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Make Yourself a Home: Hungarian Immigration and Life in Canada during the Great Depression

Abstract

Focusing on Hungarian immigration to Canada between 1924 and 1931, this paper aims to describe the immigrant experience and life during the Great Depression by juxtaposing family history research with critical scholarly works. Interdisciplinary in nature, the material of the article is organized around the motif of homemaking, and this theme is examined from the perspective of history, folklore studies and ethnography, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. In addition to critical scholarship on Hungarian and Central European emigration to North America, this essay relies on data gathered by the author in the spring of 2000 and on two field trips in late 2001 – early 2002 with social science methods including printed questionnaires and archival documents, on-the-spot participant observation, and elicited flashbacks documented in fieldwork notes. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations in the subtitles of this study are taken from answers in the questionnaires and have been retained in their original language and grammatical form to reflect the linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasies and the rich connotations displayed by the sources: József Tóth, born in 1915, and Laci Tóth, born in 1920.

Résumé

Cette thèse a pour but de décrire, en juxtaposant des recherches généalogiques avec des travaux académiques du sujet, les expériences et la vie des immigrants pendant la Crise de 1929-31, se concentrant sur les immigrants Hongrois au Canada de cette période. Interdisciplinaire en réalité, le matériel de ce document est organisé autour du thème d'installation du foyer, et ce sujet est analysé par la perspective de l'histoire, des études du folklore et de l'éthnographie, l'anthropologie, la sociologie et des études sur la culture. En addition d'une bourse sur l'immigration hongroise et d'Europe Centrale vers l'Amérique du Nord, cette thèse est basée sur des données recrutées par l'auteur au printemps de l'an 2000 et au cours de deux voyages thématiques en fin 2001 – début 2002 par des méthodes de science sociologiques comprenant des questionnaires imprimés, des documents archivés, observations des participants et des flashback arrachés et procédés en des notes d'enquête sur le terrain. Quand il n'est pas indiqué autrement, les quotations dans les sous-titres de cette thèse sont prises des questionnaires et elles sont en leur forme linguistique et grammaticale originale afin de refléter les caractéristiques culturelles et linguistiques et les connotations riches des deux sources: József Tóth, né en 1915 et Laci Tóth, né en 1920.

Introduction

“We are in this world to find a home in it,” is the answer the hero receives for his existential question from a rootless Black worker in Áron Tamási’s *Ábel Amerikában* (*Ábel in America*).¹ The setting is not accidental: Ábel, the archetypal Hungarian Szekler boy whose humor and cunning help him survive the disadvantages of being a member of an ethnic minority and the peasant class, must travel to America before he can find the meaning of life. He needs to do so in order to realize what *is* home by seeing what is *not* home: he has to go through the immigrant experience to recognize where he stands, what he identifies with, where his *home* is.

Ábel may be a fictional character, but as in all good writing, the features of his story are universal. Making a home is one of the overarching themes of human existence, whether it is the life of an individual or the history of a people. Still, the motif of homemaking as a beginning and an end is most apparent in the career of single persons or families. For scholars of identity, the immigrant’s experience of finding a home, because it by nature involves contrasts between native and foreign, is worthy of examination.

One such personal narrative is that of the Tóth family, the members of which emigrated from Hungary to Canada in the late 1920s - early 1930s, and made a home for themselves during the “dirty thirties” of the Great Depression. This study aims to place their personal narratives in the wider historical context by juxtaposing the findings of family history research with the results of scholarly examinations of the immigrant experience. Its central question is how and to what extent the features of the Hungarian community in interwar and Depression-time Canada appear in the Tóth family’s life and memories. As far as the author is concerned, the narratives in this paper will be neither exhaustive nor representative, but rather indicative and illustrative, of the Hungarian – and, as critical scholarship suggests, Central European – immigrant experience and life in the Canada of the Depression. Due to constraints on length, only selected parts of the study will be reproduced here.

