

HUNGARIAN REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD AND CHILDLESSNESS:
AN ANALYSIS OF POST-COMMUNIST DEVELOPMENTS WITH A FOCUS ON *NŐK*
LAPJA MAGAZINE

By

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I examine the constructions, maintenance, and resistance to dominant discourses concerning motherhood and non-motherhood in contemporary Hungary, using the popular Hungarian women's magazine *Nők Lapja* as my key illustrative example. I strive to illuminate how gendered discourses, bio-power, history, and geopolitics are implicated not only in the construction of nationhood but also in defining women's roles in nation-building. I hope to contribute to research that helps to better understand women's contemporary social roles in Hungary, and the power relations that construct them.

I argue that ideas regarding motherhood and non-motherhood in Hungary are often bound up in ideas concerning who should, or should not, have children, and why, and I explore in detail how these ideas have formed through the history of the nation. My analysis reveals different sites of power—focusing on policy and print media—that seek to determine women's procreative decisions. I argue that, under various regimes, women's procreative choices have consistently been systemically constrained, and framed as key to the nation's success—or failure. Concerning *Nők Lapja* magazine, my research reveals that it both supports and resists traditional gender roles, at times contributing to discourses that naturalize childbearing and motherhood (also defining for readers whose motherhood is deemed desirable), but at other times disputing such ideas and redefining conceptions of womanhood to include women without children. Although ultimately the magazine pathologizes, disbelieves and negates the choice to be childless, *Nők Lapja* does resist and redefine limited definitions of womanhood and motherhood by carving out a small space

for discussions of childlessness, and also by challenging conceptions of singletons as necessarily lonely and mothers as necessarily better if they stay at home.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Agatha Schwartz, for being my thesis supervisor. From the beginning, she tirelessly ensured that doing a PhD was professionally, personally, and academically rewarding for me, encouraging me to attend conferences and submit my research for publication, in addition to facilitating the improvement of my Hungarian language skills. When I admitted that although I could speak Hungarian I could not read it very well she said, “No problem,” which I thought meant I would work with English sources only. What that *actually* meant was I would have to travel to Hungary and learn (and she made sure I received funding to do so). She never doubted for a minute that I could learn more and do better. I will forever be appreciative of her guidance, tutelage, unfailing support, and (seemingly) unending patience.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee: Dr. Christabelle Sethna, Dr. Denise Spitzer, and Dr. Judith Szapor for helping to appropriately narrow my focus and shape my research project. A special thank you goes to my external reviewer Dr. Katalin Fábián for accepting to read the final version of my thesis. I consider myself very lucky for the privilege of having these outstanding academics guide my dissertation.

I would also like to thank the Institute of Women’s Studies (particularly the IWS Operations Coordinator, Margot Charbonneau for her helpfulness), the School of Graduate Studies, and the Balassi Institute (Hungarian Scholarship Board). Without their generous support, I would not have been able to conduct my studies and gather the necessary data for my analysis. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Mária Palasik who helped me with a letter of invitation to work at Budapest libraries.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my husband, who has been endlessly supportive and is more versed in Hungarian women’s reproductive rights than he should be, after editing version after version of my typo-ridden drafts. He also held down the fort at home while I ventured to Hungary—twice. Additionally, I would like to thank my parents for their encouragement, especially my mother for her help with translating endless articles, which my father dutifully scanned and emailed to me. He also endured my mother’s long absence when she travelled to Hungary with me, never begrudging my having absconded with her at the least opportune time. They have both worked hard for the bragging rights of a daughter with a PhD, and I am certainly very thankful for their unfailing support.

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I examine the constructions, maintenance, and resistance to the dominant discourse of motherhood and childlessness in contemporary Hungary, using the popular Hungarian women's magazine *Nők Lapja* as my key illustrative example. When I began work on my dissertation, I was vaguely familiar with Hungary's history of low fertility rates and coercive pro-natal policies, but ultimately I knew little about the country. I quickly discovered a long and fascinating history and came to the insight that certain historical issues still impact the country today, shaping contemporary women's lives in profound ways. Although nationalism and the pressure placed upon certain women to have large families is certainly not unique to Hungary, the way in which the dominant discourse of motherhood is presented is supported by references to the nation's past. As a result, what began as an interest in representations of childlessness has blossomed into a project that uses the example of women without children to illuminate how gendered discourses, bio-power, history, and geo-politics are implicated not only in the construction of nationhood but also in ideas concerning women's roles in nation-building. I present a project that helps to better understand women's contemporary social roles pertaining to motherhood and non-motherhood in Hungary, and the power relations that construct them.¹

¹ Following Madelyn Cain (2001), I recognize the difficulty of distinguishing between examples of choosing to be child-free and other circumstances. Cain considers three categories of childless women: those childless by choice, by chance, and by happenstance. Cain classifies women who are medically unable to, or face serious health risks if they do, procreate as "childless by chance". "Childless by happenstance" is a category Cain uses to explain women who, among other situations, never found the time to have children, or never found the right partner, or who were afraid of having children. Women "childless by choice" actively chose not to have children. Melissa Graham and Stephanie Rich (n.d.) use a nearly identical categorization (p. 8). Although this is arguably the best categorization, I still contend that it is very difficult to distinguish between these categories because the boundaries between them can blur—women without children, even if classified using Cain's system, are not a homogenous group. In this paper, I focus on childless by choice and happenstance, leaving discussions of infertility for later projects. Concerning the terminology I have chosen

In what follows, I outline in more detail why I chose to study Hungary and, specifically, Hungarian childlessness. I provide a brief overview of Hungarian fertility rates, in addition to providing data on childlessness in particular. I also explain my choice of using *Nők Lapja* as the focus of my study. I then briefly outline my theoretical and methodological frameworks, paying careful attention to my positionality (and limits) as a researcher. Finally, I provide a short summary of the chapters in this dissertation.

Why Study Hungary, Why Study Childlessness?

Although there is much research that examines Hungarian women's social roles, particularly during communism, what I (and other researchers such as Hollos and Yando, 2006; Merz and Liefbroer, 2012; Poston and Szakolczai, 1986) have noted as lacking in the literature is a thorough examination and discussion of women without children (both women who are unable to physically bear children and also those women who have chosen not to procreate).² Literature concerning women without children is a growing field worldwide but there are many gaps in the literature even among North American sources, where the experiences of women without children have arguably been documented the most. Eva-Maria Merz and Aart C. Liefbroer (2012) confirm that in Europe, little is known

to use in my writing, in the English-language literature concerning women without children, sometimes "childless" is rejected as an inappropriate term because it suggests that something is missing. On the other hand, "child-free," another common word, suggests children are something women should *wish* to be free of. In my study, I will be employing the terms "childless," "childlessness," and "women without children," and non-motherhood, recognizing that any current terminology is problematic. The reason for this choice is that child-free is laced with more political activism than I wish to employ here, and it does not capture the social factors that may constrain women's choices concerning reproduction—it suggests that the choice is made more freely than is the reality for many women in Hungary.

² Prior to commencing my research, I had found but one study on childlessness in a small Hungarian village (Cserepfalu) published in 1987. Eva V. Huseby-Darvas finds that in this small village, the customs and social roles are very traditional and childlessness is viewed as abnormal, caused by a hidden moral defect or a punishment from God for a past wrong (1987, p. 17). This article piqued my interest.

about attitudes toward childlessness (p. 586). In Hungary, particularly, this is an exciting area of research as it remains largely unexamined and there is much room for original research contributions.

Although throughout this project I make reference to other formerly communist countries in Europe, a comparison is not my goal because among formerly communist Central and Eastern European countries, there are many differences in economy, culture, history, etc., that make comparisons difficult. It has been argued that while there was overlap in policies and history, conclusions drawn from one cannot be applied to another (Verdery, 1996, p. 11). Further, many policies, even under communism, were not applied evenly or equally across countries and they were adapted or changed on a case by case basis, thus pro-natal policies that unfolded in Hungary were very different than what unfolded, say, in Romania (Petrescu-Prahova, 2009).³ I believe a comparison of representations of women without children, or pro-natal policies, among Central and Eastern European countries is too large a scope for this particular project, although the potential for research in that area is certainly present.

Truthfully, choosing Hungary was a very personal decision for me, based on my (modest) ability to read and speak the language. I welcomed the opportunity to conduct research that would help me better understand the lives of Hungarian women. Apart from my personal interests, Hungary makes for an interesting case study. Hungary's low fertility rate has fascinated researchers and frustrated policy makers for decades—and has, overall,

³ Marxist ideals of “communism” were not actually met in Soviet occupied Europe and so the term for the transitional system—“socialism”—is often used. However, it has been noted in the literature that communist, state socialist, totalitarian can be used interchangeably (Valuch, 2004, p. 512). In my own experience, North American studies tend to use “communism,” while European scholars employ “socialist”. As a Canadian researcher I have chosen to use the term “communism,” although I recognize the technical inaccuracy of the term.

been in decline since the 19th century (Kövér, 2004). Although fertility trends in other European countries tended to decline after 1920, “among all the European countries, the decline was most pronounced in Hungary” (Gyáni, 2004, p. 273).⁴ Total fertility (the number of live births per woman) is the most commonly used measure of fertility (Gábos et al., 2009, p. 218). In Hungary, total fertility has declined from 2.6 in 1950 (which is above replacement—2.1) to 1.3 in 2006 (which is far below replacement) (Gábos et al., 2009, p. 218). According to a 2012 Eurostat study concerning fertility across the European Union, in 1960 Hungary’s total fertility rate was 2.02, which dropped to 1.91 in 1980, 1.32 in 2000, and finally 1.23 in 2011. Although the study reports that overall Europeans are having fewer children, of the 35 countries listed on the included table (see below), in 2011 Hungary had the *lowest* fertility rate of all (Eurostat, 2012, p. 2-3).

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2009	2010	2011
EU-27	2.54	2.25	1.68	1.62	1.67	1.76	1.84		
Belgium	2.31	2.17	2.05	1.82	1.26	1.32	1.57	1.49	1.51
Bulgaria	2.09	1.92	2.08	1.90	1.14	1.28	1.49	1.49	1.43
Czech Republic	2.57	1.95	1.55	1.67	1.77	1.80	1.84	1.87	1.75
Denmark						1.38	1.34	1.36	1.36
Germany				2.05	1.38	1.50	1.62	1.63	1.52
Estonia	3.78	3.85	3.21	2.11	1.89	1.86	2.07	2.07	2.05
Ireland	2.23	2.40	2.23	1.40	1.26	1.33	1.52	1.51	1.43
Greece			2.20	1.36	1.23	1.34	1.39	1.38	1.36
Spain	2.73	2.47	1.95	1.78	1.89	1.94	2.00	2.03	
France (1)	2.37	2.38	1.64	1.33	1.25	1.32	1.41	1.41	
Italy				2.41	1.64	1.42	1.51	1.44	1.35
Cyprus (2)						1.31	1.31	1.17	1.34
Latvia		2.40	1.99	2.03	1.39	1.27	1.55	1.55	1.76
Lithuania	2.29	1.97	1.50	1.60	1.76	1.63	1.59	1.63	1.52
Luxembourg	2.02	1.98	1.91	1.87	1.32	1.31	1.32	1.25	1.23
Hungary			1.99	2.04	1.70	1.38	1.43	1.38	
Malta	3.12	2.57	1.60	1.62	1.72	1.71	1.79	1.79	1.76
Netherlands	2.69	2.29	1.65	1.46	1.36	1.41	1.39	1.44	1.42
Austria				2.06	1.37	1.24	1.40	1.38	1.30
Poland	3.16	3.01	2.25	1.56	1.55	1.40	1.32	1.36	1.35
Portugal			2.43	1.83	1.31	1.32	1.38	1.33	1.25
Romania				1.46	1.25	1.26	1.53	1.57	1.56
Slovenia	3.04	2.41	2.32	2.09	1.30	1.25	1.41	1.40	1.45
Slovakia	2.72	1.83	1.63	1.78	1.73	1.80	1.86	1.87	1.83
Finland		1.92	1.68	2.13	1.54	1.77	1.94	1.98	1.90
Sweden		1.90	1.83	1.64		1.78	1.94	1.98	
United Kingdom		2.81	2.48	2.30	2.08	2.05	2.23	2.20	2.02
Iceland					1.57	1.49	1.71	1.40	1.69
Liechtenstein		2.50	1.72	1.93	1.85	1.84	1.98	1.95	1.88
Norway	2.44	2.10	1.55	1.58	1.50	1.42	1.50	1.52	1.52
Switzerland						1.60	1.91	1.69	
Montenegro						1.41	1.49	1.46	
Croatia					1.88	1.46	1.52	1.56	1.46
FYR of Macedonia							2.08	2.04	
Turkey									

(1) Excluding French overseas departments, up to and including 1990.

(2) Break in series, 2010.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_frate)

⁴ Gyáni (2004) notes that in the early 1910s, there were approximately 34 births per thousand, which dropped to 19 by 1941 (p. 273).

I originally assumed that a low total fertility rate suggested a large group of women without children in Hungary, but I quickly realized this is not the case. Dudley L. Jr. Paston and Árpád Szokolczai (1986) explain that in the 1980s, there was “wide-spread belief even today among some Hungarians that one is not really an adult until a child is born” (p. 82). Olga Tóth (1999) affirms that at the end of the 20th century, Hungarian women typically had one or two children and that families of three children, or couples with no children, were atypical (p. 134). Indeed, until the 1990s, “the number of childless marriages was rather low in Hungary” (Tóth, 1999, p. 140). Tóth suggests that, typically, childless marriages are a result of infertility and that the choice to be childless was rare because Hungarian society “traditionally stigmatized married couples without a child” (1999, p. 140). This traditionally held value of children and family did not wane in the 21st century. A survey conducted between 2000 and 2003 demonstrated that 58.8 percent of Hungarians surveyed believed that “the real source of happiness can only be a child” (Bencsik and Juhász, 2010, p. 71). Andrea Bencsik and Tímea Juhász (2010) argue that these findings suggest Hungarians prioritize having a family and believe it “unacceptable if somebody makes a conscious decision not to have a baby” (p. 71).

A more recent study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* examined questionnaires administered between 2005 and 2006 to 38, 187 respondents in 25 European countries (approximately 1,500 respondents per country) to determine the acceptance of childlessness (Merz and Liefbroer, 2012, p. 591).⁵ Attitudes about voluntary childlessness were assessed with the following question: “How much do you approve or disapprove if a

⁵ The following European countries were studied: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine (p. 591).

woman/man chooses never to have children?” (p. 591) to which respondents could answer on a scale of 1-5, 1 meaning “strongly disapprove” and 5 meaning “strongly approve”. In Hungary the mean response was 2.38 with a Standard Deviation of .89, meaning answers leaned toward the middle of the scale, slightly toward disapproving, and that most respondents were close to this middle response in terms of their feelings concerning childlessness (p. 593). From this I ascertain that childlessness is overall disapproved of in Hungary, but not by an overwhelming majority of the population. The study, which I will utilize again later in this dissertation, ultimately revealed that countries which stronger value modernization were more approving of the choice to remain childless than countries with traditional values (p. 595). Additionally, respondents with higher levels of educational attainment were more approving than respondents with lower educational levels (p. 595). The researchers noted that approval of childlessness was strongest among respondents in Northern and Western Europe, while lowest in formerly communist Eastern European countries—like Hungary (p. 594).

It has been suggested that the low fertility rates in a social climate that values children is due in part to women delaying childbirth during their childbearing years, often because of their careers, thereby decreasing the number of children they could have as a result of age-related infertility (Koronczay, 2001). Demographer Ferenc Kamarás argued that before 2001 intentional childlessness was rare but that this kind of unintentional childlessness was becoming more prevalent (Koronczay, 2001, p. 21). In 2009, Hungarian psychologist Miklós Baktay further contextualized the decreasing size of Hungarian families. Baktay asserted that the family structure in Hungary had changed: for the last fifty years the family had been child-centred whereas Hungary was previously comprised of larger families with extended relatives and children had to adapt—not expect to be catered

to (Kulcsár, 2009c, issue 45, p.85). Beginning in the 1960s, the larger family structure all but disintegrated and smaller families were the trend as parents wanted only one or two children, but desired to give them everything and make them the focal point of their lives (V. Kulcsár, 2009c, issue 45, p.85; Valuch, 2004, p. 524). This is, of course, not unique to Hungary as both industrialization and capitalism have influenced smaller families across Europe—children have become a commodity (Valuch, 1999, p. 52).

