

ERDÉLYI FIATALOK: THE HUNGARIAN VILLAGE AND HUNGARIAN IDENTITY IN TRANSYLVANIA IN THE 1930's

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The Erdélyi Fiatalok (Transylvanian Youth), a group of young Hungarian intellectuals in Transylvania, undertook in the 1930s “to know” the Hungarian village. They did so in order to know themselves better as Hungarians because they were convinced that the essential qualities of the “race” had been preserved in their purest form in the village, far removed from the cosmopolitan, modern city. Just as urgent, in their minds, was the need to establish close links between the intellectuals and the rural population, if the Hungarian community in Transylvania was to survive. Their way of achieving their goals was to carry out the systematic investigation of village life in all its diverse aspects and to base their work on up-to-date sociological theory and research methods. While drawing on the experience of their Hungarian colleagues elsewhere, they were perhaps most indebted to the ideas and practices developed by the sociological school of Bucharest, headed by Dimitrie Gusti, professor of sociology at the University. Gusti and his team of researchers welcomed the participation of the Transylvanian Hungarians in their work, and the resulting common labors offered an encouraging example of Romanian–Hungarian cooperation. In the end, the initiatives of the Erdélyi Fiatalok were thwarted by events beyond their control and perhaps by their own idealism.

Keywords: village research, ethnic identity, race, minority, peasantry, intellectuals, young generation, sociology

I

My paper, broadly speaking, is about the self-styled “new generation” of Hungarian intellectuals in Transylvania who, in the aftermath of World War I, took it upon themselves as a moral and national responsibility to preserve the Hungarian community in Transylvania, now a minority, and foster its progress. This paper, then, is concerned with matters of identity and minority status.¹

My perspective on such broad questions here must necessarily be limited. I shall, therefore, focus on a single, though central, aspect of the matter: the relationship that a significant portion of the new generation cultivated with the vil-

lage. It was here, in the countryside, that they were certain they would find the solutions to the urgent ethnic and social problems that preoccupied them. Known as the Transylvanian Youth (*Erdélyi Fiatalok*), from the name of the review they founded in Kolozsvár in 1930, they became engaged in pioneering investigations of the Transylvanian Hungarian village.² The inspiration for such an undertaking owed much to the extensive scholarly, literary, and polemical writings on the peasantry and to the tradition of village research in Hungary. Yet at the same time, the approach of the Transylvanian Youth to the village and its inhabitants drew creatively on the monographic method of village research developed by Dimitrie Gusti, professor of sociology at the University of Bucharest, and his teams of investigators. It was a debt they readily acknowledged.

II

The Transylvanian Youth were composed of university and some gymnasium students, mainly from middle-class families, who formed a new organization in 1930 in order to deal effectively with what they regarded as the most critical issues facing the Hungarian community in Transylvania. Their immediate aims were to formulate a coherent plan of social action and to instill in all their supporters a sorely needed sense of purpose. They grasped the importance of the media for their enterprise, and they intended their review, *Erdélyi Fiatalok*, which was published between 1930 and 1940, most of the time as a quarterly, as an instrument to inform a wider public about their vision of the future and their work to achieve it, and, no less important, to rouse fellow intellectuals to action. In all their endeavors they were guided by a sense of mission notable for its idealism and integrity. Their high principles owed much to their religious upbringing, for the majority in 1930 were members of Calvinist (*Ifjúsági Keresztyén Egyesület*), Unitarian (*Dávid Ferenc Egylet Ifjúsági Köre*), and Roman Catholic (*Az Erdélyi Római Katolikus Népszövetség Egyetemi és Főiskolai Szakosztálya*) youth organizations.³

Among the most prominent figures of the Transylvanian Youth were: Béla Jancsó (1903–1967), writer and literary critic and an editor of *Erdélyi Fiatalok* who advocated an agrarian third way of development and urged the adoption of Dimitrie Gusti's monographic investigation of the village;⁴ Dezső László (1904–1973), a founder and chief editor of *Erdélyi Fiatalok* who urged new foundations and a new minority ideology for the Hungarians of Transylvania;⁵ Béla Demeter (1910–1952), the director of the Transylvanian Youth's village seminar who established direct contact with Dimitrie Gusti and helped to popularize his ideas in the Transylvanian Hungarian press; and Imre Mikó (1911–1977), a lawyer, public intellectual, and political figure.⁶ Among their close associates were the Unitarian

pastor Ferenc Balázs (1901–1937) and the sociologist József Venczel (1913–1972), whose activities will be discussed later.