1. Arrivals

- As I remember nobody kicked us in the butt (Laci)

Like thousands of Hungarian immigrants entering Canada under the 1925 Railway Agreement, József and Laci Tóth’s father, László, was taken by train to the Western Provinces. A major concern of the railroads contracted by the Canadian government to transport Central and Eastern European peasant laborers with permission to overstep immigration authorities was to make sure that emigrants actually went where they were supposed to, and officials made a point of reminding them at the time of boarding that they were to travel all the way to Winnipeg.² They also adopted the practice of getting a deposit of 25 dollars from their passengers to be refunded upon arrival.³ Unlike some who defied authorities and got off the train in Central

Canada to look for work or meet relatives,⁴ László obeyed regulations and arrived in Alberta in the fall of 1929.

Once immigrants reached their destination, they began looking for work. In Winnipeg the Hungarian government's Canadian Hungarian Immigrant Protection Bureau offered assistance in finding employment⁵ and Sámuel Zágonyi's travel account mentions another governmental office providing free housing for a short while.⁶ For the most part, however, Hungarians found only temporary farm work, and they drifted back to urban districts, many of them heading for the industrialized areas of the Central Provinces.⁷ László likewise realized that when the sowing of spring wheat was done, no other agricultural employment would be offered for months, and he traveled to Toronto. There he found work in a "hothouse", and read an advertisement in the paper about lands up for sale for 50 cents per acre in northern Ontario. This is how he arrived in Driftwood, purchased some land and spent the winter there. In a fairy tale-like episode László celebrated an uncharacteristically mild, snowless Christmas sitting on the turf and, enchanted by the warm spell, wrote to his family to come over to this land of Canaan. As his son Laci added, the snow arrived later.⁸ The following December a real Canadian winter greeted László's son József and his wife Margit.

2. Reception

- Az nagyon jó volt apám várt a kutyájával 4 ft [feet] hó volt abban ugrotunk bele nyári ruhában meg cipőben 40 fokos hideg volt. Tehát akkor megbántam hogy kijöttem [That was good my father greeted us with his dog there was 4 ft of snow we jumped into it with summer clothes and shoes on it was 40 degrees cold. I regretted coming over then] (József)

The temperature was 40 degrees below zero and József and his mother had only summer clothes on when they got off the train. They were received by László and taken on a sled to his dwelling.⁹ Recalling how they met his father at the train station, in the lines above József condenses the wide range of emotions sweeping through him at the reception in one single sentence. His words compose one of the most touching and richest parts of his narrative.

Around the latitude 47 degrees north, the Ontario settlement in which József arrived on December 3, 1930 consisted of about 10 houses.¹⁰ Both to him and to his brother Laci, who arrived a year later, the conditions in the village seemed appalling and dreary. Laci mentioned their house as a thing very disappointing to him at first sight.¹¹ From the picture the brothers paint of Driftwood it becomes clear that it was a bachelor settlement,¹² a collection of virgin and mostly wooded farms populated by people of various nationalities and equipped with only the essentials of work and survival. Driftwood seemed to be a place on which drifting immigrants pinned their hopes to start a life of their own.

For József and his mother, the arrival and reception in Canada was clearly traumatic. They had brought only what was absolutely necessary, for they

were advised they could get everything in their new country; and here there was nothing to make a home from.¹³ József expected to arrive on the shore of beautiful Lake Ontario, but Driftwood was cold and isolated. Both his own and his mother's first reaction was the wish to go back; but after a bitter discussion with László, they chose to face the future as one family.¹⁴

József's first year in Canada was spent working with his parents, an experience that did not endear the new country to him. Driftwood summers brought mosquitoes and blackflies, while the winters were bitterly cold with deep snow on the ground. The boy cried for a year, and "refused to learn as much English as 'hello'" until his brothers arrived.¹⁵

As for Laci and his younger brothers, upon arrival the joy over seeing their brother and parents and the natural beauty of their surroundings softened the boys' disappointment by the primitiveness of their new home.¹⁶ József, however, could not enjoy the comfort of his reunited family for long: as a young man and an immigrant of the Depression, he was soon forced to leave his family in search of work.