Concerning historical statistics of childlessness, Paston and Szakolczai (1986) report that childlessness increased between 1930 and 1949, but this was likely only temporary and a result of wartime hardships (p. 82). However, childlessness overall—likely due to medical improvements and the resulting reduction of involuntary childlessness—actually declined between 1949 and 1980 (p. 80). According to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2010), in 1960, 10 percent of 40-49 year old married women were childless, whereas earlier they report this number to be 15 percent; however, this data lumps infertility with intentional childlessness. By 2001, only 4 percent of 40-49 year old married women remained childless. In the same year, only 1.5 percent of women 45 years of age or younger and 2.4 percent of men 50 years of age or younger “considered childlessness ideal” (par. 2). The study reports that ultimately, in 2010, the proportion of “consciously childless” was not high in Hungary, but confirms that women were choosing to have children later in life and this delay in childbearing can result in fewer children born within a woman’s most fertile childbearing years.⁶ In summation, while I interpreted low

⁶ Important to note concerning this demography is that examining intentional childlessness can be complicated because although a woman, man or couple may claim they do not want children, this decision can change during their childbearing years and thus studying one’s intentions may not be as fruitful as studying definitive childlessness. According to a study produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2010, “definitive childlessness” for women can only be determined at the end of a woman’s childbearing years—typically between age 45-49 (p. 1).

fertility rates to mean a variety of childless, small and large families, overall childlessness remains stigmatized in Hungary and the low fertility rate reflects how family sizes have instead decreased dramatically, due in part to changes in the family structure and delaying of procreation.

Although family sizes have decreased and fertility rates have fallen in Hungary, what I have learned from the existing literature on women's social roles is that families are no less valued in contemporary society than they have been traditionally, and childlessness still remains largely unaccepted. Indeed, in post-communist Hungary "in judging a Hungarian woman's personhood, or "moral career," marriage and childbearing are the primary criteria" (West, 2000, p. 117). This judgment is further compounded by the post-communist dominant discourse of motherhood, which frames Hungarian women's reproductive decisions as central to the demise, or success, of the country, culminating in the strongly nationalist, revisionist sentiments and policies of the current government. Indeed, a series of contrasts (which will be explored in this dissertation) suggests Hungary as a most interesting case study: a history of intense pro-natal policies, a current nationalist government that prioritizes (certain) women's reproduction above all else, coupled with declining fertility rates but also the social unacceptability of childlessness.

The Role of *Nők Lapja* Magazine

Because childlessness is relatively unstudied in Hungary, I originally planned to examine multiple post-Second World War texts (posters, magazines, newspapers, films, etc.), to put together a comprehensive understanding of the representations of women

without children. I was wisely cautioned that this was an inappropriately broad focus for a project of this size. Instead, as recommended, I chose an anchor for my research. I chose the popular Hungarian women's magazine *Nők Lapja*—studying each weekly issue published between 1989 and 2012—as an introduction to a study of childlessness, marking my initial contribution to the small existing scholarly work on childlessness in Hungary.⁷ The magazine has proven to be an excellent barometer for beginning to understand and unpack representations of women without children and understanding how they fit into family-focused discourse, pro-natal policies, and constructions of nation.

By studying *Nők Lapja*, I am also further contributing to studies of Hungarian media and its impact. At the same time that research on childlessness is absent, Sára Hatházi argues that “research on Hungarian media representations is scarce” (2011, p. 12) as well. As I discuss in Chapter Three, *Nők Lapja* has been a relatively unstudied text and scholarly work on it is often disparaging. Study of popular media like women's magazines is crucial, however, because although they are not entirely prescriptive, media like a women's magazine can have a material effect on people's expectations of the world, which in turn shapes their experience of it and this impacts how other people are treated, what legislation is passed (or rallied against), what becomes a societal norm, and which social groups become excluded (Branston and Stafford, 2006, p. 141). Influenced by Michel Foucault, Gillian Rose (2012) argues that people are produced through discourse—a person's sense of who they are can be shaped by discourse; “discourse produces the world as it understands it” (p. 137). In post-communist Hungary, the situation is no different. Éva Thun (1999) argues that women's identities are greatly shaped by popular media,

⁷ I chose 1989 as a starting point because 1989 is recognized as the year communism fell in Hungary as it did in other formerly communist Eastern European countries following the opening of the Berlin Wall (Kontler, 2002). The choice is in keeping with my interest in studying childlessness post-communism.

which at the time of her writing produced images and representations of women which remained largely uncontested.

Lastly, as I will elaborate on in Chapter Three, I chose *Nők Lapja* for its popularity among Hungarian readers (mainly, but not exclusively women), but also because, in the post-communist period, in which politicians have largely distanced themselves from communism, this formerly communist publication has been able to seamlessly transition through the fall of communism and remain a household favorite. Its ability to shed communist connections in the transition period suggests that the magazine was, and is, important to Hungarian women. Despite international and domestic competition, it has managed to maintain its position as market leader, which implies that it continues to be significant to the lives of many Hungarian women (and men) who read it.

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

Intersectionality

Although the physical act of procreating might be biological, the meanings ascribed to procreation, motherhood, the family, etc. are socially constructed and are influenced by socio-cultural organizations. Thus, in this dissertation I have employed an intersectional approach. Such an approach demands and aids in the execution of a research project that, although focused on the discourses and representations concerning mothers and women without children, also looks at the rich historical and geo-political context of these constructions, examining the intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, politics, dis/ability, history, geography, economics, and nationalism. The concept of “intersectionality,” a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw and Harris, 2009), has

been interpreted differently by feminist scholars but Nina Lykke (2010), in an effort to provide an umbrella definition, contends that intersectionality

is a theoretical and methodological tool to analyze how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally and/or structurally constructed socio-cultural organizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations (p. 50).

According to Lykke (2010), intersectionality helps researchers analyze how different categorizations are interwoven and entwined.

Intersectionality stipulates that no socio-cultural organization can be studied in isolation and serves to complicate understandings of experience because, as Crenshaw and Harris (2008) explain, intersectionality helps researchers see that “perceived group membership can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias, yet because we are simultaneously members of many groups, our complex identities can shape the specific way we each experience that bias” (p. 3). Intersectionality helps me to understand and elaborate on, for example, how one woman’s reproduction can be demanded by a society that simultaneously discourages another woman’s children from receiving adequate access to education, and why motherhood is important to the state in the first place. An intersectional approach complicates simplistic accounts of motherhood as being significant because of biology (or women’s “natural desires”), and provides language for explaining the multitude of socio-cultural organizations that are integral to the social construction of the institution of motherhood and representations of non-motherhood.

Gender and Nation

Given this emphasis on intersectionality, in the chapters that follow, multiple themes and discourses intersect as I explore connections between nation, body, and gender. Nation, like gender, is a socially constructed concept (Verdery, 1996, p. 62). In the literature, there are typically two main understandings of nation: as citizenship and as cultural identity (Verdery, 2013, p. 17; Kövér, 2004, p. 197). I address both, but primarily the latter which can also be referred to as ethno-nationalism (Verdery, 2013, p. 17). Nira Yuval-Davis' theorizing on nation and gender has been particularly influential to my research. Women, Yuval-Davis (1997) contends, "reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically" (p. 2), but despite these roles (and demands), Yuval-Davis points out that women are often left out of theorizing about nationalism. To remedy this, Yuval-Davis (1997) illuminates how constructions of nationalism typically involve very specific constructions of manhood and womanhood—specific notions of what it means to be feminine or masculine. Barbara Einhorn makes a similar connection and argues that, concerning gender roles, "nationalism both structures and is structured by rigid notions of gender" (2009, p. 54). To be sure, ideas of nation—what is good for the nation, who is part of the nation, who is against the nation—construct and are constructed by actions and thinking about men's and women's social roles (Iveković and Mostov, 2002). Specifically, "by dressing and behaving 'properly', and by giving birth to children within legitimate marriages, they [women] both signify and reproduce the symbolic and legal boundaries of collectivity" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p. 20).

Floya Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) outline five major, but not exclusive, ways women are drawn into nation-building:

- (a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities;
- (b) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups;
- (c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture;
- (d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences—as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the constructions, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories;
- (e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles (p. 7).

Later, the authors add that “women are [also] acted on with regard to the labor market” and reproduce class groups (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p. 80-81). Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) stipulate that these roles are shaped differently across different historical settings and the importance placed upon these roles—which are prioritized—will change.

Motherhood, then, is often inextricably linked to conceptions of womanhood and further wrapped up in nationalist projects as certain women are called on to reproduce the nation. Huseby-Darvas (1987) calls this the role of the “*Kulturtrager* (carriers, sustainers of culture)” by which she means that women are seen as holders and perpetuators of culture, in an effort to sustain continuity in terms of social practices, cultural meanings and even biological ties (p. 17). Importantly, “nations and their boundaries are made and remade, literally and metaphorically, through discourses and practices on reproduction” (Kramer, 2009, p. 82). Yuval-Davis (1996) argues that women’s reproductive rights are often negated, in an effort to ensure that women meet their so-called obligations to their national and ethnic collectivities (p. 17). As my research will demonstrate, ethnically Hungarian women are often constructed as both mothers of the nation—a key to the

nation's survival if they have the number of children prescribed by the state—and threats to the nation if they refuse to comply with demands placed on their reproductive bodies, which have been controlled in various ways in an effort to meet nation-building objectives. Indeed, “women as mothers are reproducers of the nation; but they are also thought of as potential enemies to the nation, traitors to it, and collaborators to its death” (Iveković and Mostov, 2002, p. 11)—which shall be demonstrated quite clearly in Chapters One and Two. However, not all women's motherhood is valued the same way because “racialized and ethnic minority women are often deprived of the rights to reproduce the citizens of the state” (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p. 81), which I will also discuss later on. Certainly, women of othered groups are perceived as “enemies as reproducers, multiplying the number of outsiders, conspiring to dilute and destroy the nation with their numerous offspring” (Iveković and Mostov, 2002, p. 11).

“Othering” and Constructions of Nation and Nationalism

Nationalism is argued to be “a kind of collective identity” (Einhorn, 2009, p. 52). Benedict Anderson (2006) suggests that nation is a socially constructed community, invented by people who consider themselves to be members of that particular community. However this community is an “imagined community,” because most members will never meet (p. 6). Despite the fact that they will likely never meet, a nation is perceived to be a comradeship of members and “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). Among other imagery, nation-building strategies can be constructed on likeness and shared suffering (Böröcz and Verdery, 2013, p. 13). However, it can ultimately be difficult to pinpoint exactly what qualities or characteristics the “insiders” of a nation have, thus

nations are also typically defined in contrast to another group of “outsiders,” the “others” who do not have that which binds the collective together and helps construct and maintain the nation (Einhorn, 2009, p. 52; Huseby-Darvas, 1995, p. 166; Verdery, 1994, p. 226; Anderson, 2006).

Katherine Verdery (1994) summarizes this insight best: “a given ‘nation’ has no meaning except in a world of other, different nations, but a great deal of social effort has historically been expended on defining any given nation as distinctive by virtue of qualities *all* its members are presumed to share” (Verdery, 1994, p. 226). She believes that the nation “mediates the relation between subjects and states (which are themselves social constructs too). It is a cultural relation intended to link a state with its subjects and to distinguish them from the subjects of other states” (Verdery, 1994, p. 227). Indeed, the role of the “other” is key to nationalism and the construction of the nation, so much so that it has been argued that a nation has no meaning unless there are different, other nations to which it can be compared to and differentiated from (Verdery, 1996, p. 62). Exclusion and “othering” can happen *within* the geographical boundaries of a nation-state as well. Sometimes a common “origin” and culture is foregrounded as important to the nation-building process (Yuval-Davis, 1996, p. 18). In today’s Hungary, inspired by a history fraught with the border contentions I outline in Chapter One, nationhood is distinguished as separate from citizenship and territory (Fowler, 2004) enabling Hungarians to discriminate against legal residents on the basis of their not being “properly” Hungarian”. I pay careful attention to Hungarian history because a common history is deemed crucial for determining who “belongs” to the nation, for it is believed that Hungarians have suffered differently—and more—than other ethnic groups.

Understanding Contemporary Traditionalist Ideas

Concerning women's contemporary social roles and their connection to the nation, I also rely on Elspeth Probyn's (1997) "new traditionalism," which argues that a contemporary return to traditional social roles is fuelled by a rejection of feminism.⁸ I adapt her work to include a rejection of communism as well. Probyn's work is quite useful in that it helps theorize how a rebirth of traditional ideas in Hungary not only outlines what is natural for women, but also frames traditional gender roles for women as the "natural" choice (Probyn, 1990). By naturalizing the home, women have no choice but to accept re-domesticized roles lest they be deemed *unnatural*—further complicated by the situation in Hungary, where women are frequently accused of doing harm to the nation and allying themselves with communism with their *unnatural* emancipation and failure to maintain the family life. Wendy Bracewell (1996) argues that nationalist ideology supports the return to traditional values, marked by patriarchy and the framing of women's roles as limited to the domestic sphere, by "using mothers as symbols of the nation, and by emphasizing women's responsibility for the biological and cultural reproductions of the nation" (p. 25). She refers to this emphasis as positioning women as "machines for reproduction" (p. 28).

Theorizing Childlessness

Concerning theorizing about childlessness in particular, my analysis of representations of childlessness in *Nők Lapja* is influenced by Rosemary Gillespie's (2000) argument that reactions to the decision to be childless or the inability to have children serve a purpose and are informed by, but also shape, public perception. Specifically, Gillespie

⁸ Gail Kligman employs a similar concept, "retraditionalization" to explain a return to traditional values (Petrescu-Prahova, 2009).

(2000) discusses discourses disbelieving, disregarding or treating as deviant the decisions not to have children. She argues that negating and disbelieving women's accounts of choosing not to have children "preserves notions of motherhood as natural, inevitably desirable and central to understandings of femininity" (Gillespie, 2000, p. 229), which is central to my argument in Chapter Three. Connected to Gillespie's work, Elisabeth Badinter (2011), in her study of European motherhood, finds patterns across the European continent assuming that a childless woman's decisions not to have children stem from a psychological issue. Further, she argues that voluntarily childless women are often dismissed as irresponsible—which I connect to themes of nationalism and the "responsibility" of citizens—particularly women—to reproduce the nation.

In understanding why discussions and representations of childlessness were so infrequent in my study of *Nők Lapja*, I turn to Merz and Leifbroer's (2012) interpretations and applications of two influential theories: the Second Demographic Transition and New Home Economics. The authors summarize the Second Demographic Transition theory, which they explain suggests that an emphasis on "autonomy and self-realization" leads to acceptance of behaviour, like choosing to be childless, which deviates from traditional family norms (p. 588). In other words, where tradition is valued, childlessness is less socially acceptable (p. 589). Thus, studying cultural change—which I do in Chapters One and Two—contributes to understanding socially acceptable representations of childlessness. The New Home Economics theory supplements the former by suggesting that where the opportunity cost for having children is perceived to be too high, approval for childlessness increases, and vice versa (p. 588). In their aforementioned study, it was revealed that approval rates for childlessness were lowest among formerly communist Eastern European countries (p. 594). This finding provides support for the theory that the

less traditional a country, the more citizens approve of childlessness whereas the more traditional a culture the less childlessness is approved of (p. 595). Merz and Leifbroer (2012) singled out former communist Eastern European countries as lagging in the modernization, as they call it, of values because the associated process of individualization was delayed under communism (p. 597). Compounding this influence, Merz and Leifbroer note that after the fall of communism across Europe, countries afflicted have faced economic uncertainty, which also influences attitudes concerning procreative decisions (p. 597).

Theorizing Power

Foucault's concept of bio-power, the disciplining of bodies and populations, is particularly useful to my research, because it highlights the dominance of state ideologies, but also how the private sphere can reject them and generate resistance. Bio-power "concerns the management of the production and reproduction of life in modern societies. It is oriented to such new objects of power/knowledge as population, health, urban life, and sexuality. It objectifies these as resources to be administered, cultivated and controlled" (Fraser, 1989, p. 24). I elaborate on this in Chapter Two, explaining how women in Hungary were pushed and pulled by various state policies to meet the demands of the state, and how women's bodies were, and are, a site of power relations.