Two issues were of paramount importance to the Transylvanian Youth. The first was their own status as the new generation and the role they should play in both their own community and in Greater Romania. They were acutely conscious of the special burdens they bore as a minority in a state dominated by its Romanian majority, but they were determined to be forthright and impartial spokesmen for their generation.⁷ The second issue that defined them was intimately connected to the first and had to do with the village and the urgent need they felt to bring peasants and intellectuals together. It was the only means they could see of assuring the continuity of the Hungarian race. It is worth noting here that the concept of "race" led to spirited polemics among the Transylvanian Youth. Although the biological view of race advocated by the Hungarian novelist Dezső Szabó, who was popular with them, had some support, important voices, notably those of Ferenc Balázs and Zsigmond Vita,⁸ an editor of *Erdélyi Fiatalok*, insisted on speaking of race as a spiritual and cultural community. Their view reflected the thinking of a majority of the center Transylvanian Youth. In the minds of all, village, race, and minority status could not be separated, and the defense of them supplied the moral sustenance that lay behind all their endeavors.

Another objective pursued by the Transylvanian Youth was unity within their own ranks, but in this endeavor they were largely unsuccessful. From the beginning differences of opinion over the direction they should take and the goals they should achieve proved insurmountable. Antagonisms long held in check broke into the open at a conference of Hungarian youth in Kolozsvár in the fall of 1932. The factionalism was aggravated by disagreements over how to deal with the effects of the world economic depression and the growing political instability in Romania in the early 1930s. The left, led by János Demeter, a lawyer, objected to the group's emphasis on agriculture and urged adoption of a broader, more aggressive, more modern development strategy. Other leftists denounced the center's advocacy of class conciliation and called for class struggle, instead. They left the Transylvanian Youth and gathered around *Korunk* (Our Era), the ideological monthly, and *Falvak Népe* (Village Folk), the political organ of the left, both of which were under Communist influence. On the right the Catholic youth were at odds with what they thought was the Protestant character of the Transylvanian Youth. As an alternative they demanded adoption of a Christian socialist program based on the Church's social teachings. Some of them eventually joined *Hitel* (Credit), a social-political and cultural quarterly, and later monthly, founded in Kolozsvár in 1936, which pursued national objectives based on the spirit of Count István Széchenyi's program of the nineteenth-century Reform Era. On behalf of the center, which remained in place and kept control of *Erdélyi Fiatalok* and preserved the agrarian focus of the Transylvanian Youth, Béla Jancsó and Dezső

László reformulated the group's program in 1933. They declared allegiance to "Transylvanian realities" and to a third way of development that was neither capitalist nor socialist.⁹ Discernible in their thought and that of their friend Ferenc Balázs was "Transzilvanizmus", the idea that Transylvania, because of its unique character, was the proper framework for the continued development of the Transylvanian Hungarian community.¹⁰