3. Trying times: the "Dirty Thirties"

- Én bejártam magamban [Kanadát] a vonat tetején munka után jártam Keletől nyugatig északról le délig bejártam [I travelled all around Canada on the top of trains looking for a job traveled from East to west from north to down south] (József)

A thorough study of the lifestyle of interwar Hungarian immigrants in Canada raises the question of to what extent their living conditions were the product of the pre-Depression 1920s and how much they were influenced by the world crisis itself. Some of the characteristics typically associated with the Great Depression seem to have been present before the onset of the calamity; it is perhaps legitimate to say that these were accentuated rather than created by the greatest economic recession of the 20th century. A brief account of 1920s immigrant life follows.

Hungarian peasant immigrants in the Canada of the 1920s faced a number of obstacles to success arising from their status, skills and circumstances, and this resulted in a peculiar way of life: that of the transient laborer. To begin with, the stay of Magyar sojourners was supposed to help the economy through their engagement in agricultural work on the Prairies. Rural work in the Canadian West meant plowing, sowing and harvesting as farm hands, clearing lands or working on sugar beet fields.¹⁷ The cycle of such employment was largely determined by the weather, the winters being slack periods,¹⁸ and even those immigrants who farmed their own land often hired themselves out for months at a time to do other work. To be sure, most arrivals were first hired to a farm,¹⁹ but as soon as their seasonal employment expired, it was natural for newcomers to leave homesteads in search of another job.

Other likely rural employers were mines, lumber camps, and railways.²⁰ These, however, often meant poor conditions, and workers were exposed to

the harsh Canadian weather. To most Hungarians, though they lacked the necessary training, factory work seemed to be more steady and sheltered, and the best paid.²¹ Since the majority of such jobs were offered in rapidly growing urban areas like the ones in Central Canada, Magyar immigrants headed from the rural West to the cities back east.²² According to Carmela Patrias, this drifting from the Prairie Provinces to an urbanized Ontario and Quebec was a general trend among foreign workers. Such a “secondary distribution” of immigrants, she claims, was preexisting to, but was also intensified by, the Great Depression.²³

City jobs may have paid better, but they were also more difficult to secure. For the ex-farmhands to be hired in construction, the service industries and manufacturing, it sometimes took bribery. Due to the significant labor surplus, exploitation was also rampant. Competition with native workers was not without tensions, and entry-level jobs were cut at the whims of the fluctuating market. The few women in the Hungarian population considered becoming a domestic servant the last resort.²⁴

Considering their situation in the job market, odds were against Hungarian immigrants even before the Depression for a variety of reasons. Many were indebted for their passage, and therefore had to take whatever employment was available; being unskilled workers excluded the majority of them from competing for high-paying jobs; and all had a language barrier difficult to transcend without formal instruction.²⁵ The above reasons compelled Magyar laborers to adopt the transient lifestyle of migrant workers.

Such a life was characterized by an increased geographical mobility combined with unstable earnings. News of prospective employment reached the migrant worker through word of mouth or correspondence,²⁶ or perhaps he read it in one of the contemporary Hungarian-language papers like the widely circulated *Kanadai Magyar Ujság* [Canadian Hungarian News] headquartered in Winnipeg.²⁷ Even for unfounded or vague accounts, Magyar transients driven by economic necessity and restlessness set off in groups,²⁸ and attempted to reach the new location by any form of cheap transportation. Hoping to save the train fare, they mostly traveled on top of trains or in empty freight cars. “Riding the rods” was a formative experience, and such modes of traveling came to be called “dzsumpolás”, the *Hunglish* word coming from the English expression “jumping trains”. Weak and cold, hundreds of migrant workers died and hundreds were injured yearly by freezing or falling under the wheels when getting on or off train cars.²⁹ With all its dangers, catching a train to and from the Prairies became a routine of Magyar laborers each year at harvest time.³⁰

Such was the lifestyle of Hungarian immigrants in the 1920s, and the Depression found them on the road or working in mining, lumbering, factories, construction and the agriculture, and living in boarding houses, on homesteads or in company housing. While their status as peasants and immigrants relegated them to the lowest rungs of Canadian society, the recession made them doubly disadvantaged in a country struggling to provide even for its native population.

