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The National Association of Hungarian Women
1918–1946

Theses of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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I. Theme and objective of the research

The present doctoral dissertation deals with the National Association of Hungarian Women (MANSz) operating between the two world wars, from its being established in 1918 until its being dissolved in 1946.

The largest women's organization of the Horthy era, which has developed into a national movement, has so far been dealt with by few people, a comprehensive monograph on the topic has not been published, only for partial research (Krisztina Kelbert, Szombathely, 2012; Bernadett Kun, Debrecen, 2014; Tünde Árvai, Pécs, 2016; Gyöngyi Nagy, Hódmezővásárhely, 2019-2021), which mainly cover the history of the organization's rural branches. The author of the present dissertation is the first who has attempted to outline the national history of MANSz.

The organization has been extremely diverse in public life and in social matters (of the Jewish as well as of the charity matters), so its operation has important social, political and historical aspects in addition to its organizational history.

II. Methods followed

The researcher's work is complicated because of the fragmentation and shortcomings of the sources of the topic. The serious shortage of resources is due to the fact that in 1944, during the siege of Budapest, the headquarters of MANSz on Rózsa Street were hit by bombs, so most of the documents were lost.

Nevertheless, the primary source base for the topic is provided by archival records, although these are not found in one place. Due to the destruction of World War II, the few surviving documents of the MANSz center, which operated for a quarter of a century, can be searched at the Vienna Gate Square and Óbuda branch of the National Archives of the Hungarian National Archives. In the latter place, documents related to the dissolution of the center and some rural branches are available to the researcher. The Budapest Capital Archives has preserved material about the MANSz branches in the capital district and certain groups in the capital of the railway department. You can find out more about the rural MANSz branches in the county archives of the Hungarian National Archives, where, however, fragmentary documents are also available, mostly between the mayor's, the city council's and the association's documents.

In addition to the archival sources, the main source of the MANSz is the Association's central bulletin, *The Hungarian Woman*, whose full grades and numbers cannot be found in any public collection in Hungary. In the course of my research, I visited the National Széchényi Library, the Parliamentary Library, the Petőfi Literary Museum and the Károly Somogyi City and County Library in Szeged to obtain it. The MANSz branch in Hódmezővásárhely, in a unique way, also had its own fund. The establishment and initial steps of the organization in the Southern Great Plain and the list of members were published in the *Hungarian Women's Journal*, which, although it lasted only two years, can still be considered a basic source in the MANSz research, not only for the Great Plain branch but also for the

center. This document is kept in the Local History Collection of the László Németh City Library in Hódmezővásárhely.

In its own bulletin, MANSz most accurately documented its daily life and the articles, writings and reports which were also published by the capital and county newspapers. Thanks to the *Budapest Newspaper*, *The Newspaper*, *The Hungarians*, the *National Newspaper*, the *Pest Newspaper* and the *New Generation*, which regularly reported on the work and movements of the Association, a rich press material is available to the researcher.

MANSz strived to capture its history and work in its own publications. In addition to archival sources, the federal bulletin, and abundant press material, these - like the *Almanac for the 1920s*, *are 15 years old. Pictures from the fifteen years of the National Association of Hungarian Women*, *the 1925 Congress of Women's Education of the National Association of Hungarian Women*, *the report of the National Association of Hungarian Women from 1940/41. and the Yearbook of the National Association of Hungarian Women 1943–1944* - form the next important source base of the association, and despite the fact that the history of the organization is presented unilaterally, only from their own point of view, they are of great resource value to the researcher. Another important source is the statutes of the MANSz.

Finally, contemporary recollections are an important category of sources on the subject. Without exception, the self-justifying intention is an important feature of these, so they should be treated with special source criticism, but in their absence the researcher would be in an

even more difficult position, as they contribute more or less to the relatively accurate reconstruction of MANSz. Such sources of the formation of the movement come from the pens of three women who were present at its formation. The founder, Cécile Tormay, in her literary diary novel, first published in 1920 – In the *An outlaw's diary*, published in 1922, was the first to record the circumstances of the formation of the MANSz. Emma Ritoók also dedicated in her memoir *Years and People* a lot to the Christian-national congregation of women, as she herself also was a founding member. The third contemporary personal source of the MANSz is the diary of Mrs. János Mór Révay from 1918–1919, which also reports on some aspects of the formation of the MANSz.