The Transylvanian Youth were by no means alone in their advocacy of the Hungarian peasant and their exploration of the Hungarian village. They were one of a number of agrarian currents that invigorated Hungarian intellectual life in the interwar period. Besides drawing inspiration from the populist writers like László Németh and Gyula Illyés, the Transylvanian Youth were deeply indebted to the writings of the novelist Zsigmond Móricz (1879–1942) and the poet Endre Ady (1877–1919), who taught them that the most important task for the new generation was the strengthening of the Hungarian village. Móricz wrote poignantly about the hardships of village life caused by the ravages of modern economic growth in his novel *Sárarany* (1910; Pure Gold), which was a favorite work of the new generation. So were many of Ady's poems, which portrayed the existence of the Hungarians as precarious because they had settled in a Europe that was utterly foreign to them. They took seriously his warning that they were in danger of losing their very essence. These were ideas that spoke movingly and somberly to the new generation, who were struggling with feelings of their own about being strangers in a land that had once been Hungarian.¹¹ Another, perhaps even more provocative source of inspiration was the novelist Dezső Szabó (1879–1945). The son of a city official, he captured the imagination of the Transylvanian Youth in his most influential novel, *Az elsodort falu* (1919; The Village Swept Away). It is the story of a well-educated son of a poor gentry family who returns from a failed sojourn in the city, portrayed as immoral and inauthentic, to his native village, where at last he feels at peace in this simple, uncorrupted "cradle of the Hungarian race".¹² Szabó's romantic enthusiasm, his expressionist rhetoric, and his admonition that the preservation of the race depended, in the final analysis, on the peasantry inspired the Transylvanian Youth and helped to sustain them in the difficult early years of their village work. Equally inspiring was the pamphlet-proclamation drawn up in 1930 by the poet Attila József and Dániel Fábrián, of the Bartha Miklós Társaság in Budapest, *Ki a faluba!* (Out to the Village), which declared that every social and economic question was ultimately a peasant question.¹³

The Transylvanian Youth also made common cause with the Sarló movement of young Hungarian intellectuals in Czechoslovakia (Slovakia). Both groups agreed that the peasantry formed the healthiest stratum of Hungarian society, and they expressed their joint determination to do all they could to preserve Hungarian culture in the successor states of Central Europe.¹⁴ Edgár Balogh, one of the leaders of Sarló, wrote in *Erdélyi Fiatalok* that young intellectuals had a duty to ac-

quaint themselves with the laboring classes, both rural and urban,¹⁵ and he and Béla Jancsó corresponded in 1930 about the desirability of cooperation among Hungarian minority organizations in Central Europe.¹⁶ Initially, then, relations between the two organizations were close, but when Sarló's leaders became more radical in their social and economic objectives, the Transylvanian Youth drew back.

Despite shared enthusiasms and aims with other Hungarian groups, the Transylvanian Youth occupied a distinct place among Hungarian agrarian currents. They combined a commitment to the village and to the investigation of their own identity with new approaches in sociology, and perhaps more than any other Hungarian group they drew on the achievements of Dimitrie Gusti's school of sociology and strove to apply his methods in their own village work. Yet, however much they may have benefited from the thought and experience of others, both Hungarian and Romanian, they were determined to base their own projects and the means of accomplishing them on Transylvanian realities.

III

Those who occupied the center of the Transylvanian Youth after the split of 1932 continued to make the peasant the main object of their attention. They viewed him in historical perspective and judged his role in the contemporary social and moral development of the Transylvanian Hungarian community as crucial. Idealistic and even romantic, they were certain that the fate of all the Hungarians of Transylvania ultimately lay in the village. In the circumstances prevailing in the Romania of the 1930s the village presented itself as a sturdy defense against the outside world,¹⁷ not just the world of other ethnicities but, for some, at least, the world of the city. Some of the Transylvanian Youth thought of the village and its peasant inhabitants as offering a healthy alternative to the urban world, which they saw as burdened by modernity and materialism.

Not surprisingly, the Transylvanian Youth perceived a close connection between a vigorous peasantry, the minority status of the Hungarians, and the preservation of the Hungarian community. They valued the peasants as the one class in Hungarian society whose roots went back far into the past, a "pure-blooded", "elemental" force whose own welfare could not but determine the future of all the Hungarians of Transylvania. One commentator put the matter in stark terms: "Our existence or non-existence depends solely on the Transylvanian village."¹⁸ Another observer described the village as a defense against the dissolving force of the cosmopolitan city, thereby transforming itself into a kind of rural autarchy that would save the Hungarian race from assimilation.¹⁹

As intellectuals who assumed that they were by right the natural and even the spiritual leaders of the peasant majority, the Transylvanian Youth became obsessed with the need to know the village and to understand its inhabitants. In their minds, knowledge of the village meant knowledge of themselves as Hungarians, for where better to plumb the nation's essence, they asked, than in the authentic Hungarian countryside. If they were successful in their mission and created close bonds with the rural majority, then, they were certain that the resulting spiritual unity would secure the future of the race.