Making a living in the Canada of the “dirty thirties” was difficult for all, but on few social groups did the Depression weigh as heavily as on the immigrants. The October 1929 Wall Street Crash spelled unemployment for 25% of Canada’s workforce,³¹ and the Hungarian Consul General in 1930 estimated that among Magyars this ratio was 65%.³² In manufacturing recent immigrants were the last to be hired and the first to be fired.³³ As prices of land, crops and firewood dropped, farming became unprofitable. People tried to spend as little as possible and such reduction in purchasing power further aggravated the economic crisis. Those who incurred debts and could not pay were evicted and had to join the swelling ranks of the unemployed. Some immigrants had borrowed money to pay for their passage, and, as a result of foreclosure on their estates, became separated from their families back in Hungary for years to come.³⁴

Although neither the Canadian authorities nor non-governmental organizations were insensitive to the plight of migrant workers, their relief measures were fraught with problems. In 1932, along with providing public relief, the Department of National Defence tried to ease the country’s misery by setting up unemployment camps where the poor could work on government construction projects for room and board complemented by a daily 20-cent wage, but such locations were remote and supplied only bare subsistence.³⁵ Others who applied for relief in the cities were required to show proof of their long-term residency or Canadian citizenship.³⁶ Immigrant transient workers, who in the United States were labeled “address unknown,”³⁷ were able to do neither. Some Magyars were deported back to Hungary for being a public burden, which made others reluctant even to ask for help.³⁸

Like Hungarian peasant immigrants in general, the Tóth brothers were hampered in their economic advancement by their lack of education and training. At the time of emigrating, József had completed his 7th grade, while Laci was in his 4th year of public school, which he managed to complement this with 6 months’ of schooling in Canada.³⁹ Initially both brothers also worked with their parents for a few years. József did lumbering, while Laci cut and hauled pulpwood for paper manufacturing.⁴⁰

While Laci stayed with his family until 1940 when he joined the Canadian army,⁴¹ in the winter of 1933 eighteen-year old József left home in search of a job, and, joining a group of about 300 transients heading out West, he began to live the life of the masses of migrant workers.⁴² He did harvesting and threshing in Saskatchewan, and subsequently worked in carpentry, manufacturing and farming.⁴³ Receiving news of a job opening he got on the move, and in order to spare the price of the fare he often rode on the roof of freight trains in numbing cold, risking freezing or falling under the wheels and losing his life. His memories of this transient period are so vivid that even some 70 years later he claimed he could explain how to jump on and off a moving train without getting hurt.⁴⁴ József’s words in the subtitle to this section were an answer to a rather naïve query from the researcher concerning his travels in Canada.⁴⁵ Probably the darkest years in his life, these times ripened him ultimately and irreversibly.

Whether the Depression only intensified preexisting problems or created new ones, the period of the 1920s and '30s left a lasting imprint in the people Ferenc Bakó calls "öreg kanadálok" (Old Canadian Hungarians) – Magyar peasants who arrived in Canada during the interwar years.⁴⁶ He argues that most of these newcomers were characterized by a flexibility that allowed them to work outside of their trades in order to stay afloat in Canada, and that the recession pushed them to the limit when it stripped them of much of the old country's social conventions and standards in the fight for survival.⁴⁷ Carmela Patrias also touches on the psychological and social effects of a migratory lifestyle. A speculative account of their points follows.