Foucault's theorizing on power in a broader context is particularly salient to my research. As Sara Mills (2004) explains, "feminist theorists are generally concerned to analyze power relations and the way that women as individuals and as members of groups negotiate relations of power" (p. 70). Power, Foucault (1980) argues, "can retreat here, re-organize its forces, invest itself elsewhere" (p. 56). Further, Foucault (1990) argues that

“power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (p. 93). M.E. Bailey explains this notion as “relations of power must take myriad and partial forms” (1993, p. 107). Because power is everywhere, Foucault advocates examining “micropractices,” which are social practices found in everyday life (Korinek, 2000, p. 18). Chapters Two and Three do just this, examining various sites of power, focused on women’s bodies and reproduction in policy and in print. These chapters also examine how women engage with these pressures, and resist them. Indeed, the most important point concerning power, according to Foucault, is that “where there is power, there is resistance . . . [and] these points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (Foucault, 1990, p. 95). Mills (2004) reiterates that “the categories and narratives which discourse constructs for subjects are not simply imposed, but are subject to negotiation by those subjects” (p. 86). She means that there is no one central, dominant point of power nor is there one great source of resistance. In this way, *Nők Lapja* helps to understand the way in which Hungarian readers of *Nők Lapja* (typically women, but not always), have accepted, agreed with but have also resisted traditional ideas of motherhood understood to be integral to what it means to be a woman. Further, state policies are seen as a source of power as well, but that does not mean that they have been able to coerce women successfully into assuming the social roles prescribed for them.

I also take into account Nicholas Abercrombie et al.’s (1980) dominant ideology thesis which holds that dominant ideologies alone cannot produce social order. Therefore, the power of the state is always ready to be employed when required. This theory complements Foucault’s understanding of power located everywhere and how law is “an instrument of power which is at once complex and partial” (Foucault, 1980, p. 141). This is partly why Chapters Two and Three, although different, fit together. Chapter Two, with

a focus on reproductive policy development, contextualizes Chapters Three and Four, but also demonstrates sites of power and resistance concerning women's reproductive bodies. Chapters Two, Three, and Four demonstrate how discourse will "appear across a range of texts" (Hall, 2012, p. 75).

Discourse Analysis

Some of my project is descriptive, synthesizing information on Hungarian history and family policies, employing theories of nation and nationhood to better understand this history. In other parts, I focus on discourse analysis, using Foucault's study of discourses "as a system of representation" (Hall, 2012, p. 72). Drawing upon Foucault, Mills (2004) defines discourse as "groups of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and a force to them in common" (p. 6). This definition, one of many increasingly narrow definitions Mills unpacks, allows researchers to identify specific discourses, such as a discourse of femininity, or motherhood. A second definition derived from Foucault describes discourse as a regulated practice which results in statements, which Mills takes to mean that the utterances themselves are not as crucial as the rules and structures that direct them (p. 6). These two definitions can be used together including a third, more broad definition which states that discourses are texts with a meaning and effect (p. 6). What many definitions of discourse have in common is that "they consider discourses to be organized around practices of exclusion. Whilst what it is possible to say seems self-evident and natural, this naturalness is a result of what has been excluded, that which is almost unsayable" (Mills, 2004, p. 11).

Discourse analysis attempts to understand how a particular discourse is structured and how that discourse produces a particular kind of knowledge (Rose, 2012, p. 150). For

example, how does a particular discourse describe something? Further, critical discourse analysis studies texts, looking for how ideology or power has worked to produce them. Rose (2012) argues that discourse analysis means examining key themes and considering both what is visible and invisible (p. 158). She further stresses looking at the social context: discourse analysis is concerned with how things happen, even if it may not be able to explain why (2012, p. 159, 162) I abide by these guidelines, particularly considering the social contexts.

Employing Foucault's theorizing concerning power and resistance, feminist use of discourse analysis sees discourse not as something which forces people to act in certain ways, but as something people can negotiate with and use (Mills, 2004, p. 77). Mills explains how Dorothy Smith argues that discourses cannot be divorced from their social contexts (Mills, 2004, p. 76). Smith further explains that men and women are both actively involved in keeping discourses in place as well as contesting elements that are reframed, re-imagined and replaced; thus discourses can change over time in response to this resistance as well as changes in social structures (Mills, 2004, p. 78, 79). In other words, to explore a discourse is to understand that it is not a force that men and women are passively subjected to, but rather something which can be reinterpreted, contested and shaped. A strength of this view, as Mills explains, is that

rather than seeing, for example, conduct books and advice manuals for women as being straightforward indicators or signs of the degree of a woman's oppression, instead, they can be seen as merely an indication of the scale of the problem posed by women and their resistance to being counseled this way (p. 79).

She further explains this point by arguing that because there were so many books about conduct for women in the 19th century, this suggests that women were not compliant to these norms and were instead resisting them, or else such literature would not have been necessary. The emphasis I place on pinpointing women's resistance to constructions of their identity is evident throughout this dissertation.

My Positionality as a Researcher

I think it is necessary to make note of my positionality as a researcher. Caroline Ramanzanoğlu and Janet Holland (2008) explain that all researchers can exercise power by choosing to hear some things but ignoring others and making judgments about what kinds of issues are notable and which are superfluous—discourse analysis leaves room for interpretation. My analysis has been filtered through my own experiences and position: I am a white, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual, married woman who has chosen not to have children. Throughout my research I have tried to be critical of the fact that my political mission as a feminist and researcher has been to normalize the decision not to have children and the physical inability to procreate, and to challenge ideas of a “biological clock” for women. This goal, and my privileged position in society, obviously impacts my research.

Further, although my Hungarian grandparents and mother taught me to speak Hungarian as a child, as a Canadian I have been influenced most strongly by Western ideas. Therefore I have had to question continually to what extent I am infusing my research, particularly my analysis of discourse, with Western interpretations. Indeed, despite my Hungarian heritage, I hold the complicated position as a privileged researcher—with

political goals of my own—and an outsider to the country and texts I am studying. As an outsider there are drawbacks and limitations to my abilities to do research in and on Hungary. My language skills, although much improved since beginning my PhD, are still limited and translating Hungarian texts proved exhausting and challenging. Happily, I have had the assistance of my mother, who worked for a short time as a Hungarian translator.⁹ Still, I think it would be foolish to think that we have not missed—or misinterpreted—double entendres, cultural nuances, and meaning from the texts. However, I also think there is value in my being an outsider.

In her work on women's magazine, Joke Hermes (1995) discusses how necessary it was for her to subdue her own negative views of the genre of women's magazines. In this way, perhaps an outsider perspective is refreshing. Unlike many academics and intellectuals who disdain the Hungarian *Nők Lapja* (explained in Chapter Three), I have no prior feelings about the magazine. Of course, as addressed, I am not without bias of my own. However, concerning the magazine, I knew of its popularity but prior to commencing my study, had only looked at a few issues and had not yet formed an opinion of it, positive or negative. Rose (2012) explains succinctly that to do discourse analysis requires that a researcher look at material with fresh eyes, immersing oneself in the material (p. 158). I did just this: immersed myself in issues of the magazine, and all of the content was entirely new to me—I had “fresh eyes”. Although an outsider perspective on another country can be fraught with problems, which I wholly recognize, there is a benefit to be drawn from working as an outsider studying a popular text—although I recognize that discourse analysis can never be wholly objective (Rose, 2012, p. 160).

⁹ All Hungarian translations of *Nők Lapja* were completed by my mother and I. Other translations, such as book titles, quotes, and party names, unless otherwise stated, were also completed by me, with the help of my supervisor, Dr. Agatha Schwartz, who is fluent in Hungarian.

Chapter Summaries

As Carolyn Morell (1994) emphasizes, beliefs about women and what women should do or want “are not independent of the social and historical conditions from which they spring” (pg. 3). In Chapter One (“A Brief Overview of Major Historical Developments in Hungary in Relation to Women’s Roles, with an Emphasis on the 20th and 21st Centuries”), I present a brief account of key moments in Hungarian history. Factors such as geography, history, politics, demographics and culture have all had a major impact on representations and conceptions of women in Hungary. Tóth (1993), in her essay on Western feminists interpretations of Hungarian women’s lives, clarifies that life for Hungarian women has been very different than Western women’s and she asserts that understanding the different cultural traditions, and social and historical context are key to understanding Hungarian women’s lives. Therefore, this chapter highlights aspects of the nation’s history that are essential to contextualizing contemporary discourses and representations of women. In analyzing contemporary political discourse, I (and many others) have noted what Anne-Marie Caroline Kramer refers to as “historical signifiers” appealing to the country’s past that require some unpacking (2009, p. 88). Specifically, I examine the significance of land loss, revolutions and wars and the construction of nationalism and “othering”. Further, I point to ways in which Hungarian women have shaped Hungarian history and how they supported or resisted female social roles ascribed to them by tradition and the state—another theme threaded throughout this dissertation. I emphasize examples which demonstrate the ways in which women have been called upon to support or illustrate the nation, and have thus been drawn into nation-building projects.

Lastly, I sketch out patterns in post-communist political discourse, highlighting an intensifying nationalism and pointing to historical signifiers. I also address a preoccupation with women's roles in nation-building. I pinpoint a dominant discourse of motherhood that suggests that the motherhood of desirable women is not only natural but essential to the success of the nation, and I discuss how this discourse has been shaped.

In Chapter Two (“Developments in Pro-natal and Family Policies in Hungary from the 19th Century Onward, with a Focus on the 20th and 21st Centuries”) I narrow my focus to a particular aspect of Hungarian history: attempts to control women's reproduction since the 19th century. By synthesizing dozens and dozens of scholarly sources, I sketch out the chronology of pro-natal policies, using key illustrative examples. I argue that the pro-natal policies that have unfolded since the 19th century have defined women's roles in accordance with the nation's needs—as workers, as reproducers (of culture and citizens), and as homemakers—and women's reproductive choices have been shaped through discourse and policy to meet these needs. This chapter demonstrates what Yuval-Davis (1996) argues: that women's reproductive rights are at times negated to meet the needs of the nation. Chapter Two thus demonstrates the many ways in which women's roles are wrapped up in nation-building. I also argue that the policies outlined illustrate Foucault's idea of bio-power—an explosion of ways through which bodies and populations are sought to be controlled, and through which they resist. I conclude the chapter with a more detailed look at contemporary attitudes concerning Hungarian women's roles in nation-building.

In addition to the historical background provided in Chapter One, Chapter Two further contextualizes my original research findings in Chapters Three and Four. Chapters One and Two are not thorough historical trajectories but are more like Foucault's genealogies. They are partial and highlight specific aspects of history—particularly the

“historical contextuality of, and the interests invested in” Hungarian women’s social roles as mothers and non-mothers (Bailey, 1993, p. 103). A genealogy makes the important intervention that contemporary power dynamics and cultural structures are not an inevitable outcome of history—“instead, the oppression and disciplining of women, like other relations of power, has taken different forms with different rationales—truths—at different times” (Bailey, 1993, p. 103-104). Further, a genealogy does not allow contemporary relations between men and women to be justified based upon claims of the “nature” of men and women (Bailey, 1993, p. 105).

In light of the history of a restrictive environment concerning women’s reproductive freedom in Hungary discussed in Chapter Two, in Chapter Three (“Studying the Popular Hungarian Women’s Magazine *Nők Lapja* with a Focus on Representations of Childlessness”), I consider popular representations of women without children—focusing on voluntary childlessness. I studied 23 years of the weekly magazine—from January 1989 to December 2012—which yielded approximately 1,100 issues. In this chapter, I unpack and analyze all of the articles that have to do with childless women in this period. I argue that the magazine, in addition to supporting, shaping and reflecting the dominant discourse of motherhood—which emphasizes women’s roles as reproducers and the “naturalness” of women’s reproductive desires—the magazine also acts, to use Foucault’s terminology, as a site of resistance. Childless women turn to the magazine as one of the few forums in the country where women can openly challenge traditional ideas of womanhood. However, although the magazine can serve as a site of resistance, ultimately my analysis reveals that what is “sayable” about childlessness in the magazine is limited to a dominant discourse of childlessness which disbelieves women’s decisions to remain childless, questions the happiness and wholeness of women without children, and pathologizes the decision.

Together with persistent themes of the “biological clock,” and a demonstrated assumption that all “normal” women will eventually have children, I argue that the magazine works to naturalize the decisions to have children and supports nationalist claims that “real” Hungarian women desire and bear children.

Chapter Four (“Constructions of Motherhood and Nationalism in *Nők Lapja*”) evolved as my research progressed. In examining *Nők Lapja*, I focused intensely on finding articles concerning childlessness but I could not help but notice the other ways in which the magazine participated in the nation-building project, supporting the dominant discourse of motherhood, the exclusion of certain groups, and the construction of Hungarianness. Some of these themes are picked up in Chapter Three, but they are explored in more detail in this chapter. Further, I examine the focus of the magazine on the difficulty for women to balance roles as workers and mothers, and how the magazine—in direct opposition to political discourse demanding mothers stay a home—provides solutions for the work–family balance and challenges ideas about women being happier at home. I once again complicate understandings of the magazine’s role in nation-building by discussing its continued resistance against traditional roles prescribed for women—marking an ongoing struggle among women to define womanhood for themselves.¹⁰

Finally, in my conclusion, I present a summary of my findings and stitch together the many themes running through this dissertation as well as present some possible avenues for future research.

¹⁰ What I present is a sampling of articles, my bibliography includes additional articles that informed my research but were not referred to specifically.

CHAPTER ONE

A Brief Overview of Major Historical Developments in Hungary in Relation to Women's Roles, with an Emphasis on the 20th and 21st Centuries

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is not to provide a complete historical account of Hungary, but to examine critically factors such as geography, history, politics, demographics and culture that have all had a major impact on representations and conceptions of women in Hungary. In this chapter I provide a brief historical overview of some of Hungary's major political and social developments, highlighting aspects of the nation's history that are essential to understanding representations of women discussed in subsequent chapters. To best situate my research, I pay specific attention to concerns like nationalism, liberty, racism and anti-Semitism, invasion and land loss in relation to women's social roles, particularly the ways in which women have been called upon to symbolize and support the nation. Because women's activism, feminism and women's roles outside of motherhood and wifehood have been silenced by dominant historical narratives (Acsády, 1999), I endeavour to include a discussion of the ways in which Hungarian women shaped Hungarian history and how they have supported or resisted female social roles ascribed to them by tradition and the state. This chapter culminates with a sketch of themes prevalent in the post-communist era: Hungarian nationhood, women's approved social roles, anti-communist, anti-feminist and anti-Western sensibilities, as well as the exclusion of racialized and ethnic groups. Importantly, as I shall demonstrate, the historical events that I

address in this chapter have all shaped, and continue to resurface in, contemporary discourse.

Early History and the Threat of Invasion

Hungary has experienced a longstanding history as a nation. According to the dominant historiography, the Magyars, under their ruler Prince Árpád, were the last group to migrate to the Carpathian Basin, now East-Central Europe. Nandor Dreisziger (2001) explains: “no ethnic group or nation had managed to build and sustain, for more than a brief period, a state in the Carpathian Basin before one was established by the Magyars” (p. 4) in the 9th century. Gyula Illyés, a 20th century Hungarian poet and writer cited by George Bisztray (2000), concurs: “in the Carpathian Basin, not a single nation could find permanent dwelling before the Hungarian arrived. This was a dangerous area” (p. 29). Following their successful settlement in the late 9th century, the Magyars have maintained a nearly continual state (Kenez, 2006).¹¹ The point is that, except for periods of occupation, Hungary still exists today as a country within Europe, an important and impressive accomplishment to Hungarians, who have continued to take pride in this history (Good, 1964; Dreisziger, 2001; Veszprémy, 2001). In fact, Dreisziger (2001) deems this sense of ongoing nationhood a “marvel of a historical development” (p. 4).

The Hungarian language does not belong to the same linguistic family as the languages of geographically neighboring countries (Csepeli and Orkeny, 1996). This

¹¹ New research concerning the arrival of the Magyars to the Carpathian Basin suggests that perhaps the Magyars arrived in the area even earlier than what the dominant historiography describes. The specific date is not as important to this chapter as is simple understanding of the long history of the Hungarian people and their interest in this history.

linguistic difference contributed to Hungary's feelings of isolation while also contributing to the desire to connect with neighbouring nations. To this effect, Hungary became Christianized under Saint Stephen I—the first King of Hungary—sometime around 1000 or 1001.¹² Christianity legitimated the new state and “was a medium through which they [the Hungarians] could access and become a part of the socially and culturally dynamic world of the Christian peoples” (Veszprémy, 2001, p. 74). Still, Hungary's unique language—and many other unique cultural elements—have created longstanding feelings of fear regarding the nation's potential for survival (Csepeli and Orkeny, 1996).