One of the persistent anxieties of the Transylvanian Youth was their lack of knowledge of the village, or, as Béla Demeter put it in 1932, the "yawning gap" between the intellectuals and the people.²⁰ Young people, even those from the village, he complained, did not know the village or grasp the differences between the village and the city, and he wondered how such deficiencies could be remedied. Perhaps, he thought, the answer lay in the creation of a new intellectual leading class, one that would be fully attuned to the true essences of Transylvanian Hungarian society.

The faith of the Transylvanian Youth in the peasantry by no means diminished their sense of their own worth. They thought it their solemn duty to impart to the peasant the benefits of education and all those forward-looking ideas of which they themselves were the chosen guardians and purveyors. Thus, they came to the village not merely to gather information. They were determined also to perform good works, a mission that undoubtedly owed much to the religious foundations of the Transylvanian Youth.

IV

The Transylvanian Youth's encounter with Dimitrie Gusti and his monographic method of studying the village was decisive in guiding their approach to the peasantry. They were attracted to Gusti's project, in part, because it offered them a proven means of becoming acquainted with this essential source of the racial essence, of the spirit of community, and thus of enabling them to deepen their knowledge of themselves as Hungarians. To succeed in their village work they readily admitted their urgent need of proper organization and training. Before they had begun to absorb Gusti's teachings, their approach to the rural world had been beholden to a relaxed, romantic peasant ideology,²¹ reminiscent of the novels and other writings of Dezső Szabó. From the beginning they had recognized the need for a thorough investigation of the village, and they were making progress, but it was their acquaintance with Gusti, first through publications and then by participation in the field work of his research teams, that imposed scholarly discipline on their work and gave it a firm sociological foundation.²² Gusti taught

them, in particular, how vital it was to mobilize the expertise of many disciplines and how valuable sociological theory could be in coordinating their work and thus ensuring their success.²³

Association with Gusti appealed to the Transylvanian Youth also because it fitted in with their efforts as a minority to ensure their place in Greater Romania. They appreciated the similarity between their view of the peasant and Gusti's as the decisive element that had determined the form that their respective societies had taken, and they warmly approved of his sending intellectuals into the countryside as validating their own central role as mentors of the peasantry.²⁴

The Transylvanian Youth were certain that the monographic method would make crucial contributions to the solution of the minority question in Romania. They found Gusti's expressions of support for their own labors and his willingness to work with them to create a "harmonious existence" between Romanians and Hungarians especially encouraging.²⁵ His insistence that village research not be beholden to politics corresponded to their determination to keep their own village work free from ideological entanglements on either the right or the left. A non-political sociology seemed to them the best way to reveal to themselves and to others the "true essence of minority life", as Béla Jancsó put it, and thereby dispel the myths and prejudices that divided ethnic communities from one another. Thus, for them, Gusti's efforts to distance himself from the extremist politics of the 1930s were particularly reassuring.²⁶ Yet, they harbored no illusions about their actual status in Greater Romania. They were always conscious of the fact that the Hungarian peasant as a minority bore a double burden – economic and ethnic.

The Transylvanian Youth were the first among the Hungarians of Transylvania to initiate regular contacts with Gusti. Before them there were no important scholarly relations between Hungarian intellectuals in Transylvania and the monographic school in Bucharest. From the beginning of *Erdélyi Fiatalok* its editors followed closely the activities of Gusti's teams, publishing both reports of field work and theoretical and methodological commentaries on the nature and importance of village investigations.²⁷ Behind such interest was, of course, their desire to create their own monographic school by training a corps of Gustian village researchers. To do so they knew that they could not remain mere bystanders, but would have to participate directly in the work of Gusti's teams.