Much of the Depression era for migrant workers was characterized by isolation and instability, and for most of them the world crisis made it impossible to create a home. Many guest workers who intended to return to Hungary were unable to do so because they lacked the financial means; others were denied family reunification because they could not prove that they would be able to provide for their wives and children; and all those with loved ones living in Hungary were deprived of the family's presence as a viable economic unit.⁴⁸ Instead they had to lead a dangerous and humiliating life, in the centre of which stood the daily meals.⁴⁹ People who had grown up to respect dignified labor and to attain its fruits now had to stand in bread lines, regularly register for aid and information on jobs,⁵⁰ and again and again explain why they could not support themselves and their families. Many of them found themselves unable to pay back the loan for their passage and send remittances to their relatives, a goal they had set for themselves and were expected to achieve. Tensions between their dreams, self-image and reality created in Hungarians a great deal of anxiety, guilt, bitterness and loneliness. Some withdrew from society, others committed suicide, while still others turned to the ethnic community for peace and self-respect.⁵¹ For those who emigrated from Hungary to Canada in the 1920s, the first period of their new life was at least as difficult as, if not more straining than, their existence in their old country. The second half of the 1920s and the Great Depression brought an instability to the existence of recent immigrants that virtually made it a continuation of their arduous journey. The waning twenties and the "dirty thirties" prolonged the immigrant experience for Hungarians in Canada.

4. Marriage and families

Creating a new home takes more than a steady job or a piece of land; although these are important requirements, for most people a home means a family. Establishing a family begins with finding a partner, and like in many other respects, the Tóth brothers here made different, but successful, choices.

For the immigrants living in Canada, the interwar period was not a favorable one concerning the finding of a future spouse. The male-to-female ratio of Canada's foreign-born population was 125 to 100 in 1921;⁵² for Hungarians, in 1931 this proportion was some 17,000 men to 8,000 women.⁵³ Although family migration and reunification made for the entry of 4,700 persons between 1931 and 1941,⁵⁴ the shift from single sojourners to families had

barely begun, and in terms of the percentage of males in the Canadian diaspora Magyars were surpassed only by Slovaks.⁵⁵

- Az erdőben nem is voltak nők hozzám valok... [In the woods there were no women for me] (József)

With so few women in the Hungarian ethnic group, one's chances of getting a wife were largely determined by his place of residence. Hungarian settlements were in a flux for much of the interwar period: the migratory lifestyle of large numbers of men created temporary communities which disappeared as soon as their employment terminated. The disruptive force of transient work was accompanied by a trend to gravitate to cities and old ethnic centres offering steady jobs; according to N. F. Dreisziger, many of the Hungarian communities in southern Ontario were formed by the interaction of these two tendencies.⁵⁶

The dynamics between settlement patterns, living arrangements and family life is exposed by a number of observations made by scholars of Hungarian immigration to Canada. According to Ferenc Bakó, Hungarian residential organization of the period consisted of permanent colonies created by former waves of immigration, and temporary centres or neighborhoods. Researching the social forms of living, he found that while in rural areas Magyars lived on farms, in the cities many stayed in boarding houses. The latter arrangement was a famous feature of Hungarian North America, and was made up of a group of 30 to 50 boarders and a family maintaining the house. The workers' hostel-like structure was a convenient organization for those who wanted to work and save money by minimizing their living expenses: boarders ate and slept in shifts, and they paid the owner for the board, rent and utilities.⁵⁷

While Patrias implies that the boarding house was as much an ethnic small business as a response to social, psychological and cultural demands,⁵⁸ she and Bakó both see the institution as a product of chain migration.⁵⁹ For Bakó, the "burdosház" is a venue where the framework of rural Hungarian society is applied: with the entrepreneur couple at its core, the interwar boarding house may be regarded as a remnant of the traditional extended family.⁶⁰ Indeed, people living in such hostels often called the landlady "auntie" or "grandmother",⁶¹ thus creating quasi-familial ties. Initially, boarding houses may have served as a springboard for relatives, friends and other fellow ethnics who recently arrived to Canada.⁶² An example of such an arrangement is the literary representation of a Winnipeg Hungarian boarding house in John Marlyn's novel *Under the Ribs of Death*.⁶³

The boarding house system may have been economical and culturally comforting, but it was far from being a real home. Overcrowding forced boarders to take turns in everyday activities,⁶⁴ and it invaded everyone's privacy. The arrangement of many men living together without women created sexual tensions, with the attention and desires of the boarders riveted on the one "missus"⁶⁵ in the house, who was the landlord's wife. Folklorists as well as immigration scholars noted stories of her romantic involvement with one of the guests who became the "star boarder", and sometimes ran

away with the woman and the money.⁶⁶ Playing the role of a wife-and-mother in an environment exclusively comprised of single males⁶⁷ must have been very difficult and rather dangerous for Magyar women.