A prevalent theme in the nation's longstanding history is the threat of invasion, both perceived and real. Following Saint Stephen's death in 1038, his successors struggled with threats from within in an effort to maintain Christianity, but also had to protect the nation from its neighbours, and their threats of invasion (Dreisziger, 2001). Later, from the 13th to 17th centuries, Hungarians had to protect the country's borders against serious invasions repeatedly (Foote et. al., 2000; Dreisziger, 2001; Csepeli and Orkeny, 1996). Barbara West (2002) succinctly summarizes this history by explaining, “the Mongols invaded in the thirteenth century, the Ottoman Turks in the sixteenth, the Habsburgs in the eighteenth, and the Russians in the twentieth” (p. 26).¹³ Although only the more recent events—specifically, the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and 20th century Soviet occupation—will be discussed in more detail in this chapter, the fear of invasion is intimately connected with the Hungarians' passion for liberty, sense of having been “wronged,” concern for

¹² Saint Stephen, whose name was Vajk before he assumed the name Stephen (István), was canonized after his death (Bisztray, 2000; Veszprémy, 2001).

¹³ Dreisziger (2001) complicates this timeline by explaining that the Habsburg era of Hungarian history actually began in the 16th century, but the 18th century was the only one which saw Vienna rule Hungary for the entire century.

population size, and various expressions of nationalism (developed in the 19th century), which are all factors central to the construction of Hungarian identity and gender roles.

18th and 19th Century Women's Activism

Before I outline the importance of the 1848-1849 Hungarian Revolution, highlighting women's participation in the revolution by means of activism and their acceptance of or resistance to prescribed social roles, it is imperative to point out that women's activism pre-dates the revolution. Thun (1999) explains, "the Hungarian contemporaries of Mary Wollstonecraft drafted their versions of the *Vindication*. . . in 1790" (p. 56) and in the 18th century, Hungarian women also contributed to religious debate and the arts. Specifically, in 1790 three pamphlets were published, by women or on behalf of women, discussing women's societal roles in Hungary. Women also formed activist organizations. The earliest women's organization recorded in the nation's history, the Pester Women's Charitable Society (*Pesti Jótékony Nőegylet*), was founded in 1817 (Acsády, 1999). By the end of the 19th century, approximately 800 women's organizations existed in Hungary (Acsády, 1999). These examples, and those discussed in what follows, point to the long history of feminism in Hungary, a history that is all too readily forgotten by contemporary anti-feminist discourse.¹⁴

¹⁴ Also important to consider is the backlash these early feminists experienced. For example, the Hungarian women who began publicly sharing their writing in the 1820s experienced disapproval and their engagement in the arts sparked controversy and debate much more intensely than the writing of Western European authors, such as Jane Austen (Acsády, 1999). Nevertheless, many women were active participants before, during and after the 1848-1849 Hungarian Revolution.

The 1848-49 Hungarian Revolution: Passion for Liberty and Women's Political Participation

Peter H. Wilson (2006) points out that 1848 marked a year of many kinds of revolutions across Europe. The Enlightenment, in particular, shaped Hungarian ideology; separation from Austria—and thus national sovereignty—became a principle concern (Csepely and Orkeny, 1996). Still, 1848-1849 Hungarian Revolution, a bloody conflict, provides an excellent case study of the Hungarians' fight for liberty and freedom. In fact, during the 19th century, Hungarians were internationally respected for their dedication to the pursuit of liberty (Kontler, 2002, p. 262). However, the Hungarian passion for liberty was not extended to all citizens. In the 19th century Hungary became more intolerant of other cultural groups and the state became more monolingual, mono-cultural and nationalist (Bisztray, 2000). Lajos Kossuth, who led the Hungarian Revolution, claimed the strongest nations were those with multicultural populations (Bisztray, 2000). However, the revolution was rife with ethnic tensions, as the Viennese court actively encouraged Hungary's ethnic minorities to rebel within Hungary (Dreisziger, 2001). The allegiance of minorities to the Habsburgs suggested to ethnic Hungarians that these minorities were in opposition to Hungary's freedom (Deme, 1972, p. 76). Indeed, "the conflict between Magyars and non-Magyars in Hungary was one of the most unfortunate aspects of the 1848 revolution (Deme, 1972, p. 76). Sándor Petőfi, who is considered one of Hungary's greatest poets, was a radical nationalist at the time of the revolution and, reportedly, "on one occasion referred to the [ethnic] minorities [in Hungary] as 'ulcers on the body of the

motherland” (Anderson, 2006, p. 103).¹⁵ Though the revolution ultimately failed, it did succeed in many ways. It resulted in the Compromise of 1867 (Csepely and Orkeny, 1996). Further, the beginning of nationalism is a note-worthy by-product of the 1848 Revolution and will be addressed later in this chapter.

What is also noteworthy about the events of the 1848-1849 Hungarian Revolution is the participation of women. In the 19th century, Hungarian women, as in many other countries and cultures, were expected to assume traditionally female social roles, such as keeping house, bearing and raising children—and women were thought to have certain “natural” qualities, like being more emotional than men (Kádár, 2002). The depiction of motherhood in the 19th century “had roots in pre-Christian myths of ethnic-community creation as well as in Christian perceptions of sanctity” (Huseby-Darvas, 1996, p. 168). Women at the time were expected “to breed culturally Hungarian children” (Huseby-Darvas, 1996, p. 169).

Although women were excluded from political life, they were called upon by political leaders in the mid-19th century to demonstrate nationalism by their attire, donning Hungarian national dress and rejecting foreign fashions (Nemes, 2001). Hungarian women, were not content, however, with such a limited expression of political action and welcomed and supported the revolution by hanging revolutionary banners, raising money and even participating in demonstrations (Nemes, 2001). In these examples we see women challenging their traditional social roles.

According to Robert Nemes (2001), the 1848 revolution created “new opportunities for political participation and patriotic displays” (p. 193). For example, six weeks after the

¹⁵ Such a statement may sound rather surprising given the fact that Petőfi himself did not come from an ethnic Magyar background. As a matter of fact, his original family name was Petrovics, which is not a Hungarian name.

Hungarian Revolution broke out, a document entitled “Demands of the Radical Hungarian Women” was published in the Hungarian newspaper *Pesti Divatlap* (Pest Fashion Magazine). The twenty-four demands insisted that Hungarian women were crucial to the revolution and claimed that participation in public life was a woman’s right (Nemes, 2001). Some male Hungarian writers were enthusiastic about Hungarian women’s patriotic displays, yet their participation was expected to be demonstrated through their maternal roles. For example, Mór Jókai explicitly argued that “women could best support the revolution as wives and mothers and set an example with their patriotism, self-sacrifice, and loyalty” (Nemes, 2001, p. 195).

Women shaped their demands for political participation beyond these limits—as mothers and wives only—but without rejecting their traditional roles outright. However, the demands also stipulated that women’s knowledge must not be limited to the home and that women must be encouraged to develop intellectually so that they may understand political, historical, and social concerns (Nemes, 2001). Blanka Teleki, a Hungarian pioneer for women’s educational rights, was a revolutionary force during this time and established an educational institution for women in 1846, two years before the revolution (Bisztray, 2000). She too rallied for women’s education during the revolution, but also viewed motherhood as central to women’s societal contribution. Teleki advocated that educated mothers meant a better Hungarian society, due to the strong influence of a mother upon her children, who are future members of a nation (see Bisztray, 2000). In her advocacy for education, Teleki expressed her strong nationalism and argued expressly against the practice of having non-Hungarian governesses raise Hungarian children. Pálné Veres, another notable 19th century activist for women’s education—strongly inspired by the 1848 revolution—also promoted women’s rights and even formed alliances with

international feminists (Bisztray, 2000). She argued that the sacrifices expected of mothers impeded a woman's educational aspirations, and she sought to remedy this. In 1865 she published an article in *Hon* (Homeland), a national newspaper, entitled "Call to Women" ("Felhívás a nőkhöz"), in which she reiterated her claims that because women, as mothers, raised children and thus played an integral role in nation building, their education should be of importance to the nation as a whole (Loutfi, 2006).

In 1861 the National Association of Hungarian Proprietor Ladies (*Magyar Gazdasszonyok Országos Egyesülete*), was formed and many of its members had participated in the revolution (Nemes, 2001). Thanks to Veres' activism, in 1868 the National Association for Women's Education (*Országos Nőképző Egyesület*, ONKE) was approved in Hungary, which was a major step in the development of women's education (Loutfi, 2006). Agatha Schwartz (2008) further chronicles the development of women's organizations at the time, citing the Maria Dorothea Association (*Mária Dorothea Egyesület*), founded in 1885, in addition to the 1897 formation of the National Association of Women Office Workers (*Nőtisztviselők Országos Egyesülete*, NOE), to name but some.

Importantly, the activism at this time focused predominantly on providing Hungarian women with more education as well as improving women's employment opportunities.¹⁶ However, the need for education was not based exclusively on the need for women's liberation. Instead, many Hungarian activists argued for emancipation without

¹⁶ In 1869 the National Association for Women's Education opened its first class of secondary school for girls, who, at the time, were expected to only attend primary education, which became a great success and prompted the funding of state-funded secondary schools for Hungarian girls (Schwartz, 2008; Loutfi, 2006). Further, an Imperial Decree from 1895 finally permitted women to study at the faculties of philosophy, medicine and pharmacy (Acsády, 1999). Schwartz (1999) argues that, at the turn of the 20th century, the advances in women's education, although an improvement, were ultimately of minimal impact to the lived experiences of most Hungarian women.

violating or challenging traditional gender roles, particularly women's roles as mothers and caretakers of the home. Specifically, echoing earlier feminist arguments, it was argued that better educated women could be superior mothers, providing their children with a better upbringing (Schwartz, 2008).

Developments in women's organizing continued and 1904 saw the foundation of the Feminist Association (*Feministák Egyesülete*, FE), a more progressive or liberal organization than the Federation of Hungarian Women's Association (*Magyarországi Nőegyesületek Szövetsége*, MNSZ), formed in the same year. Some Hungarian feminists in the early 20th century, many of whom were members of the FE, began arguing not only for women's education, but also for the betterment of employment opportunities available to women and, eventually, for women's political rights (Schwartz, 2008). The traditionalism expressed in 20th century feminist discourses varied, as women re-negotiated their roles in Hungarian society.

The political participation of women in the mid-19th century must be highlighted for many reasons. As we can see, Hungarian women both supported and resisted the traditional roles of mothering and home-making. Further, 19th century Hungarian women's activism is especially important to consider because women's organizations were silenced under communism and replaced with state feminism. In post-1989 discourses, feminism was discounted as "un-Hungarian," a statement easily proven wrong given the feminist history in this country. Finally, the nationalist sentiments of Hungarian women's organizations in the 19th century present interesting examples of the budding nationalist discourse, which is discussed in the next section, and the ways in which motherhood was positioned as integral to the nation, but also leveraged by women as a site of power and resistance.

The Birth of Nationalism and the 1867 Compromise

Although ethnic identification predates the understanding of nationalism as a concept or category, the rise of nationalism in Hungary is typically attributed to the 19th century (Kövér, 2004; Hoensch, 1988) as it is elsewhere in Europe. Jörg Hoensch (1988) argues that Magyar nationalism was created from a “previously unpolitical national consciousness” (p. 4). In the 18th and early 19th centuries, in Habsburg-controlled Hungary, the ethnicity of people mattered less than one’s social standing or religious practices (Dreisziger, 2001). The 1848-49 revolution shaped nationalism because, according to West (2002), during the war of independence against the Habsburgs, Hungarian peasants looked to Hungarian landlords and saw more in common with them than with peasants of other ethnicities.

West (2002) contends that Hungarian nationality has, since the mid-19th century, focused not on statehood but on ethnicity—who is an “ethnic” Magyar has been deemed important, not just who resides within the geographical borders of the nation. Early 20th century Hungarian poet Mihály Babits argued in his work, *On the Characteristics of Hungarians*, that being a Hungarian is “a historical phenomenon” (cited in Bisztray, 2000, p. 101). Babits contends that Hungarians were once a heterogeneous group of people who became homogenous (cited in Bisztray, 2000). Given the history of various invasions, perceived and real, who resides within the nation’s borders was as critical to the construction of Hungarian identity as a shared history and culture, with emphasis on the Hungarian language, which is said to have developed in isolation from neighbouring

countries.¹⁷ Following the 1867 Compromise with Vienna, which gave Hungary its “long-coveted autonomy” (Dreisziger, 2001, p. 27), Hungarian authorities implemented strong assimilation policies. These were directed at “magyarizing” Romanians, Germans, Slovaks and other ethnic groups living within Hungarian borders (West, 2002).¹⁸

With the so-called Compromise (*Kiegyezés*), Hungary became a constitutional monarchy in 1867 and “an equal partner of Austria within the Habsburg Monarchy” (Kontler, 2002, p. 263). The Compromise provided Hungary with more autonomy than the nation had experienced in a century (Dreisziger, 2001). It also marked an important acquisition of political power for Hungary because, at the time, Austria was regarded as one of the more powerful nations in Europe. László Kontler (2002) contends that this union with Austria was thought to ensure the success of Hungary and reinstate its former “greatness” (p. 263). However, Hungarians were ultimately unhappy with this union and both nations—Austria and Hungary—were convinced that *their* citizens had given up more.¹⁹ Hungarians grieved the loss of (or limits to) national self-determination (Kontler, 2002), and nationalism was increasingly woven into public policy. Holly Case (2009) argues that after the Compromise, “magyarization” became a priority as a step toward establishing a nation state.

¹⁷ Language has played an important role in the development of Hungarian nationalism, particularly because Hungarian does not share any characteristics with the Indo-European language family of neighbouring countries. This, it has been argued, has left Hungarian people with feelings of isolation in their geographical location, but with feelings of camaraderie toward the linguistically related Finnish-speaking people rather than toward non-Magyar speakers living within Hungarian borders (Bisztray, 2000).

¹⁸ Hungary, during the 19th century, was a multinational state “where Hungarian speakers made up less than half the population and the remainder spoke German, Slovak, Serbian, Romanian, Croatian, and other languages” (Nemes, 2001, p. 194).

¹⁹ Under the Dual Monarchy, Hungary enjoyed more autonomy, but customs, defense, education and revenue policies were still shared with Austria, limiting Hungary’s independence and affecting policies and the economy (Dreisziger, 2001).

Anti-Semitic legislation appeared prior to the “birth” of nationalism in the 19th century. In 1790 it was proclaimed that Jewish citizens could legally reside anywhere except for mining towns, although in 1860 the restrictions on where Jewish people could live were lifted (Kövér, 2004, p. 193).²⁰ The 1867 Compromise aimed to provide political and civil rights to Jewish citizens. However, György Kövér (2004) argues that the “Jewish question” began to appear in political discourse after 1875. He explains that in 1875, Győző Istóczy, a noble delegate claimed that Jewish people created an impenetrable divide between themselves and other groups within a nation, and displaced other populations because of their “caste-like element” (p. 234). These sentiments contrasted with previously held conceptions of Jewish people as members of a common religious faith. Kati Vörös (2010) points out that the “Jewish Question” (*zsidókérdés*) was actually “established as a powerful slogan and a stock concept when talking not only about the Jews but about the ills of modernizing Hungary in general” during the 1880s (p. 137). Part of the “Jewish Question” surmised that the Jews were taking over Hungarian society; it was “understood as an epic struggle between ‘the Jews’ (vile strangers) and ‘the Christians’ (honest Hungarians)” (Vörös, 2010, p. 140). This intervention in ideas about the Jewish citizens of the country signaled an intensification of political anti-Semitism in Hungary (Kövér, 2004). In 1883, a National Anti-Semitic Party (*Országos Antiszemita Párt*) was created and some Jewish citizens were accused of crimes on the basis of their alleged ritualistic nature (Kontler, 2002, p. 290).

In 1907 a law was passed that stipulated a school could only receive state funding if Hungarian was taught (Kövér, 2004). In the early 20th century, people not deemed

²⁰ Peter Tibor Nagy (2005) explains that from 1869-1920—and even later on—in the Hungarian census Jews were recorded as belonging to the Jewish faith—they were thus classified as a religious, not as an ethnic group (p. 17).