Personal contacts were crucial in persuading the Transylvanian Youth to embrace Gusti's goals and methods. In this way they became acquainted with the monographic school from within. Imre Mikó was the first of the group to meet personally with Gusti in December 1930. Afterwards the Ferenc Koós Circle in Bucharest, an organization of mutual assistance for Hungarian students in the capital, founded in 1925, played a key role in establishing and maintaining links with Gusti and his principal assistants, Henri H. Stahl, Traian Herseni, and Anton

Golopenția. The Circle served as an indispensable base for village researchers from Transylvania, providing them with ample opportunities to meet their Romanian colleagues.²⁸ The participation of Transylvanian Hungarians in monographic field work began in earnest in 1936. Noteworthy was the presence of three of the Transylvanian Youth at a two-week training course in methods of village research held in the summer of 1937 in the commune of Stănești, in Muscel County, northwest of Bucharest.²⁹

Of all the members of the Transylvanian Youth, the most consistent Gustian was József Venczel, who before 1944 was probably the most important Hungarian sociologist in Transylvania.³⁰ He himself recognized the influence that Gusti's teachings had on the village researches of the Transylvanian Youth because, he insisted, Gusti had raised their work to a systematic, scientific level from its diffuse, romantic beginnings.³¹ An active member of the Transylvanian Youth almost from its beginnings and a prominent representative of the new generation, despite his young age, Venczel wholeheartedly embraced Gusti's approach to knowing the village. His debt to the monographic method is evident in the article he published in 1935, *A falumunka és az erdélyi falumunka-mozgalom* (Village Work and the Transylvanian Village-Work Movement), a critical appraisal of village research by Transylvanian Hungarians since 1930.³²

Inspired by Gusti's theoretical work, *Sociologie monografică, știință a realității sociale* (1934; Monographic Sociology, a Science of Social Reality),³³ Venczel insisted that the investigation of the Hungarian village be based on solid sociological principles and that a "journalistic superficiality" be avoided.³⁴ He urged his fellow researchers to see the Transylvanian village in all its complexity and to treat every aspect of village life as being intimately linked to all the other aspects. Only then, he admonished, when the interweaving of social, economic, and spiritual relations had been achieved could an authentic portrait of the village emerge and genuine self-knowledge of the race occur.³⁵ Like Gusti, he conceived of the village-work movement not only as a way of becoming acquainted with the peasants but also as a necessary preparation for intellectuals who were intent on carrying out social reforms.³⁶

V

In their exploration of the village the Transylvanian Youth engaged in a variety of activities designed to achieve self-understanding, to defend themselves as Hungarians, and to bring beneficial change to the village. As intellectuals and idealists, they had great faith in the efficacy of the spoken and written word to influence men's behavior and were confident of their own ability to find solutions to

the social and minority problems of the day. They thus put great store by seminars, lectures, conferences, and publications of all kinds.

Foremost among the tools of village research they created was the seminar, which was formally organized in the fall of 1930 and was chaired by Béla Demeter. Its role was crucial because it served as the coordinating center for the whole village-work enterprise. Demeter and his colleagues used the seminar to instill in their researchers a unity of approach to the peasantry free of religious or ideological constraints.³⁷ Inspired by Dezsó Szabó, they gave lectures not only to fellow intellectuals and urban audiences, but brought their message to the villages as well, Ferenc Balázs and Béla Demeter being the first to do so in October 1930.³⁸