From the above sources, we get an idea of the formation and activities of the MANSz, as well as how it has taken a position on certain internal, foreign and social policy issues, and with their help the worldview of the MANSz is unfolding before us.

Some of these sources have been little or not used in our previous historical literature. However, even after reviewing so many different document types, the author cannot say that he has all the possible sources on the subject. Various documents can be hidden e.g. in the Historical Archives of the State Security Services, which can be a useful addition to the history, afterlife and life of the leaders or major figures of the Alliance, as in post-World War II proceedings against members of the Alliance (e.g. in the lawsuits related to the revolution of 1956 as well as in the political-testimonial cases) the activities and operation of the association were / could be examined. The various

family legacies can also provide a grip on the personal life and motivations of the members of the association, but also on the image of MANSz formed in his own time. That is why this work does not mean the research is complete, it is only an important stage and a partial summary of its closure.

The MANSz shows a unified picture based on the sources examined: throughout its quarter-century history, members have adhered to the slogans of 1918–1919 - God, Home, Family, and the organization's number one leader, Cécile Tormay, even after her death in 1937. Throughout the country, rural organizations were guided by the center in terms of their activities, with a particular focus on local specificities. Attempts were made to bridge generational differences, e.g. by supporting college students from the beginning, and by the end of the 1930s, as their successors, they also formed Girls' Circles.

My dissertation is primarily of an organizational-historical nature, which approaches its subject matter from a methodological point of view, partly chronologically and partly thematically, to present the organizational structure of the MANSz, its expansion into a national network, its customs and objectives. Since my research covers the history of the MANSz branch in Hódmezővásárhely in addition to the central MANSz, I draw most of the examples from here on how the national tendencies of the MANSz could have been realized in the case of a rural MANSz branch. My local attachment was just one of the reasons why the choice fell on Hódmezővásárhely. It was also important that this was one of the earliest established branches, which

operated without interruption during its existence, and that a curiosity such as Hungarian Woman's Journal provides data for its history.

III. Issues and thesis of research

The MANSz was established in opposition to the spread of Bolshevik ideology in Hungary, in the interests of the territorial unity of Hungary and in order to consolidate the Christian-national ideology. Within the latter, it belonged to the neoconservative branch.

With the formation of the organization brought to life by historical necessity, a new era began in 1918 in the history of women's history and women's equality in Hungary: feminists were replaced by conservative women.

The main figures of the organization are the writers Cecilé Tormay (1875–1937) and Emma Ritoók (1868–1945) and Countess Rafael Zichy (1877–1964).

The official establishment of the MANSz took place on January 11, 1919, with the cooperation of the National Catholic Women's Association, the National Association of Hungarian Protestant Women, and the Social Mission Society. Non-denominationalism also signaled the need and weight of cooperation.

The MANSz, however, shared anti-Jewish prejudices in the counter-revolutionary system, but did not belong to racially anti-Semitic groups, as indicated by the fact that it had several baptized members. Their work followed the slogans of 1918 - God, Home, Family. However, in addition to their main goal, the fight for revision, they also engaged in extensive social (support for children, mothers,

students) and culture. All this was given increased attention during the Second World War.

Cécile Tormay, the founder-leader and keynote speaker of the organization, dominated and influenced Hungarian public life as a non-professional politician. Until her death, the members of the MANSz regarded her as a spiritual leader, so her cult naturally developed in her circles, which she consciously formed after her death in 1937.

The MANSz defined itself as a social association, so that it could avoid being openly associated with a political party, and thus appear as a non-partisan organization representing national interests. At the same time, since István Bethlen, Kuno Klebelsberg and Pál Teleki were among their founders and helpers, they joined the political line they represented.