“Hungarian,” such as Jewish citizens, were expected to assimilate into Hungarian culture. There was a political emphasis on promoting the Hungarian language and even encouraging newcomers to Hungary to change their names to sound more Hungarian (Kontler, 2002). Despite some anti-Semitic sentiment, shortly before the First World War the Jewish population of Hungary increased from 83,000 to almost one million, an increase from approximately 1 percent of the population to 5 percent, via immigration, mostly from Galicia and Moravia (Kontler, 2002, p. 289). Although most of the Jewish immigrants who migrated to Hungary assimilated into Hungarian culture, the fact that they were not born Hungarian and that they experienced monetary and social success was deemed problematic by many non-Jewish Hungarians, who were outwardly critical of, and discriminatory toward, these new citizens (Kontler, 2002; Kenez, 2006,). These examples are included to demonstrate the existence of anti-Semitism and the way in which it was entangled with nationalism, and will be expounded upon.

The First World War and the Treaty of Trianon

The first half of the 20th century was a time of upheaval. Hungary changed “from a democratic government to a Bolshevik-style revolution to counter-revolution, ending under the authoritarian regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy” (Szapor, 2011, p. 246). The First World War certainly added to this upheaval and changed the physical landscape of Hungary dramatically. As in many other European countries, the response of Hungarians to the outbreak of the First World War was “an outburst of patriotic enthusiasm” (Kontler, 2002, 319). Further, as elsewhere in Central Europe, in Hungary anti-Semitism increased during the First World War (Vörös, 2010, p. 149). By the end of the war, many Hungarians

were struggling. The First World War had a devastating effect upon Hungary, particularly in terms of population: 530,000 soldiers were killed, 1.4 million more were wounded and 833,000 became prisoners of war (Dreisziger, 2000, p. 31).

The war also resulted in the Treaty of Trianon, a devastating settlement for Hungarians. The Treaty of Trianon, a peace agreement between Hungary and the Allies, was signed on June 4, 1920 and resulted in an extreme change to the geographical size and population of Hungary. As a result of this treaty Hungary lost, or in Kontler's (2002) words, "was deprived of" (p. 342), 71 percent of its territory in addition to approximately 60 percent of its population (Gyáni, 2004; Kontler, 2002; Kovacs, 1989; Behr, 2002; Kenez, 2006; Palasik, 2011).²¹ Along with the loss of land came the loss of resources. For example, Hungary lost 89 percent of its iron production capacity (Dreisziger, 2001, p. 34). As part of the Treaty, the western Allies also dismantled the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in an effort to create liberal democracies within the two nations and redistribute the balance of power within Europe, which served to weaken Hungary's position in Europe (Kontler, 2002). The loss of 60 percent of the country's population was especially devastating and this loss, combined with a rapidly declining fertility trend, which was discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, shaped inter-war public policy and discourse, particularly regarding women's roles as child bearers and mothers.

In the post-Trianon period "Hungarian women were often represented as powerful threats from within" (West, 2002, p. 131). Nationalist discourse propagated fears of the "death of the nation" (Tóth, 1993, p. 216) and the nation's success was hinged on women's reproductive decisions. For example the "egyke issue," the choice of some rural families to

²¹ Dreisziger (2001) refers to the Treaty of Trianon as "dismemberment" (p. 32). The re-drawing of the nation's borders was so dramatic that residents of cities that were previously in a central location, such as Esztergom, found themselves newly located on the edge of Hungary's border (Kovacs, 1989).

have only one child (to prevent the division of land), was deemed problematic because the “one child system” was interpreted as negatively affecting the “fate of the nation” (Gyáni, 2004, p. 275).²² Populist writers claimed that Hungarians should fear the demise of the Hungarian nation as a result of persistent low birth rates, and single-child rural families were singled out as an illustrative example of this inevitable fate (West, 2002; Gal, 2013; Gyáni, 2004).²³ For populists, this pattern was “as threatening to the nation as the diminution of population brought about by the Treaty of Trianon” (Gal, 1997, p. 125). Kunó Klebelsberg, Minister of Education in Hungary during the late 1920s and 1930s, paid particular attention to the reproductive choices of rural women: “mothers who have given birth to at least three children, he contended, deserve our greatest respect. However, women who do not take motherhood seriously represent a danger to society, he continued, and therefore should be treated as enemies” (Bodó, 2001, p. 188).²⁴ Feminism was also blamed for the nation’s failings (Huseby-Darvas, 1995, p. 173), a discourse that, as will be elaborated upon, has seen a revival in contemporary Hungary. Also familiar is that nationalist discourse at the time was buoyed by themes of Hungary’s victimization and isolation as a country (Gal, 2013, p. 58).

As Béla Bodó (2001) elucidates, for some, the “egyke issue” represented a “sign of the biological exhaustion of the Hungarian nation, the end of European supremacy and the

²² The egyke issue originally caught the attention of a physician in 1840, who warned of the demographic implications, but the public barely noticed the growing literature on this rural custom until after the Treaty of Trianon, which suddenly shifted reproductive choices to the forefront of public debate (Bodó, 2001).

²³ See Deborah Cornelius (1990) for a detailed account of the populist writers’ movement. Although historians tend to refer to the activities of a few populist writers, Cornelius points instead to a larger movement—of which she traces the roots in detail.

²⁴ Gal (2013) explains that populist writers of the 1930s “turned to the countryside in an effort to redefine national consciousness after the losses of Trianon” (p. 57), which explains the focus on the egyke issue.

decline of the white race” (p. 185).²⁵ What was also deemed problematic about the custom of one-child families was the perceived shift in power from fathers to mothers, which, populist writers argued, created an undesirable shift from patriarchies to matriarchies which would lead to a degeneration of Hungarian men, at the hands of heartless, commanding Hungarian women (Bodó, 2001). Although Hungarian women’s workforce participation grew in the post-war period, their employment was hotly debated; and although society did accept some women’s employment, married women who worked were typically deemed problematic (Acsády, 2011). The Populist writers’ thoughts on women’s roles, the “egyke” issue and the demographic decline are important to consider because, as Richard Esbenschade (2009) notes, these writers became “national icons by the end of their lives” (p. 204).

After the Treaty of Trianon displaced many citizens of non-Magyar ethnicity into the geographical boundaries of neighboring countries, 90 percent of the population in Hungary was ethnically Hungarian (Kenez, 2006). Religious plurality decreased and thus the Roman Catholic denomination represented a majority, with nearly two thirds of the population belonging to it in 1930 (Gyáni, 2004; Tomka and Harcsa, 1999). The decrease in religious plurality was accompanied by a decrease in the importance of one’s religious identity (Gyáni, 2004) and religion became less relevant to the lives of Hungarians after the First World War. Feelings of nationalism, however, did not subside. Kövér (2004) cites Gyula Szekfű, “the most eloquent Hungarian historian,” (p. 230) who argues, “a feeling of passionate nationalism was practically the only link which, in addition to superficial homogeneity of lifestyle, held the various strata of the middle class together [between the

²⁵ It should be noted, however, that the one child family was more common in rural areas and, specifically, only in some rural communities, although the “demographic problem” was blown out of proportion to suggest devastating effects for the nation as a whole (Bodó, 2001).

two world wars]” (p. 230). Publications like *Uj Idők* (New Times) aimed at awakening patriotic sentiment in readers (Kádár, 2002). Reactions to the Treaty formed a nationalism different than nationalism of neighboring countries—Hungary saw itself as affected differently than its neighbors post-war (Huseby-Darvas, 1996, p. 170).

Esbenshade (2009) contends that after losing the status the Dual Monarchy had afforded the nation, ethnic Hungarians felt diminished and “saw themselves in a desperate competition with the Jews for persecuted status” (p. 216). The Jewish population that remained in Hungary faced an increasingly virulent anti-Semitism (Kenez, 2006; Deák, 2009).²⁶ For example, the Hungarian parliament introduced the Numerus Clausus Act in 1920. The Act limited the number of students who could enroll in universities, particularly Jews and women, with the goal of seeing the socio-economic makeup of student bodies reflect the citizenry while ensuring that non-Jewish Hungarian men’s interests were protected (Acsády, 2011; Kontler, 2002). Although the act hindered many social groups, it has been referred to as explicitly anti-Semitic legislation (Porter, 2010; Nagy, 2005). Although Anna Porter (2010) claims the Act was largely ignored, and Peter Tibor Nagy (2005) explains the Act was never completely implemented, it did have an impact: in 1914 Jewish students represented 24 percent of incoming students, but between 1920 and 1935 their numbers dropped to only 8-12 percent (Kontler, 2002, p. 348; Nagy, 2005, p. 18). Nagy (2005) distinguishes between different kinds of anti-Semitism in Hungary—shaped by different motivations—and sees the Numerus Clausus act as an expression of envy regarding the perceived economic wealth of Jewish Hungarians, thereby going beyond a merely religious concern (p. 14). The act, he elaborates, was put in place partly as a barrier

²⁶ In 1934, author Louis Birinyi wrote “The Tragedy of Trianon” and blamed the Jews for Trianon (Huseby-Darvas, 1995, p. 171-72).

to Jewish wealth and associated class standing because the Jews were considered a threat to Hungarian elites. Additionally, Roma were discriminated against—accused of being “bloodthirsty savages” and a threat to social order (Kende, 2000, p. 192).²⁷ Between the world wars, it was even suggested by parliament that Roma be held in labour camps and Roma women be sterilized (Kende, 2000, p. 192).

In addition to shaping the population and policies of Hungary, the Treaty of Trianon affected Hungarians emotionally. Hundreds of Hungarians took to the streets to protest the Treaty of Trianon the day it was signed. After the Treaty was signed, Hungarians demonstrated an unwillingness to give up on regaining territories lost with the slogan “*Nem! Nem! Soha!*” (No! No! Never!)” (Dreisziger, 2001, p. 34; Kontler, 2002, p. 327). The Treaty caused feelings of uncertainty among Hungarians (Cornelius, 1990). Since 1920, the treaty has “haunted Hungarian collective memory” (Kontler, 2002, p. 344) and been referred to as a “trauma” the nation has suffered (Bisztray, 2000, p. 38) and the “greatest Hungarian tragedy” according to most Hungarians (Porter, 2010, p. 231). Indeed, in contemporary Hungary, Porter (2010) argues that public discourse defines Hungarians as victims who have suffered throughout the 20th century, something expressed through historical exhibitions, among other instances. The Treaty contributed to 20th century nationalism especially because it made Hungarians feel resentment toward the nations which benefited from their loss (Bisztray, 2000). The Treaty also contributed to sentiments suggesting Hungary was alone in Europe and instigated ideas of “us” and “them,” which in turn incited intense patriotism (Huseby-Darvas, 1995, p. 172). As well, populists were concerned about the prospective loss of Hungarianness (Cornelius, 1990).

²⁷ Roma reportedly migrated from India in the 14th and 15th centuries, settling across Europe, but they continually faced discrimination and marginalization (Kende, 2000, p. 190).

Women's Organizations in the Inter-War Period

Women's organizations in the early 1900s typically emphasized tolerance and were active in communities, organizing discussions and lectures, but remained independent from party politics (Acsády, 1999). The Association of Feminists (FE) founded in 1904, fought for women's rights, suffrage, and participated in anti-war activities. However, some women's associations, from the First World War until 1945, echoed many of the popular nationalist concerns of the period and strove to raise national consciousness. Instead of rallying for women's occupation of different social roles, some associations tried to "improve the lives of women within their traditional role" (Pető, 1998, p. 13). Feminists struggled in the post-war period, facing increasing political harassment and claims that they were unpatriotic, particularly for arguing against a war aimed at retrieving lost territories (Acsády, 2011).²⁸ Further, the anti-liberal National Federation of Hungarian Women (*Magyar Asszonyok Nemzeti Szövetsége* or MANSZ), founded in January 1919, created competition. Judith Szapor (2011) explains that middle-class women seemed to opt for the competing, anti-liberal group, abruptly abandoning the liberal and internationalist policies of the FE. The emancipatory agenda of early 20th century feminists was replaced by the agenda of MANSZ, which is characterized by Szapor as anti-Semitic and conservative.

MANSZ was used by the inter-war Horthy government to spread propaganda and discredit other, liberal women's organizations as well as to spread hatred against those not considered Hungarian enough (Acsády, 2011). Admiral Miklós Horthy's regime, from 1920-1944, was a response to the previously short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic led by

²⁸ The FE was eventually silenced altogether as their activities and ideologies were increasingly scrutinized, marginalized and banned (Acsády, 2011).

Béla Kun. Horthy's counterrevolutionary system was, in addition to being revisionist, "antidemocratic, antiliberal, antisocialist, anti-Bolshevik, and, most especially, antisemitic" (Deák, 2009, p. 96). MANSZ represented the nationalistic sentiments of the period quite clearly, speaking against the FE's "right" to represent "Hungarian" women when the group was accused of being comprised of "immigrant aliens," referring to some of its Jewish leaders, such as Rózsa Schwimmer (Szapor, 2011, p. 261). Further, MANSZ encouraged women to vote for conservative parties and assume their "natural" roles in the home as wives and mothers, making sure to ingrain in their children nationalism and patriotism (Acsády, 2011). The MANSZ journal *Magyar Asszony* (Hungarian Woman)²⁹, even espoused such advice as this: men must sport mustaches, because it is "Hungarian" and "masculine," while women must wear traditional Hungarian garments adorned with Hungarian patterns (Acsády, 2011).

Peter Kenez (2006) argues, "in the interwar period, Hungarian public life was utterly preoccupied with the need to remedy the historical wrongs committed [by the Treaty of Trianon]" (p. 205).³⁰ In the immediate post-Trianon period, Hungarians had a tendency to blame all problems with the country on the Treaty—and the aforementioned scapegoats—instead of searching for constructive solutions. Indeed, "the right-wing government and its ideological adherents, men and women, had found the culprit in the composite image of Socialists, democrats, Jews, free masons and feminists" (Szapor, 2011,

²⁹ "Asszony" in Hungarian designates a married woman, thus the journal's title emphasizes that a "proper" Hungarian woman ought to be married.

³⁰ Even in the late 20th century, scholars such as Enikő Bollobás (1993) attributed much of the nation's shortcoming to the treaty, explaining "after 1920 Hungary could not return to her old strength; her illnesses could not be cured" (p. 201).

p. 263). Feminists were blamed for their leftist associations.³¹ In addition to blaming liberal feminists, István Deák (2009) argues that Horthy's regime used Jews as a scapegoat for the calamities the nation had experienced. Bollobás (1993) argues that before the Second World War, Hungary could be characterized as a patriarchal society, much like most of Western Europe and the United States. Hungarian women's roles were still confined to traditionally "feminine" tasks: motherhood and household chores.

Conservative election propaganda in 1920 targeted mothers, asking them to consider their children, particularly girls, as they cast their vote (Acsády, 2011, p. 312). We see in the example above strategies of women being drawn into nation-building projects as they were deemed unpatriotic for not supporting a war to retrieve "lost" lands and asked to wear national clothing to support the country.

The Second World War and Nazi Occupation

After the Treaty of Trianon, Hungarians, "who felt they had been unfairly treated [by the Treaty], flocked to a number of different fascist movements that promised to fight for the retrieval of this territory" (West, 2002, p. 25). Indeed, retrieving lost territories dominated Hungarian foreign policy in the interwar years (Palasik, 2011). Based on the promise of restored borders, Hungary allied with Nazi Germany (which had experienced similar social movements following the First World War) in the Second World War (Cesepeli and Orkeny, 1996). Because 80,000 square metres of land had already been "returned" to Hungary because of Hitler and Mussolini (Palasik, 2011), Hungarians were

³¹ MANSZ members were convinced a "Jewish-pacifist international conspiracy" was at work when MANSZ was left out of the program at the 1920 International Woman Suffrage Alliance congress, which coincided with the formation of the Trianon Treaty negotiations (Szapor, 2011, p. 262).

hopeful that an alliance with Germany could restore all lost lands. Although Horthy had supported efforts to retrieve Trianon lands and had also enacted anti-Semitic legislation, he was reportedly not amenable to Hitler's demands of deportation and the eventual slaughter of Jewish people; he refused to commit genocide (Deák, 2009).³² Because of Hungary's ideal geographical location but burgeoning unwillingness to remain involved with the war effort, culminating in Horthy's October 15th, 1944 speech in which he attempted to remove Hungary from the war, Hungary was occupied and ruled by a "Nazi puppet government" (Foote et. al., 2000, 307; Pető, 2000, p. 132) in 1944, thereby temporarily losing sovereignty.

Although not mentioned in dominant historical accounts of the Second World War, some women's associations, including both Catholic and Protestant groups, were politically active during the war and actively worked to protect persecuted groups, especially Jews. Specifically, women's associations were involved in the evacuation of Jews but also in the political act of refusing to exclude Jewish women from maintaining their positions as officers of associations (Pető, 2000). As another form of political activity, some women's associations declared independence from political parties, even during Nazi occupation of Hungary, risking the lives of their members as a result (Pető, 2000).