At the heart of the Transylvanian Youth's concerns was the need to establish direct contacts with the village, and in the summers of 1931 and 1932 they dispatched teams of young researchers to villages in the Székelyföld and Kolozsvár County, the most important work being done in the village of Kolozsborsa. The village seminar assumed responsibility for instructing the teams in how to organize their work and what techniques to use in interviewing peasants. Béla Demeter emphasized the importance of developing personal relations with their "subjects", but at the same time he and his colleagues urged researchers to maintain a certain "disinterested" distance from them. The Gustian spirit, manifest in this measured approach to the villagers, was strikingly evident in the questionnaires drawn up by Béla Demeter, József Venczel, and others. The first one was published in *Erdélyi Fiatalok* in 1930 and another in 1933.³⁹ The most detailed was the work of Béla Demeter, already cited.⁴⁰ Comprehensive, just like those elaborated by the monographic school of Bucharest, they invited the villagers to tell in detail about the place where they and their forebears lived and the routine of their daily lives. The researchers wanted to know about the history and the physical layout of the village and then asked about births and deaths. Next came questions about property relations and making a living from agriculture or from crafts, ideas about nationality, religion, and mixed marriages. Then they asked about cultural life and the role of the clergy and the teachers, and especially about the relations between the villagers and the intellectuals and how the intellectual class was formed, and about literacy and good and bad customs. They wanted to know about the cottage industry and about health and who cared for the well-being of the villagers – clergy, teachers, intellectuals? The current economic crisis was also on the minds of the researchers; they were curious about what categories of peasants were most likely to fall into debt and why small holdings could not survive?

These questions showed genuine enthusiasm for village research in the years just after the founding of the Transylvanian Youth. But it soon waned, and only in 1936 did serious work resume. In July of that year József Venczel, who had been studying at the sociological institute in Bucharest, and Attila T. Szabó, a young linguist from Kolozsvár, organized the first important work camp for some twenty

Hungarian university students at Bábonny, west of Kolozsvár in Kalotaszeg, on the property of Károly Kós, writer, architect, and graphic artist. Here in the course of several weeks they set about in true Gustian fashion to know the village.⁴¹

Not all those associated with the Transylvanian Youth joined in group village work. Ferenc Balázs, who was serving as a Unitarian pastor in Mészkö, near Torda, from 1930 until his death in 1937,⁴² followed his own path to knowledge of the village. Although one of the founders of *Erdélyi Fiatalok*, he did not belong to the center of the Transylvanian Youth; he was too independent of mind to adhere to an ideology or even to follow all of Gusti's prescriptions for village research. Thus, while he published numerous articles in *Erdélyi Fiatalok*, he wrote at the same time for the leftist monthly, *Korunk*. His work in the village was certainly influenced by Gusti's ideals, but he shunned the monographic method of data collection; he preferred his own, informal approach, which consisted of observing his parishioners and talking to them as he went about his daily tasks as a village pastor. Although an intellectual in the true sense of the word, he employed the methods of an insider. He could thus be a member of the group and thereby avoid the formality and awkwardness often felt by the researcher who came to the village armed with a questionnaire and intellectual expertise and thus found himself treated as an outsider.

When it came to fostering change in the village, Balázs was a more ardent reformer than most of his friends in the Transylvanian Youth.⁴³ Convinced that the solution to economic and social problems in the village lay in the cooperative movement, he had before him as a goal transformations of the type he had seen in rural America during his stay there between 1923 and 1927, when he was a student at the University of California in Berkeley. He was one of those rare members of the Transylvanian Youth whose first concern was to reform the village rather than gather information about it. He thought deeply about the village, and his aspirations come through clearly in his remarkable memoir, *A rög alatt* (1936; *Under the Soil*). His way of grasping the essence of the village was to describe ten of its characteristic inhabitants from the pastor and teacher to the artisan and independent farmer, rather than follow the scientific rules laid down by Gusti. His book was the first true Transylvanian Hungarian sociological work and represented a milestone in the literature on village research.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 and the cession of north Transylvania to Hungary by Romania in the following summer seriously affected the village research sponsored by the Transylvanian Youth. The new order of things in Transylvania seems to have discouraged the comprehensive investigations and the contacts with the sociological school of Bucharest that had characterized the Transylvanian Youth's exploration of rural society. An indication of a change for the worse in the intellectual climate of the times was the absence of articles about village work in the pages of *Erdélyi Fiatalok* in 1939 and 1940. In-

deed, the review itself ceased publication in the summer of 1940, mainly, it seems, because of financial problems, and the last meeting of the editorial board was held on July 22, 1941.⁴⁴