From the symbolic invasion of Budapest on November 16, 1919, Miklós Horthy became spiritual ally for the creation of a Christian-national spirit in the conservative civilian governments. MANSz, which thus became the official women's association of the Horthy era, enjoyed the financial support of the Hungarian state in return. By the 1930s, the nationwide women's association, following Bethlen's line, had been a proponent of the gradual expansion of suffrage, had participated in election campaigns itself, and several of its members had participated in political life (e.g., Margit Slachta, Lilla Melczer, Mrs. Sarolta Futima Fuchs).

MANSz has gradually built up its organization in the country. After the establishment of the Central Association in 1919, in the 1920s to

the cities with rural jurisdiction (towns of Kecskemét, Zalaegerszeg, Szombathely, Győr, Békéscsaba, Kiskundorozsma, Tiszafüred, Hódmezővásárhely, Pécs, Debrecen, Baja, Szeged, Makó). In the districts of Budapest, the more serious organization did not begin until the 1930s, but from then on it was continuous and even during the war (towns and villages of: Sashalom, Újpest, Pestújhely, Rákosszentmihály, Mátyásföld, Cinkota, Rákosfalva, Kőbánya, Rákoskeresztúr, Pesterszébet, Pestszébet, Rákoshegy, Kispest, Csepel and the districts). Also during the war, the organization started in the areas returned in the series (Highlands, Transcarpathia, Transylvania, Southern Region), and in these years the occupational departments (railway, firefighter, postman, transport sector workers) were established.

In October 1944, the MANSz ceased all activities. It officially ceased to exist in 1946, when it was dissolved by the Provisional National Government, like right-wing and far-right associations operating in the Horthy era.

IV. Publication activity on the topic

Gyöngyi NAGY: The life and church career of the Unitarian pastor István Barabás. In: Yearbook of the Szeremlei Society of Hódmezővásárhely 2018. Local History Studies. 21. Editor: István KOVÁCS – Zoltán PRESZTÓCZKI, Hódmezővásárhely, 2018. 35–60.

Gyöngyi NAGY: The Early Years of the Hódmezővásárhely Branch of the National Association of Hungarian Women, 1921–1923. In: Yearbook of the Szeremlei Society of Hódmezővásárhely 2019. Local history studies. Editor: István KOVÁCS – Zoltán PRESZTÓCZKI, Hódmezővásárhely, 2019. 57–84.

Gyöngyi NAGY: The early years of the Hódmezővásárhely circle of the National Association of Hungarian Women, 1921–1923. In: Studies on twentieth - century Hungarian history. Edited by András DÖBÖR – Péter MIKLÓS – Ferenc ZEMAN. Memorial Point Books 14. Hódmezővásárhely, 2019. 27–48.

Gyöngyi NAGY: "We are many, we just don't know about each other!" Establishment of the National Association of Hungarian Women. In: Trianoni Review, July – December 2019, 125–130.

Gyöngyi NAGY: The history of the branch of the National Association of Hungarian Women in Hódmezővásárhely between 1924 and 1928. In: Yearbook of the Hódmezővásárhely Szeremlei Society 2020. Local history studies. Edited by Zoltán NAGY Gyöngyi – PRESZTÓCZKI, Hódmezővásárhely, 2020. 147–165.

Mrs. János Mór RÉVAY: The Days of Bolshevism. Diary Notes 1918–1919. Edited by Árpád SZAKÁCS, foreword by Gyöngyi NAGY, Kárpátia Studio, Köröstárkány – Balatonfőkajár, 2020.

Gyöngyi NAGY: The history of the MANSz branch in Hódmezővásárhely between 1929 and 1940. In: Yearbook of the Szeremlei Society of Hódmezővásárhely 2021. Local history studies. Edited by Zoltán NAGY Gyöngyi – PRESZTÓCZKI, Hódmezővásárhely, 2021. 107–134.

TORMAY Cécile: Fighting. Memories. Editor-in-Chief: Erzsébet SZILÁGYI. Foreword by Gyöngyi NAGY, Kárpátia Studio, Köröstárkány – Balatonfőkajár, 2021.