as a foreign import and the acts of a small social group, we miss the main point: the consideration of those lingering peculiarities of the actual social majority's mentality and political culture that led to the coming into existence and maintaining of these dictatorial regimes.