Hungary's alliance with Nazi Germany had disastrous consequences. As a result of the war, the country suffered devastating losses, both of resources and citizens. When the war ended, Hungary was left "under a foreign occupying force with devastated resources, a broken conscience and an identity crisis arguably still worse than at the beginning of the

³² However, Anna Porter (2010) explains that the aforementioned Numerus Clausus Act of 1920 was re-instated in 1938, 1939 and 1941 (along with a host of other restrictions and limitations placed upon Jewish citizens) in addition to newly defining Jews as members of a different race (p. 214).

period” (Kontler, 2002, p. 386). By participating in the Second World War, Hungary lost more than 1 million citizens (Gyáni, 2004; Kontler, 2002).

Approximately 140,000-160,000 Hungarians died on the front lines and another 200,000-280,000 of the 850,000-900,000 Hungarian soldiers taken captive were killed, while between 125,000-160,000 civilians were killed (Valuch, 2004, p. 521; Gyáni, 2004, p. 279; Kenez, 2006, p.12). Jewish and Roma citizens suffered immensely as a result of the war. Approximately 500,000-600,000 Jewish and Roma citizens were deported to extermination camps or killed in Hungary (Foote et. al., 2000, p. 324). Specifically, in 1941 the population of Jewish citizens living in Hungary (including the annexed areas) was about 780,000-825,000 (Valuch, 2004, p. 521; Palasik, 2011, p. 5). Statistics vary, but Tibor Valuch (2004) reports that in 1945 there were only approximately 299,000-334,000 Jewish citizens in Hungary, resulting in a decrease of approximately 480,000 (p. 521).³³ These overall population losses—coupled with the loss of citizens who fled Hungary—hindered the country moving forward, as the manpower they represented was desperately needed during reconstruction (Kontler, 2002, p. 387).

Some historical accounts point out that there were no deportations of Jewish people until after Nazi Germany’s occupation, and that some Jewish citizens were saved when “Horthy stopped the deportations on July 7th, 1944, which, for the time being, saved the lives of the 200,000 Jews in Budapest” (Kontler, 2002, p. 384). However, Porter (2010) argues that most deportees had already died before Horthy’s intervention (p. 216). Kenez (2006) argues that Hungarians, following the Second World War, considered themselves

³³ Deák (2009) explains that determining the exact number of deaths is nearly impossible because the boundaries of Hungary changed before and after the war and thus many Jewish Hungarians’ residence was transferred to and from Hungary, making calculations of lives lost in Hungary difficult to make with certainty.

victims and “were not impressed by the obvious fact that their Jewish countrymen suffered incomparably more” (p. 152).³⁴ Further, Hungarians were, typically, unwilling to accept responsibility for what happened to Jewish citizens and blamed the Holocaust entirely upon the Germans, absolving themselves of any guilt or wrongdoing (Kenez, 2006; Kenez, 2009). Furthermore, Jews were once again used as scapegoats and blamed for the nation’s destroyed industries, economy and overall poverty (Deák, 2009). Anti-Semitism among the Hungarian population actually increased in this post-war period (Kenez, 2009). The refusal of Hungarians to accept responsibility for their share in the Holocaust resurfaces in contemporary political attitudes and a renewed wave of anti-Semitism.

An often unmentioned group of persecuted people are the Hungarian women who were prisoners of war (POW). Among the approximately 600,000 Hungarians kidnapped by the Soviets and forced to work in labour camps, there were thousands of women (Várdy, 2002, p. 81).³⁵ Women were not spared, from neither the aggressive way in which Hungarians were seized, detained and deported, nor the gruesome conditions of the work camps themselves (Várdy, 2002; Porter, 2010). Because of Hungary’s active participation in the war against the Soviets, the Soviet leaders wished to exact revenge and punishment upon *all* citizens of Hungary, not just the government and those responsible for the war, and thus both men and women suffered (Várdy, 2002). It is reported that some Soviet soldiers looted and burned parts of the country, in addition to raping Hungarian women,

³⁴ The impact of the war on Hungary’s economy was severe; Hungary was left “devastated” (Borhi, 2004, p. 53). Kenez (2006) explains that the “country was in ruins, and the social-political system had disintegrated” (p. 11). Hungary lost 40 percent of the nation’s wealth (Valuch, 2004, p. 521; Kontler, 2002, p. 387). The national income plummeted: in 1945-1946 it was only half the value of the 1938-1941 national income (Kontler, 2002, p. 387). Hungary also owed approximately 300 million dollars, reduced to \$200 million, a debt transferred to the Soviet Union who collected that debt in addition to the 300 million owed *to* Hungary *from* Germany (Kontler, 2002; Kenez, 2006). The population suffered hunger and cold.

³⁵ The exact numbers are not recorded or known, as many women died either on route to labour camps or as a result of the unlivable conditions within the camps (Várdy, 2002).

for, as Miriam Katin (2006) suggests, the Hungarians were viewed as Germans; an enemy, who deserved the most brutal revenge.³⁶ Porter (2010) provides the horrific example of one mother and daughter, attempting to return to Budapest from Ravensbrück, who were sexually assaulted by Soviets ten times during their journey (p. 212). There is no shortage of such tragic tales, and they speak to the symbolic significance of women for nations—they come to embody nations such that their rape in time of war is a communication between enemy nations (Iveković and Mostov, 2002, p. 11).

After the First World War, the conservative literary journal *Új idők* published a list of 10 “commandments” for women to obey, in terms of how they should interact with their husbands, who would feel defeated after the war. Among these recommendations, women were not to trouble their husbands with their own complaints, but were to greet them with a clean house, well-behaved children and sunny disposition (Kádár, 2002). Further, women were instructed to trust their husbands and if they became withdrawn, to be patient and understanding (Kádár, 2002). Women’s own concerns after the war were dismissed, and they were expected to support their husbands wholly, setting aside their own fears, suffering and concerns to provide a happy and comforting home. Thus women were expected to contribute to the rebuilding of the nation once again through their traditional roles as supportive wives and good mothers.

Following the Second World War, “representatives [of persecuted groups] who remained in Hungary were almost without exception at an advanced stage of assimilation in spite of the fact that there were no measures of forced assimilation after the war” (Valuch, 2004, pp. 554-555). By 1945 discriminatory and anti-Semitic laws were prohibited, but

³⁶ Katin (2006) also humanizes the Soviets and depicts the kindness of some soldiers who helped her and her mother at the end of the war.

most Jews who returned to or resided in Hungary following the war assimilated into Hungarian culture and those who opted not to assimilate typically left Hungary (Valuch, 2004). Further, Valuch (2004) asserts that “as part of the tendency to assimilate, and due to the individual and collective hurts suffered, there was a strong tendency to join the ranks of the Communist Party” (p. 557).³⁷ Joining the Communist Party was desirable for some Jews, because of the promise of assimilation and equality the party espoused and because some felt some loyalty to the Soviets, who had saved many Jewish citizens from certain death by liberating Hungary from German occupation (Kenez, 2006, p. 155).

The loss of citizens during the Second World War was exceptionally difficult for a nation long struggling with falling fertility rates. After the war, Hungary was the first European country to experience such low fertility levels as to below replacement levels (David, 1999). Further, unlike many other countries, both in Europe and North America, Hungary did not experience a true “baby boom” (Frejka & Sardon, 2004; Dreisziger, 2001). After the Second World War, the Western powers rejected any suggestion of Hungary’s borders being redrawn to reflect their historic position (Kontler, 2002; Dreisziger, 2001). Worse still, Hungarians found themselves occupied by Soviet forces.³⁸

³⁷ The Hungarian Communist Party was called the Hungarian Workers’ Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*) from 1948 to 1956 and from 1956-1989, the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*).

³⁸ Hungary had originally wanted to surrender to the Western allies and thought the USA would be concerned with occupying Hungary because of its perceived geopolitical significance (Borhi, 2004). László Borhi (2004) explains that Hungarians considered their country, a “gateway to Western Europe” and a “bastion protecting the Christian West from the heathen Ottomans, a mission that could be accomplished again—this time with the Soviets” (p. 22) therefore of utmost importance to Western countries and that Soviet occupation would be cause for concern for Americans, who would prefer to occupy the important territory themselves.

Soviet Occupation and the Last Democratic Elections of the 20th Century

In 1945 Hungary fell under the Soviet sphere of influence. Although occupied by Soviets, there was a period of time between the Second World War and the communist takeover during which Hungarians were optimistic (Kontler, 2002; Kenez, 2006). Kontler (2002) argues that the initial period after the war was marked by “exhilaration, excitement and hope” (p. 404) because the war was over. The period of 1944-1945 was, even during Soviet occupation, still “referred to as ‘Liberation,’ and the anniversary of April 4, 1945, the removal of the last German troops from Hungarian territory, was celebrated as a national holiday” until 1990 (Kenez, 2006, p. 37-38).³⁹ Kontler (2002) argues that “among different geo-political circumstances, the astonishing dilapidation, the near-*tabula rasa* that remained after the war, could have even proven advantageous for the future of the country” (p. 388, emphasis in original).

Instead, any happiness or relief quickly devolved into “apathy and despair” (Kontler, 2002, p. 404). Although Hungary was eventually Sovietized, the takeover was not immediate. Because of compromises between the Soviet Union and the United States, Stalin could not appear to be Sovietizing occupied countries and so the takeover was to unfold, with help from the Hungarian Communist Party, over ten or fifteen years, in a slow process (Palasik, 2011; Pető, 2000). However, the disappointing voter turnout for the Hungarian Communist Party in the 1945 elections, coupled with American and British talk of the “iron curtain” and the impending Cold War, motivated Stalin to Sovietize occupied

³⁹ However, Kenez (2006) argues that the typical Hungarian was likely “distrustful of the new occupier” (p. 38) during early stages of occupation.

countries like Hungary quickly.⁴⁰ It is vital to examine briefly the process, particularly the sustained unpopularity of communism among Hungarian voters, for it speaks to later reactions to communist control, particularly following the collapse of communism.

Kenez (2006) calls the years between 1945 and 1947 “imperfect pluralism” because Hungarians were still free to speak out against communism and 1945 marked a free democratic election, but occupying forces limited Hungarian liberty.⁴¹ After the Second World War, there were four political parties: the Smallholder Party (*Kisgazdapárt*), the Social Democratic Party (*Szociáldemokrata Párt*), the underground Communist Party (*Kommunista Párt*), and the National Peasant Party (*Nemzeti Parasztpárt*) (Palasik, 2011). After the election on November 4, 1945—which saw the Smallholders win a majority and Ferenc Nagy appointed Prime Minister—the Western world deemed Hungary a fair and liberal democracy.⁴² Critically, in the 1945 election, “for the first time in Hungarian history no distinctions were made between the sexes, and no educational qualifications were required for the right to vote” (Kenez, 2006, p. 95). Policies concerning women underwent many changes between 1945 and 1947—changes women had rallied for since the beginning of the 20th century. Full suffrage was attained, women could access university education, and pensions, childcare benefits and family law were all reformed (Pető, 1998).

⁴⁰ Scholars hold different opinions as to whether the Sovietization was a response to foreign threat, or inevitable—a pre-determined outcome based on Soviet decisions (Borhi, 2004, p. 2).

⁴¹ For example, the Communist Party, with Soviet assistance, controlled the police and police action was weighted in the favor of the Communist Party (Palasik, 2011; Borhi, 2004). The Prime Minister struggled with complaints against police abuse of power but “they were trusted by the Soviet command” (Palasik, 2011, p. 41) and so there was little action to be taken.

⁴² The *New York Times* even complimented Hungary’s successful democratic elections under occupation, which were the first in Europe after the Second World War. The American newspaper claimed the elections a “triumph for democracy” (Palasik, 2011, p. 52). These sentiments were held by most Hungarians, who too felt the nation had triumphed (Palasik, 2011).

The Communist Party experienced tremendous growth in its initial stages after the Second World War.⁴³ Despite growing numbers, the Communist Party was still unpopular among the general population and won less than 17 percent of the votes in the first post-war elections (Palasik, 2011). The Communist Party's attacks became more and more aggressive as the communists sought to undermine and dismantle their opponents, and in 1946 they held a mass protest against the Smallholders (Palasik, 2011). Communist Party members started rumors that Smallholder party members were "reactionary" and needed to be removed from the party, targeting Smallholder members one by one (Palasik, 2011, p. 96; Borhi, 2004, p. 84). "Salami tactics" is often the term used to refer to this process, which involved the "removal from the political scene one by one those who resisted the Communist takeover" (Kenez, 2006, p. 133).

The Communist Party also created a propaganda department which consisted of three divisions: party education, mass agitation and cultural work (Kenez, 2006). Communist agitators stressed the importance of nationalism, hoping such sentiments would appeal to Hungarians (Kenez, 2006). Specifically, "the regime under Rákosi tried to appropriate some of the historical and national traditions for its own ends, suggesting that the Communist Party itself was the worthy sequel and fulfillment of the aspiration of the Hungarian fight for freedom" (Valuch, 2004, p. 562). The Party also tried to convince Hungarians that life, as a result of the Soviet Union, was better in Hungary. For example, in April, 1948 agitators were instructed to convince Hungarians that the Soviet Union was strengthening and improving life for Hungarians while life for the Americans in the United

⁴³ Between 1942 and 1944, the party had between 400 and 5,000 members (Palasik, 2011, p. 35). Numbers rose from 3058 members in December, 1944 to half a million in October of the following year (Kenez, 2006). Members crossed socio-economic lines but most had one thing in common: they wanted a "clean break with the past" (Palasik, 2011, p. 35). Kontler argues that membership grew due to an unethical and dishonest recruiting campaign that misled potential members about the long term plans of the Party (2002, p. 392).

States was worsening—thereby drawing a connection between communism and strength versus Imperialism and weakness (Kenez, 2006). Unions were made with left leaning parties, with a promise for working class unity (Kontler, 2002, p. 393).

Because women won full suffrage rights in 1945 in Hungary, they were a new voter pool. As only a small minority had voted for the Communist Party, they were considered a worthy demographic to target, as their votes could sway the next elections.⁴⁴ In 1945, Rákosi met with women activists, and advised them to influence and convince other women to choose the Party (Pető, 1998). He wanted Hungarian women in the countryside to meet intelligent, attractive communist women and be impressed (Pető, 1998; Pető, 2000). These women were asked to host a gathering of women, using a communal knitting session as a ruse, for example, and then direct the conversation toward politics. Continuing the effort to influence women voters, a weekly publication, called *Asszonyok* ([Married] Women), was created in October, 1949, after communist takeover, with the intention of spreading propaganda to women (Kádár, 2002).

In 1946, communism was gaining ground in the elections of other European countries (for example, the Czechoslovakian Communist Party won 38 percent of the votes) (Palasik, 2011, p. 98), but in Hungary, the Smallholders were undefeated and had not yet been broken up by the Communist Party's tactics. In December 1946, the Communist Party turned to show trials, falsely accusing the Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy and his general secretary Béla Kovács of armed conspiracy (Palasik, 2011; Borhi, 2004). In May, 1947, Nagy was forced to resign, for fear of arrest, a forced confession and jail time

⁴⁴ It was noted that most women had not voted for communists; only 6 percent did, and 60 percent voted for the Smallholders, a party with traditional views (Pető, 2000, p. 135).

(Palasik, 2011).⁴⁵ In Hungary, the August 24, 1947 elections were announced, but the Communist Party members excluded Hungarians from the voting registration if they were loyal to the Social Democratic Party—the Communist Party’s new rival having defeated the Smallholders (Palasik, 2011; Kenez, 2006). In the elections, 77.7 percent of voters still refused to vote for the communists (Palasik, 2011). Regardless, the Communist Party just assumed control (Kenez, 2006). By the fall of 1948, “in Hungary, as everywhere in Eastern Europe, a Soviet-style system was firmly established. The last vestiges of pluralism had disappeared” (Kenez, 2006, p.286). By 1949, the party, now re-named, after much discussion, the Hungarian Workers’ Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*), held a monopoly (Borhi, 2004).⁴⁶ Hungary fell behind the Iron Curtain.