Because workingmen had few venues where they could meet single women, institutions offering such a chance became important. Social events such as dances, picnics, theater and youth groups, religious and cultural festivals and “Hungarian days” were very popular and attracted Magyars from near and far.⁶⁸ The interest of the young adult population in these activities was a reason for the similarities in the services offered by ethnic organizations of widely different ideological backgrounds and political leanings.

Finding a mate could take various forms for Hungarians. During the pre-World War One sojourner era, some men may have returned to Hungary to marry.⁶⁹ Those who already had a wife living in the old country could postpone going home or could try to bring their families over. The several-year pause in the relationship caused by a trip to North America sometimes ended in permanent separation or divorce.⁷⁰ Hungarian bachelor immigrants without a partner could opt for blind matches: they could order old country “picture brides” by correspondence and the exchange of photographs.⁷¹ The story of one of Linda Dégh’s respondents is illustrative of the problems with such relationships: here a farmer started corresponding with World War II DP (Displaced Person) women from Hungary, and two of his matches failed before he settled for a marriage of convenience.⁷² For Hungarian men aged 25 to 39, who comprised more than half of Ontario’s Magyar population, it was difficult to find an ethnic spouse, and only two-thirds of the entire diaspora actually did.⁷³

Among the factors influencing the choice of a mate, John Kosa mentions as important considerations wealth and the “sib” (a social unit having the nature of a quasi or extended clan and comprising the nuclear family and extended family, including in-laws and godparents and their families). Whether the familial system actually determined marriage is not clear: Carmela Patrias also notes that there was a preference to settle close to and marry one’s “földi” (someone from the same geographical unit in Hungary), but she also points out that Magyars in interwar Canada had little chance to do the latter, and that the available data shows that it was a shared *nationality* that decided mate selection to the extent that it even produced a high number of interdenominational marriages.⁷⁴ Wealth, however, as Laci’s case shows, could indeed make or break a match.

- ...[E]gy Borsodi Kislány elvetem mert meg szeretem és elvetem
[A Borsod lassie I married because I fell in love and I married her]
(József)

Of the two brothers József was the first to marry: after coming to work in the Tobacco Belt of southern Ontario in the late 1930s, he married an immigrant Hungarian girl, Gizella in 1940. As it is communicated in his answers, his primary reason for marrying her was love, but he also states that he intended to have an ethnic spouse, because he wanted to have a Hungarian family.⁷⁵

Laci also hoped to marry for love, and he also had his eyes on a Magyar girl. During the courtship, however, it turned out that she wanted “to get a thousand-dollar engagement ring”. When he heard this, the young man abandoned his plans to propose, and the disappointment made him stay away from ethnic girls.⁷⁶ In the life history of Laci, this possibly exaggerated episode signals the tensions arising from the immigrant’s dream to “make it” in the economic and social spheres, and the grim reality of the Depression.

Repelled by the “niggardliness” of Hungarian women, Laci, who felt more comfortable in Canada than his brother, chose a different way culturally when he married a Canadian girl in 1944.⁷⁷ He met Cecilia while he was serving in the Canadian army on Cape Breton Island. The girl’s father was from the French island of Miquelon off the coast of Nova Scotia, and she also had some English and Irish ancestry.