Village work continued for a while at a modest pace. The most important undertaking occurred in the summer of 1941, when thirty-three students from Kolozsvár made a four-week visit to the village of Bálványosvárálja, near Dés. They collected an enormous amount of information on vital statistics and family histories, filling some five thousand index cards, and made numerous photographs and phonograph cylinders.⁴⁵ But two follow-up visits by smaller teams did not take place until 1943, and afterwards work ceased altogether, and most of the material gathered was left unprocessed.⁴⁶ The researchers followed Gusti's principles for comprehensive village investigations, although no direct contact with him or his associates seems to have occurred.

VI

The accomplishments of the Transylvanian Youth are difficult to measure. Rather than palpable things like institutions or specific social reforms, their contributions to interwar Hungarian social and intellectual life in Transylvania lay in the realm of ideas and in expectations for the future.

Their most important achievement was undoubtedly their promotion of ties between the intellectuals and the village. For the first time Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals attempted a systematic study of the village through organized contact with its inhabitants. In doing so, they helped to arouse and sustain the interest of a broader public in peasant life and peasant problems, and they helped to secure a place for peasants in the consciousness of intellectuals.

The investigation of the village by the Transylvanian Youth and by individuals associated with them brought into being a pioneering scholarly and polemical literature. From the beginning the Transylvanian Youth had intended to make known the results of their work in a series they entitled *Erdélyi Fiatalok falu-füzetei* (Village Booklets of the Transylvanian Youth). Four were published, all in Kolozsvár in 1931 and 1932 and all based in some degree on village researches. One, by Béla Demeter, dealt with the techniques of village work, especially, as we have seen, the questionnaire.⁴⁷ Imre Mikó wrote on the intricate connection between the village, the minority question, and the future of the Hungarians of Transylvania against the background of the historical development of the nationality problem in Transylvania.⁴⁸ Zsigmond Gyallay-Papp described the misunderstandings between the village and the city and the role that intellectuals should assume as mediators between peasants and urban-dwellers.⁴⁹ He did not hesitate to declare that the village was the true source of Hungarian culture and the

main hope for the renewal of Hungarian society. Béla Demeter examined the mental climate of the Transylvanian village and urged harmony between its inhabitants and the intellectuals.⁵⁰

Of no little importance was the contribution the Transylvanian Youth made to harmony and cooperation between Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals. The willingness of both sides to keep scholarship above political strife was a good omen for the future of ethnic relations. Leading members of the sociological school in Bucharest praised the initiatives of the Transylvanian Youth. Octavian Neamțu, writing in Gusti's *Sociologie Românească* (Romanian Sociology) in 1936, called attention to the exactness and systematic character of their investigations and thought that as a result of their research outsiders would be able more easily to penetrate the life of Hungarian young people and appreciate the changes taking place in their ideas. He expressed confidence that fundamental sociological investigations of Transylvanian Hungarian society would forge intimate links between Romanian and Hungarian scholars, and he hoped that their mutual understanding would be reflected more generally in their respective societies.⁵¹ In a similar vein the Transylvanian Youth held up the work of Gusti's research teams as models to be followed. Yet, despite expressions of good fellowship and of hope for enhanced cooperation in the future, neither the Transylvanian Youth nor the monographic researchers in Bucharest showed any inclination to renounce the ethnic foundations of their respective undertakings. In the end, their promising partnership in village work was, as we have seen, overtaken by war.

In the final analysis, we may ask what difference the activities of the Transylvanian Youth made. The first of the tasks they had set for themselves – to know the village better and thus to know themselves better – I think they accomplished, even though their work was far from complete. As for the second task – the social and moral uplift of village life – it seems to me that they fell short of the promises they had made to themselves. Yet, it is fair to ask how far they actually wanted to change the village? Or perhaps the question should be: Were they social reformers at all? Admirable in their commitment to knowing the village and its inhabitants and in upholding high ideals of conduct and thought, they nonetheless failed to build institutions with sound foundations and they steadfastly shunned political parties, all of which could have served them as the engines of change. Instead, they relied on the power of good ideas and reasoned debate to achieve their ends. It was their misfortune to work in an era of advancing extremism, the 1930s, which proved fatal to their project.