Discussion of communism is typically broken into different periods, but the periodization varies. For this study I use the periodization Valuch contends is used in political—as opposed to economical—historical accounts: “the classical socialist period” (1947-1963), the “consolidation under Kádár” (1963-1982), crisis of the regime and then transition (1980s) (Valuch, 2004, p. 514-515). Sometimes the periodization is further complicated: the aforementioned transition (1945-1948), Stalinism—exercised by Rákosi, who had championed for the communist takeover—(1949-1953), the “thaw” (1953-1956), post-1956 reprisal and the Kádár consolidation (1963-1989). What is significant to my study is the way in which the four decades affected Hungarians, particularly social roles,

⁴⁵ Similar tactics at the hands of communists unfolded in other European countries, including Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, as party leaders were accused of conspiracy and arrested, imprisoned or executed (Palasik, 2011). At the same time, Western powers denied entry to the United Nations to Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania (Palasik, 2011).

⁴⁶ From this point, it will be referred to simply as “The Party,” as there were no other parties with political influence in Hungary until 1989.

and the lingering effects of communism on contemporary ideas concerning motherhood and nationalism.

The Beginning of Communism and the “Classical Socialist Period” (1947-1963)

In the classical, or Stalinist, period of communism, Communist leaders sought complete control of the nation in the private and public spheres (Valuch, 2004). Communist leaders claimed that communism and its resultant policies would be progressive (Kontler, 2002). Like all East-Central European Communist Parties, the Party in Hungary modeled its policy on Soviet policy of the 1920 and 1930s, which included:

forced industrialization, an emphasis in heavy industry, an exaggerated development of the defense industry, the forced collectivization of agriculture, an irrational cult of the country’s leader, and a ritual, degrading, and emphatic assertion of the Soviet model. War psychosis was coupled with constant hostility and campaigns of reckoning (Rainer, 2010, p. 14).

Hungarians were expected to think of themselves as a “soldier of the Party” (Valuch, 2004, p. 517) and act in ways that benefited the common good (Kontler, 2002, p. 407) because loyalty to the Party was demanded above loyalty or concern for anything or anyone else. The Secret Police monitored the public and encouraged, by force or by bribe, Hungarians to report on one another (Porter, 2010). Verdery (2013) characterizes the “socialist nation” as paternalistic because citizens were treated as children who were to be grateful for the benefits of Soviet occupation (p. 17). Moreover, the Party claimed rights to supervising the activities of Hungarians in their private lives, blurring and dissolving the demarcation between the public and private spheres (Kürti, 1991). Soviets also sought to

control Hungarian culture and began a program of censorship, “purging libraries of anti-Soviet and ‘anti-progressive’ books, including some books on Hungarian history” (Kenez, 2006, p. 66-67).⁴⁷ Hungarians had to give up many traditions (Valuch, 2004, p. 604).

In the literature concerning Soviet occupation in Hungary, the portrait painted—not just of any particular period, but of communism in the country in general—is often negative.⁴⁸ Early Soviet occupation resulted in many traumatic stories of men and women captured, arrested and sent to the Soviet Union for physical labour, and women raped by Soviet soldiers (Kenez, 2006; Palasik, 2011; Borhi, 2004).⁴⁹ Additionally, Soviet occupation served to further exploit Hungary’s economy and resources (Kenez, 2006) both on an individual and national level.⁵⁰ Although communism “promised paradise” (Ceró, 2008, p. 50) to the Hungarian people, Bollobás (1993) argues that communism was a “devastating experience” (p. 201). Bollobás elaborates that under communist rule, Hungarians were “spiritually and intellectually injured” (1993, p. 204), largely because communist takeover also involved an attempt to undermine Hungarian traditions and values—ultimately Hungarian culture. Kontler (2002) argues that a “cherished plan” of communism was the “systematic remoulding of the fabric of society” (p. 406). Dreisziger (2001) argues that the “communist takeover resulted in a ruthless and systematic drive to destroy many of the thousand-year-old traditions and fundamental values of Hungarians”

⁴⁷ The same kind of censorship occurred in the film industry. Shortly before the communist takeover, a dismissal from Communist Party leader Mátyás Rákosi could send a film to the cutting room floor due to the increasing control over the film industry (Kenez, 2006).

⁴⁸ Katalin Medvedev (2007) recounts her life in communist Hungary as gloomy and describes the colours around her as “bleak, dull or faded” (p. 23). Erzsébet Kertész Dobosi Croll (2009) describes communism in her memoir in this way: “[communism] caused tremendous suffering and death. We lived in darkness and under terror for the next fifty years” (p. 25).

⁴⁹ It is estimated that between 50,000 and 200,000 rapes of Hungarian women by members of the Soviet armed forces were committed (Borhi, 2004, p. 560).

⁵⁰ Concerning individual resources, Hungarian memoirs and journals recount the thievery and mistreatment of Hungarians at the hands of Soviets, who reportedly stole from Hungarians as a matter of routine (Kenez, 2006).

(p. 45).⁵¹ In the strictest period of communism, religion was also repressed and in 1949 “all religious institutions were closed, religious orders were dissolved, and schools and many other church properties were confiscated by the state” (Foote et. al., 2000, p. 316). Valuch (2004) points out that, “one of the basic tenets of communist ideology is precisely the denial or rejection of national character” (p. 562) and, therefore, expressing one’s cultural, religious or ethnic identity was discouraged.

The Party tried to dismantle class structures and promised equality, particularly for ethnic minorities (Valuch, 2004, p. 555). In this, the Party was never entirely successful. For example, although Roma received loans and housing subsidies from the government, they also found themselves working for disproportionately less money than their non-Roma counterparts, trapped in low paying, unskilled jobs (Kende, 2000, p. 193). However, the “Jewish Question” could not be discussed under communism until the 1980s (Valuch, 2004, p. 558). Although certain kinds of hierarchies were indeed eliminated, as Valuch (2004) points out, new hierarchies were created in their place. Instead of wealth acting as a determinant of one’s position in society, one’s political position became a marker of social importance and certain positions came with benefits and privileges (Valuch, 2004, p. 478). Although women were pulled into the workforce, political offices across Soviet-occupied Europe were run primarily by men and the workforce remained very gendered; Verdery (2013) asserts that women dominated in textile and healthcare industries (p. 23). However, it is noteworthy that many women were also educated to work as doctors, engineers and in

⁵¹ Education was severely reconstructed and censorship intensified, with new textbooks and curriculum designed to uphold communist ideology (Kontler, 2002). Even songs on the radio needed to pass communist censorship first. The study of languages was severely impeded and although Hungarians retained use of their own national language, the only foreign language students could learn was Russian (Kontler, 2002). Additionally, the media became newly censored and freedom of expression was seriously hindered (Cox, 2006).

other typically male dominated professions (Kiss, 1991).⁵² Bollobás (1993) argues that communism actually stagnated social growth, resulted in poor working conditions within a broken economy, and silenced women's movements. Under communism, the National Council of Hungarian Women (*Magyar Nők Országos Tanácsa*) was created and with this organization in place, any other women's organizations were deemed superfluous and dismantled, bringing to a standstill the feminism that had been growing in Hungary since the 19th century (Corrin, 1999).

Hungarian women, like women in other communist countries, have been envied by Western women for their longtime involvement in the workforce, a product of communism, as their workforce participation has been viewed as symbolic of liberation, equality and “having it all” (Tóth, 1993).⁵³ Certainly, the Hungarian Constitution of 1949, which “proclaimed that women were entitled to the same work under the same working conditions as men and an earlier legislation guaranteed that women should be allowed to fill any job” (Fodor, 2003, p. 114), could be interpreted as reflective of equality and freedom. However, Hungarian women were not typically allowed the luxury of *choosing* to enter the workforce. Bollobás (1993) negatively characterizes employment in the classical period by arguing that many women were forced into “subordinate, humiliating, state-controlled position[s]” (p. 201). In the years immediately following the Second World War, the marked increase in the number of women employed in the Hungarian workforce was partly a result of the “ideological goal of equality between sexes in socialism” (Robert &

⁵² However, women still, overall, worked in positions that required less education and afforded less prestige and pay (Markus, 1979).

⁵³ Until the mid-1970s, state feminism and women's high employment rates in first the Soviet Union and later in other European communist countries was too simplistically interpreted by Western scholars as purely beneficial to women—perhaps even something to envy, a mistaken characterization realized in the late 1970s and onward, as the reality of the experience of women under communism came to light (Einhorn, 1993).

Blossfeld, 1995, p. 212) but largely due to the restructuring of the Hungarian economy, which demanded more workers (Koncz, 1995; Kiss-Novák, 1999). Between 1948 and 1956, women were desperately needed in the workforce because Hungary was being rapidly industrialized and needed workers (Fodor, 2002; Haney, 2002; Volgyes & Volgyes, 1977; Corrin, 1994; Koncz, 1995).

Under communism, slogans such as, “Labor is a Matter of Honor and Glory” were emblazoned on the exteriors of industrial plants (Valuch, 2004, p. 604). To solve the problem of labor shortages, “the right to work [became] fused with the social obligation to work” (Corrin, 1994, p. 246). Under Stalinist communism, “to be ‘just’ a housewife was to be a parasite on society” (Corrin, 1994, p. 125) and it was represented as a “luxury” (Haney, 2002). The Party aimed to change how Hungarians thought about women, women’s roles and women’s connection to employment (Haney, 1994; Klinger, 1977). For example,

Speeches made by communist officials to female factory workers repeatedly articulated the idea that wage labor should not be something a woman had to do for financial reasons but rather something she wanted to do for social and personal reasons (Haney, 1994, p. 121).

Hungarian women were told by the Party that they were oppressed and that the only means to overcome this oppression was to become a member of the proletariat (Fodor, 2002, p. 244; Haney, 1994, p. 121-122).

Until 1953, communist control of Hungary was strict and repressive but Stalin’s death in 1953 resulted in a thaw, as more liberal ideas entered into political discourse, to varying degrees, across Soviet controlled nations (Cox, 2006; Glanz, 2010). Although the Party had aimed to indoctrinate Hungarians and re-shape their thinking, particularly about

nationalism, Hungarians rejected the dismissal of national symbols and culture and this reaction played a role in the 1956 revolution.⁵⁴ Demanding free, multi-party elections, the de-Sovietization of Hungary and the reinstatement of national symbols, among other demands, Hungarians organized demonstrations, showing support for their Polish neighbours who had revolted in Poznań on June 28th, 1956 (Kontler, 2002).

The 1956 revolution represented opposition from “almost all sections of society” (Cox, 2006, p. vii).⁵⁵ However, displeasure was first vocalized by young intellectuals and Hungarian students who spoke of reforms. The revolution was ostensibly fought for “freedom, national independence, and liberty and also against the forced emancipation of ‘statist feminism’” (Pető, 2006, 318). Andrea Pető (2006) also stresses that revolutionary groups (consisting of men), sought to restore “maternal thinking” and rallied for the restoration of strict abortion policies and more pro-natalist discourse from the government. 1600 students organized on October 16th and on the 22nd, students from the Budapest Technical University published and distributed sixteen demands, including a re-organization of the economy, Hungarian-Soviet relations and a multi-party system (Glanz, 2010). A large demonstration also formed on October 22, 1956 after rumors that the Polish Communist Party had replaced party members with more reform communists, like Imre Nagy (Rainer, 2010). A second demonstration on October 23rd grew in numbers to almost 200,000 (Kontler, 2002; Cox, 2006). Demonstrators, wanting Nagy back into the position of Prime Minister from which he had been ousted in 1955 by Rákosi, chanted: “Nagy into

⁵⁴ Hungarians have a history of political protests. Kövér (2004) explains that between the 1901, 1905, 1906 and 1910 elections in Hungary, and in 1905, 1908 and 1912 there were demonstrations that pertained to voting rights (p. 162). 1912 marked such a violent demonstration that it has since been dubbed “Bloody Thursday” (p. 162).

⁵⁵ Interestingly, in her two hundred interviews with Shoah survivors in Hungary, Vajda (2010) found that few mentioned the 1956 Hungarian revolution as a noteworthy moment in the history of their lives (p. 117).

the government, Rákosi into the Danube!” “Hungarians march with us!” and “Russians go home!” (Kontler, 2002, p. 427). Some demonstrators stayed at the parliament, while others dismantled a statue of Stalin and another group headed to the radio station. However, when the radio station refused to air their aforementioned demands, the first shots were fired upon the crowd, the radio station was taken over and the demonstration turned into an armed uprising (Kontler, 2002; Rainer, 2010). On October 24th the government called for help from Soviet troops and for days Soviet troops (fighting alongside the Hungarian secret police) waged combat against Hungarian street fighters, comprised mainly of young workers—both men and women (Cox, 2006; Rainer, 2010).⁵⁶

On October 28th, a reinstated Nagy announced the Soviet withdrawal, followed by an announcement of October 30th announcing a multiparty system which lasted six days—before a full scale Soviet invasion (Glanz, 2010). Within his own government, Nagy experienced dissent as two members, János Kádár and Ferenc Münich, travelled to the Soviet Union to meet secretly with Soviet leaders who opted for Kádár as the leader of a new Soviet-approved Hungarian communist government (Cox, 2006). Meanwhile, the street fighters could not gain the upper hand and on November 11, 1956 they were defeated (Cox, 2006). Nagy was executed two years later, as were some of the street fighters. In total “35,000 people were arrested, 22,000 were sentenced, 13,000 of whom were sent to newly created internment camps. Some 350 people were executed, 75% of whom were young street fighters” (Cox, 2006, p. xiv).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Although not all Hungarians took up arms, across the nation other groups were inspired to make their own demands, dismantle Soviet symbols and organize, in addition to providing aid and support to the street fighters (Cox, 2006; Rainer, 2010).

⁵⁷ Among those prosecuted and executed five were women—although only three were arrested for crimes committed during the revolution (Palasik, 2010). Of those prosecuted but not sentenced to death, there

As in the Revolution of 1848-49, women were also involved in the 1956 Revolution, although their participation was not explicitly encouraged during the revolution and is usually left out in dominant retellings of the events (Bollobás, 1993; Pető, 2006). Although not many women can be seen in photographs from the first moments when the demonstration became an armed uprising, women were later photographed among some of the armed rebel groups (Palasik, 2010). Although some photographs were posed, Palasik (2010) contends that some captured candid moments of women actively involved in the revolution and carrying firearms. Women even organized an anti-Soviet march in the first days of the revolution (Bollobás, 1993). Women also contributed to the uprising in more traditionally feminine ways: acting as nurses, tending to wounded fighters and preparing food for their fellow fighters (Palasik, 2010; Bollobás, 1993). Young Hungarian women tended to be Red Cross activists, distribute flyers, or work with the armed rebel groups while Hungarian women over 30 were less likely to join the armed uprising but still offered support—even by exercising freedom of speech, something dozens were later prosecuted for (Palasik, 2010).⁵⁸ After the revolution, women remained politically engaged, and on December 4th, 1956 thousands of silent women left flowers by the Unknown Soldier in Heroes Square, Budapest, and also held a demonstration outside the American embassy, a moment of solidarity among women and an expression of their political engagement (Palasik, 2010; Pető, 2006; Juhász, 1999). In retellings of the events, women's participation has been reinterpreted to fit ideas of women as caring, mourning and

were 158 women (Palasik, 2010). As a result of the failed revolution, two percent of the population emigrated from Hungary (Cox, 2006, p. xi). About 30,000 immigrated to Canada.

⁵⁸ The 2006 Hungarian film, *Szabadság, Szerelem (Children of Glory)* by Hungarian director Kriszta Goda, a fictional account of the events, shows women participating in organizing and also depicts older citizens, unwilling to take up arms, but providing food and other goods in support of those who do.

supporting the men, except in the cases of women who were executed or who endured lengthy imprisonment (Pető, 2006). Indeed, although the aforementioned Women's Demonstration on December 4th involved between 15,000 and 45,000 women, this event is largely excluded from dominant historiography. Further, fliers for the event suggested participants were simply "passive mothers and mourners" (Pető, 2006, p. 321) rather than politically active women or freedom fighters. The 1956 revolution was another political episode in Hungarian history that offered women an opportunity to challenge their traditional roles.

Consolidation Under Kádár (1963-1982)

Kontler (2002) suggests that the 1956 revolution was successful in that "it created the basis of a compromise by compelling the Hungarians to a realistic assessment of their predicament, and Moscow to recognize that there were limits to their subjection" (p. 390). Because of both this kind of success, and the role international contingencies played in preventing Hungarian sovereignty, Kontler draws a strong comparison between the outcome of the 1848-1849 revolution and that of 1956 (2002, p. 390). Immediately after the revolution, Hungarians experienced severe repression (Cox, 2006) but soon after Hungary became known as the "jolliest" or "most comfortable" barrack in the camp within the Soviet zone (Valuch, 2004; West, 2002). As Kontler (2002) contends, "'soft dictatorship' created and reflected circumstances under which 'goulash communism' or 'refrigerator socialism' could flourish" (p. 443).