When Laci learned that he was to be deployed in Europe, he had no choice but to take care of his pregnant wife by taking her to live with his parents in southern Ontario. It was here that Cecilia spent two years while Laci served overseas. Only her mother-in-law spoke some English, so the girl had to learn Hungarian enough to understand it, which she still does. Living and raising her daughter Margaret in a non-English household required of Cecilia a great deal of love and energy. Her burden was lightened only when Laci returned and they moved to a farm in Port Robinson.⁷⁸

5. The present: Auld Lang Syne

Most researchers of ethnic life agree that late 20th - early 21st century Hungarian Canada is stagnant. Although there have been some arrivals from Central and Eastern European countries where Magyars are a minority, the now aging 1956 refugees were the last great wave of Hungarian migration to Canada.⁷⁹ As a result of the lack of reinforcements, the Hungarian community in Canada shows “signs of fatigue and old age”.⁸⁰ As early as the 1950s, John Kosa predicted that Magyars in Canada would, like a chalk island, disappear “in the natural cycle of human life”.⁸¹ N. F. Dreisziger expands on a similar metaphor when he points out that Hungarian settlements which were by a visiting Magyar priest compared to “rose-gardens on ice-floes” may be as rich but just as short-lived.⁸²

While in the interwar period two-thirds of Canadian Hungarians married within their ethnic group,⁸³ subsequent generations increasingly intermarried with mostly English or French spouses, these being the dominant ethnicities of the country.⁸⁴ Higher levels of education⁸⁵ prolonged the exposure of Magyar children to majority values. As a result, the second generation may have acquired ethnic culture, but it became largely nominal, and they did not attain leading positions in Hungarian organizations.⁸⁶ With the Hungarian-born generations advancing in years, native language use in the home is on the decline. Some present-day Magyar communities in Ontario may be still relatively untouched by English and French Canadian culture, but in Saskatchewan, a historically “Hungarian” province, members of the 3rd and 4th generations have fully assimilated.⁸⁷

From the accounts of historians, sociologists and ethnographers, it can be concluded that in terms of cultural preservation, the absence of a new exodus from Hungary since 1956 has resulted in a sorry state for Magyar Canada. Although earlier it experienced several rebirths of Magyar folk and art life, at the turn of the 20th and 21st century the Hungarian community is rapidly losing its ethos and assimilating into Canadian culture.

7. At home

- *Kanada a mi hazánk [Canada is our home]* (József)
- *Canada is yes my home* (Laci)

Although their definitions of their identity differ substantially – József considers himself a *Canadian Hungarian*, while Laci a *Canadian of Hungarian origin* – the Tóth brothers' answers to questions regarding the issue of discrimination concurred in claiming that they have rarely experienced it in the workplace or in private life.⁸⁸ Laci mentioned that he met some French Canadians who called Magyars "foreigners" in their language, and once in a heated argument he was called a "friggin' Hunky".⁸⁹

The two brothers paint a very attractive picture of their new country. When describing the disadvantages and advantages of life in Canada, József considers the language – and especially English spelling – a stumbling block, and adds that if one works hard, he can maintain a good standard of living. Laci points out that the vastness of the land and the sparseness of the population are great assets, and they both agree that their decision to migrate to Canada was profitable.⁹⁰ Although József made more efforts to associate with Hungarians,⁹¹ both he and Laci assert that Canada is their home because they have vivid memories of it, they established a family, raised their children and acquired their wealth there.⁹² They also have both acquired practical knowledge of the country as opposed to their children's official schooling.⁹³

Conclusion

Time inevitably mystifies personal history: while it sharpens some scenes, it blurs others. It gives rise to anecdotes and develops a distinct family saga beautified by its very subjectivity. However lacking, exaggerated and conflicting in facts, individual narratives still remain a touching and vivid field of history, because they attempt to grasp human life in time. Placing them in the historical context established by critical scholarship will continue to be as rewarding as it is challenging.

The history of the Tóth family shows how their life was impacted by the immigrant experience and the formative force of the Great Depression. In addition to their personal memories and family anecdotes, the world views, identities, behavior and lifestyle of Laci, József and their descendants all testify to the significance and consequences of Central European and Hungarian transcontinental migration and the biggest economic crisis of the 20th century. Thus the life of the Tóth brothers points beyond itself: it is an example of the human struggle to make a home in the world.