Notes

- 1 I am glad for this occasion to thank Zsuzsánna Magdó, doctoral candidate in history at the University of Illinois who was my research assistant in the summer of 2005, for her indispensable help.
- 2 Useful general works on the Erdélyi Fiatalok are: Mikó 1970; S. Balázs 1979, 148–189; Cseke 1986, 5–79.
- 3 Venczel 1980b, 63–64; Baczó 1933, 51–52.
- 4 Mikó 1973, 5–28.
- 5 László 1997, 3–21.
- 6 S. Balázs 2003, 7–225; Mikó 1978.
- 7 “Erdélyi Fiatalok”, 1–2; “Az Erdélyi Fiatalok főiskolás konferenciája”, 151–153; Mikó 1970, 544–547.
- 8 F. Balázs 1930a, 70–71, 1930c, 17–18; Vita 1930, 51–52.
- 9 Mikó 1970, 542–543; B. Jancsó 1933b, 6–17; László 1933, 21–27.
- 10 László 1938, 3–4.
- 11 E. Jancsó 1931, 65–67; “Móricz Zsigmond és az erdélyi magyar ifjúság”, 112–113; B. Jancsó 1939, 31–32.
- 12 László 1933, 37–40.
- 13 *Erdélyi Fiatalok* 1/7 (1930), 116.
- 14 Mikó 1930, 12–14.
- 15 Balogh 1930, 82–85.
- 16 Cseke 1986, 84–108.
- 17 F. Balázs 1930b, 85–88.
- 18 Fogarasi 1932, 77–78.
- 19 F. Balázs 1930b, 85–88.
- 20 Demeter 1932, 28–29.
- 21 Venczel 1980a, 138.
- 22 B. Jancsó 1933a, 46–49.
- 23 Venczel 1980a, 138.
- 24 Fogarasi 1932, 78.
- 25 B. Jancsó 1937, 23.
- 26 Demeter 1931, 100–102.
- 27 Demeter 1931; Fogarasi 1932; “Falu-Szeminariumunk munkája 1931–2 évben”, 81–82; Jancsó 1933.
- 28 Szappanyos 1931, 67–69; Debitzky 1935, 32–35.
- 29 “Magyar fiúk a stănești-i tanfolyamon”, 21–22.
- 30 Székely 1988, 7–20; Lengyel 1990, 9–42.
- 31 Venczel 1936, 22–27.
- 32 Venczel 1935, 219–248.
- 33 Gusti 1934, 29–120.
- 34 Venczel 1988, 204–214.
- 35 Venczel 1980b, 71–72.
- 36 Venczel 1980b, 72–73.
- 37 Baczó 1933, 52.
- 38 “Az Erdélyi Fiatalok első falusi előadásai”, 133; Vita 1977, 126.
- 39 “Hogyan tanulmányozzam a falu életét”, 91–94; “Kérdőív a falu-tanulmányozáshoz”, 55–57.
- 40 Demeter 1932, 7–32.
- 41 Szabó 1937, 51–65; Vita 1977, 127.

- ⁴² László 1937, 1–2; Mikó et al. 1983; Cseke 1998, 5–26.
⁴³ On his plans for Mészkö and his efforts to realize them, see Mikó et al. 1983, 176–208.
⁴⁴ Cseke 1986, 359–360.
⁴⁵ Molter 1940–1941, 285–306.
⁴⁶ Imreh 1967, 1192.
⁴⁷ Demeter 1931.
⁴⁸ Mikó 1932.
⁴⁹ Gyallay-Papp 1931.
⁵⁰ Demeter 1932.
⁵¹ Neamțu 1936, 24–30.

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