Endnotes

1. Tamási *Ábel*, 560.
2. Dégh 236, 262, Dreisziger “Immigrant Fortunes and Misfortunes”, 35.
3. Patrias 61. Dégh and Patrias differ as to whether the money was used to gain entry, and/or as a railroad deposit.
4. Dégh 236.
5. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 98.
6. Dreisziger “Immigrant Fortunes and Misfortunes”, 35.
7. Patrias 61.
8. Laci, personal research notes.
9. József to question 27.
10. József to question 27.
11. Laci to question 32.
12. József, personal research notes.
13. Laci, personal research notes.
14. József, personal research notes.
15. József, personal research notes.
16. Laci, personal research notes.
17. Patrias 62.
18. Bakó 58.
19. Dreisziger “Rose-Gardens on Ice-Floes”, 242.
20. Bakó 62.
21. Patrias 65.
22. Dreisziger “Rose-Gardens on Ice-Floes”, 242, Patrias 65.
23. Patrias 64-65.
24. Patrias 65-68.
25. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 114, Patrias 64.
26. Patrias 65.
27. Bakó 60, Patrias 73, 137.
28. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 114, Bakó 60.
29. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 114, Bakó 58-60, Patrias 63, “Relief for Unemployed Transients, Hearings” in David A. Shannon (ed.) *The Great Depression*, 59.
30. Patrias 70.
31. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 139.
32. Patrias 71.
33. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 141, Patrias 71.
34. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 141.
35. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 142, Patrias 72.
36. Patrias 72.
37. Newton D. Baker, “Homeless Wanderers Create a New Problem for America” in David A. Shannon (ed.) *The Great Depression*, 55.
38. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 141.
39. József and Laci to question 36.
40. József to questions 34, 36, Laci to question 36.
41. Laci, personal research notes.

42. József to question 34, personal research notes.
43. József to questions 3, 36.
44. József, personal research notes.
45. József to question 46.
46. Bakó 9-10. Bakó also includes in this group those arriving around the turn of the century.
47. Bakó 62.
48. Patrias 71.
49. Thomas Minehan, "Boy and Girl Tramps in America" in David A. Shannon (ed.) *The Great Depression*, 61.
50. Bakó 62.
51. Patrias 72-74.
52. Burnet et al 84.
53. Dreisziger et al 110.
54. Dreisziger et al 144.
55. Patrias 77.
56. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 146.
57. Bakó 66, 68, Patrias 83-84.
58. Patrias 83.
59. Patrias 34, Bakó 67.
60. Bakó 68, 69.
61. Burnet et al 88.
62. Bakó 69, Patrias 84, Kosa 16.
63. John Marlyn, *Under the Ribs of Death*
64. Patrias 85.
65. Term from Burnet et al 88, in Dániel et al 180 *miszisz* in Hunglish.
66. Patrias 85, Bakó 69.
67. Burnet et al 88.
68. Patrias 103, 126, Burnet et al 157 and Patrias 192 on the first Hungarian day in Welland.
69. Burnet et al 84.
70. Kosa 44.
71. Burnet et al 84, Kosa 48.
72. Dégh 52-53, 117, 119, 150.
73. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 110, 149.
74. Patrias 78-80.
75. József to question 40.
76. Laci, personal research notes.
77. Laci to question 40.
78. Laci and Cecilia, personal research notes.
79. Dreisziger "Rose-Gardens on Ice-Floes", 254.
80. Dreisziger "Rose-Gardens on Ice-Floes", 252.
81. Kosa 9.
82. Dreisziger "Rose-Gardens on Ice-Floes", 239.
83. Dreisziger et al. *Struggle and Hope*, 149.
84. Bakó 296-298, Kosa 58, Burnet et al. 98.
85. Burnet et al. 97.

86. Kosa 94, Bakó 296-298.
 87. Dreisziger "Rose-Gardens on Ice-Floes", 253.
 88. Laci and József to questions 48 and 41.
 89. Laci, personal research notes.
 90. Laci and József to question 47.
 91. József to question 42.
 92. Laci and József to question 43.
 93. Laci and József to question 45.

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