Terry Cox (2006) summarizes, "based on Kádár's maxim 'whoever is not against us is with us,' Hungarian citizens were allowed to live their lives without the levels of state

intrusiveness that the Stalinist system had tried to impose” (p. xiv).⁵⁹ While Stalin required that Hungarians actively participate and contribute to communism, Kádár simply wanted their compliance (West, 2002). The shift from Stalinist strategies to a welfare dictatorship has been argued to have been made with the purpose of winning the support of Hungarians (Bartha, 2011, p. 1593). A key change was the promise of greater consumption and access to material goods (Bartha, 2011, p. 1593).

January 1968 saw the launch of a “New Economic Mechanism” in Hungary (Kontler, 2002; Hare, 1976). The New Economic Mechanism (NEM) featured:

the virtual abolition of compulsory plan indicators, the strengthening of the profit motive in enterprises, considerable decentralization of price formation and investment decision-making, and, in view of the open character of the economy, establishing direct connections between foreign and domestic markets (Hare, 1976, p. 195).

NEM caused incomes to double (reaching a high in 1978) so more Hungarians could make a livable wage and the standard of living improved (Kontler, 2002). The rise in incomes for Hungarian households was gained as a result of Hungarians working long hours, earning additional wages in the new private sector (Kontler, 2002; Bartha, 2011). The existence of an economy that operated alongside a regimented state-owned monopoly is why Hungarian communism was called “goulash communism”—they experienced more economic freedom under communism than did their neighboring Soviet-controlled states.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ However, martyrs of the 1956 revolution were only allowed to be publicly remembered after the fall of communism (Foote et. al., 2000, p. 302). October 23rd has since become a national holiday.

⁶⁰ Prices also underwent a reform at the same time, because formerly prices had been set by the state and often did not fairly reflect production costs, something the price reform aimed to remedy by offering fixed, limited and free prices (Hare, 1976).

Hungarians could enjoy more consumer goods and these goods became a barometer for measuring “the good life” (Bartha, 2011, p. 1602).

The positive effects of the 1968 economic reform were short-lived. Values and lifestyle had become more linked to material goods (Valuch, 2004, p. 606). Although Hungarian men and women could work more in the second economy, a lifting of some subsidies accompanied these changes and prices of goods rose (Corrin, 1992; Kontler, 2002). Inflation climbed but wages could not keep pace (Kontler, 2002). Many Hungarians determined that the sacrifices they had made for their standard of living were too great (Kontler, 2002). The state of the country was reflected in a few social statistics: “in the mid-1980s, the country ranked first in international suicide statistics and second in those relating to the consumption of spirits and liquors” (Kontler, 2002, p. 458). By 1987, almost 20 percent of Hungary’s population “lived on or below the ‘social minimum’ level” (Kontler, 2002, p. 458). As a result of the worsening economic situation, in the mid-1980s, “anti-Roma sentiments were also widespread” (Kontler, 2002, p. 458) and they became “objects of suspicion, despised or envied: criminals, paupers or successful new businessmen” (Kontler, 2002, p. 458). Hungarians were jealous of the “undeserved” loans and subsidies they had received, and the stereotype of the “lazy Gypsy” was supplemented with the images of unworthiness (Kende, 2000, p. 193).

Crisis of the Regime (1980s)

By the 1980s, some Hungarians openly resented Party members and the economic advantages they enjoyed (Kontler, 2002, p. 458; Bartha, 2011, p. 1606). Hungarians openly criticized the credibility of the media, the increase in prices, and Party members

themselves (Bartha, 2011, pp. 1605-1607). Indeed, even though Hungarians were more or less happy with Kádár as a communist leader compared to his predecessors, Hungarians became increasingly unhappy with communism (West, 2002; Valuch 2004). Kontler (2002) explains that

there was, in the sixties, a turn of phrase recurring in the performances of a Soviet cabaret actor, very popular in Hungarian that passed for an adage: “We’ve got something—but not the real thing ...”—a bitter-sweet piece of self-irony, poignantly expressing the slight *malaise* the citizen under Kádárism felt upon contemplating that, after all, he was just happy with the “something.” By the second half of the eighties, the sweetness had gone. Without knowing precisely what it was, people started to desire the real thing (p. 458-459, emphasis in the original).

At this point, however, Hungary was classified as communist only because there was predominance of state ownership and because of the political features of the country (Valuch, 2004, p. 511). It was the most liberal of the Soviet-occupied countries, yet change and development in Hungary had slowed as a result of communism, no matter how jolly the barracks were (Rose, 1999).

Communism was losing its ideological power in Hungary (Valuch, 2004). While the 1970s have become apolitical, the 1980s saw Hungarians turn away from communist ideology—and ideological pressure itself waned (Valuch, 2004, p. 606). Even Party members were less committed to communist ideology as they became discontent with the political state of the country (Clark, 2009; Bartha, 2011). Indeed, that anti-feminist discourse—in the face of state “equality” and the “emancipation” of women—was openly expressed in the early 1980s, spurred again by the persistently declining birth rate, speaks

to the weakening of the regime (Goven, 1993). Specifically, Johanna Goven (1993) cites authors who, in the 1980s, blamed women's emancipation (at the hands of communist leaders) for an unwelcome reversal in gender roles, the alleged aggressiveness of Hungarian women, and the supposedly effeminate Hungarian men. Further, writers accused women and the communist state of having banded together in "an alliance against men" because women were represented as "selfish, voracious exploiters of men and as power-hungry destroyers of the family and democracy" (Goven, 1993, p. 227, 234). In Hungary, as in other parts of Soviet-occupied Europe, the domestic sphere became a source of pride for men and women, although women continued doing the bulk of household tasks (Goven, 1993).

The Immediate Post-Communist Period

The strength of communism disintegrated slowly in Hungary (Porter, 2010). By the end of the 1980s communist parties were collapsing all over Eastern Europe, although the break with communism unfolded differently from country to country. 1989 is typically used to mark the fall of communism in Hungary, although it has been argued that the May 1988 removal of Kádár, the elections in 1990, or the last Soviet soldier leaving Hungary in June 1991 could also be used (Kontler, 2002, 469). The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party dissolved in 1989 and the nation's constitution was amended in October of the same year. The first free elections in Hungary following the collapse of communism occurred in March of 1990 (Kontler, 2002). During the electoral process, many Hungarian politicians struggled to shed reminders of communism, in private and political affairs alike. Private life was celebrated—a rejection of communist ideology, which had already blossomed in

the 1970s and 1980s—and in the early 1990s Hungarian women were, even more adamantly than in the 1980s, deemed exclusively responsible for maintaining the private domain (Goven, 1993; Corrin, 1994; Haney, 1994).

Women were drawn into nation-building and the dominant discourse of motherhood that emerged in the 1980s was strengthened. So-called female virtues, including motherliness, were argued to be the Hungarian norm for women, a desirable resistance to state feminism and a reflection of what was supposedly natural (Pető, 2006, Pető 2013). Women were not portrayed as victims of an oppressive regime, but as “powerful agents who have responded to state emancipation by becoming destructive to men and children” (Goven, 1993, p. 225). Party leaders blamed women’s participation in the workforce for many of the nation’s failings (Haney, 1994). A mythologized time when women “knew and kept their place” was to be recaptured (Huseby-Darvas, 1996, p. 161). Indeed, “the idealization of the prewar bourgeois family... contributed to a nostalgia for a species of nonconflictual gender relations that had never existed” (Goven, 1993, p. 226)—as demonstrated by the challenges to women’s roles demonstrated throughout this chapter. Party leaders further argued that women who were required to work under communism were not emancipated but forced to do “unnatural” things; their place, instead, was in the home (Thun, 1999, p. 40). Here was see Probyn’s (1990) new traditionalism in action: women are pushed to accept re-domesticized roles unless they want to be characterized as unnatural women, allied with communist ideals and endangering family life. Despite the long history of Hungarian women’s organizing and activism mentioned above—dating back to the 18th century and making major strides in the 19th century—Acsády (1999) argues that in Hungary, in the 1990s, the understanding was that Hungary had never had any type of feminist movement because “feminism runs contrary to ‘our’ traditions” (p.

59). Further, she points out that the dominant discourse of motherhood suggested that Hungarian women had been historically content with these domestic roles hinged on motherhood and the chivalrous treatment they enjoyed from Hungarian men, a view supported by claims that biological differences have resulted in men's and women's different social positions. Feminism was thus accused of being “a brutal attack on respected traditions and nature” (Acsády, 1999, p. 58).

This discourse of motherhood was part of a broader political landscape. Following the official collapse of communism, specific aspects of pre-1945 Hungary were embraced, such as nationalism and populism. Lampland (2013) argues that the representation of Hungarian women as domestic, coupled with policies that sought to force women back into the home were “hauntingly” similar to those of the 19th century (p. 99). Kontler (2002) contends that for a while, a large minority of Hungarians even hoped that the fall of communism would result in a revision of the borders changed by the Treaty of Trianon. Valuch (2004) explains:

intellectuals surveyed during the years of the change in regime were unanimous in condemning the four decades of socialism as a declining period and had optimistic expectations regarding the future and the majority hoped that Hungary would soon return to the path of development along which it had proceeded until 1945 (p. 610-611).

Indeed, the first post-communist Prime Minister, József Antall of the centre-right Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*, MDF), re-invigorated the populist discourses of the 1930s (Esbenshade, 2009; Rowlands, 2013). Specifically, the new regime had this ethos: “(1) the folk-national; (2) the Christian course; and (3) the healthy fertility of our own” (Huseby-Darvas, 1996, p. 162). In 1990, Antall claimed that

he felt he was actually the prime minister of 15 million Hungarians—lumping in ethnic Hungarians living in other countries with the 10 million actually residing within the geographical borders of Hungary (Waterbury, 2009, p. 488; Kontler, 2002, p. 480). Under a conservative-national government from 1990-1994, the pre-1945 period of Hungarian history was glorified and 1945, a pivotal year, became “the historical moment when their [the Hungarians’] lives took the wrong turn” (Pető, 2006, p. 329). It has been argued that since the very beginning of Soviet occupation—and in the period that has followed—, “there has been a certain nostalgia in the air about the good old times when our nation was able to live according to ‘our own culture’” (Morvai, 2004, p. 101).⁶¹ The post-communist nationalizing process, involving a “revival of the nation” was thus structured as an exercise in reviving the past (Novikova, 2002, p. 176). Pető (2013) chronicles the search for recovering “the real history of Hungary (p. 148)—that was not distorted by Party intervention. For example, the 1956 Revolution—talk of which was suppressed under communism—was immediately glorified post-communism (Pető, 2013, p. 149).

Hungary in the 1990s and 2000s

After 1990, due to the economic restructuring and the subsequent loss of nearly a third of the jobs “social inequalities and destitution increased substantially” (Fodor, 2013, p. 241). Real wages dropped by about 3 percent per year between 1988 and 1995 (Valuch, 2004, p. 626). The increasing inequalities troubled Hungarians who were not used to large income and wealth gaps during communism. Péter Róbert (1999) cites the 1992 TÁRKI

⁶¹ Krisztina Morvai is now an ultra-right wing nationalist and a prominent member of the Jobbik party, but at the time of writing she was critical of the exclusion of Western ideas and the idealization of traditional Hungarian ways.

Mobility Survey, which found: 72% of Hungarians surveyed believed the state should investigate how wealthy Hungarians became wealthy, 78% believed it is the state's responsibility to close the gap between income differences, and 49% believed that excluding a few exceptions, the wealthy were only wealthy because they had fraudulently acquired their wealth (pp. 124-125). The MDF was unable to save the ailing Hungarian economy, which had begun to falter already in the 1980s, somewhat in part because of its nationalist agenda and reluctance to encourage international investment (Kontler, 2002, p. 472). Prime Minister Antall had also passed away in 1993, changing the party dynamics (Kontler, 2002, p. 477). By the 1994 elections, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) gained popularity among voters because they claimed to be focused first and foremost on rebuilding the economy and modernizing the country (Kontler, 2002, p. 478).

According to Kontler,

once they [Hungarian politicians] had demonstrated their commitment to freedom and patriotism which suffered under Kádár, people became more interested in the solutions offered for those aspects of their lives which were tolerably well served under the old regime, at least for a while. (p. 471).

Indeed, in the early 1990s there was some nostalgia for the quality of life the Kádár era had afforded Hungarians. Even though social inequalities had existed under Kádár, especially in the 1980s, propaganda had downplayed it (Valuch, 2004, p. 611). Further, communism had provided employment security, welfare provisions, and relatively good healthcare (Clark, 2009).

The 1994 elections saw a socialist-liberal coalition come to power and it permitted outsider investments and the influx of foreign capital, something the previous government—in an effort to rebuild Hungary by Hungarians—had discouraged (Kontler,

2002, p. 472). Although this coalition did alleviate some of the economic crisis Hungary had faced after the transition, it too failed to completely turn around the country's economy, which disappointed much of the population. By 1995 real wages were only 73% of what they had been in 1978 (Valuch, 2004, p. 626). Kontler contends that “bitterness bred nostalgia” (2002, p. 471) and that by 1995 over fifty percent of Hungarian people preferred the former system to what they had at the time (p. 471). Trust in political institutions fell in the 1990s (Kontler, 2002, p. 475). Throughout the 1990s, Kontler notes that there was “bitter debate” between parties and laments that these arguments were often not of benefit to the Hungarian people (2002, p. 471). Fidesz (*Fiatalkor Demokraták Szövetsége*—Alliance of Young Democrats), originally anti-communist and libertarian, won over voters in 1998 with “the vision of a ‘civic Hungary’ in which the post-communist heritage is fully buried” (Kontler, 2002, p. 479). By this time, Rudolf Andorka (1999) claims it was a “truism” that Hungarians were incredibly unhappy with their living conditions (p. 148).

Fowler (2004) explains how Hungarian political elites have, since the early 1990s, struggled to define the Hungarian nation, and its relationship to the Hungarian state, non-ethnic Hungarians within the geographical borders (although present-day Hungary is fairly homogenous) and its relationship to other nations (p. 57).⁶² Thun (1999) cites György Csepeli who argues communism “created the framework for a strictly defined collective identity which was then filled with negative content: ‘nobody could define who they were,

⁶² In 1995, 96 percent of the population of Hungary was ethnically Hungarian, making the population relatively homogenous—one of the most homogenous in Eastern Europe (Huseby-Darvas, 1995, p. 166). Despite this, there is much discrimination—even in the political realm—against the minorities living in Hungary. In 2011, the last census report, it was reported by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office that the population of residents of non-Hungarian ethnicity (including Roma, Germans, Polish, etc.) combined only total 555,507 people, compared to a total population of 9,938,000 (p. 21).

but everybody could say who they were not” (p. 48). In the post-communist period, much attention was paid to who is Hungarian and who is not, and judgments were made as to what constituted “Hungarianness”. Once again, as demonstrated previously, “Hungarianness” was built at the exclusion of others. For example, West (2002) interviewed many Hungarians in the early 1990s who claimed, for instance, that gardening was meaningful not only in times of insecurity but also as part of the Hungarian identity. She claims many interviewees pointed to Jewish and Roma people, who, they claimed, were lazy because they did not work the land as “real” Hungarians do (p. 73).

Einhorn (2009) points out that “discourses of cultural (ethnic) otherness are translated into structurally (socially) discriminatory practices” (p. 57). Judgments about the ethnicity of an individual were woven into policy in Hungary. For example, Valuch (2004) cites the 1990 census and various surveys as sources for determining population statistics for Roma citizens and makes mention of the criteria for defining Roma as based on whether *other* people consider a person to be Roma, which is thought to be known by assessing a person’s customs, traditions or lifestyle. During communism, the level of education and employment of Roma improved dramatically—although this improvement still meant many were underemployed as unskilled workers—but in the immediate post-communist period, Roma were among the first to lose their employment and educational gaps widened again (Kende and Neményi, 2006, p. 508; Kende, 2000, p. 192; Szántay and Velladics, 1995; Valuch, 2004, p. 560). Ágnes Kende (2000) argues that “the stereotype of the pampered but unworthy Gypsy took root in the best days of socialism and has recurred ever since” (p. 194).

Westernization was also considered a “threat” to the “authentic” and “ingenious” Hungarian culture (Horváth, 2011, p. 93); the standards of the West were deemed “alien”

(Morvai, 2004, p. 101). Among these threatening Western influences was feminism.

Katalin Fábián (2002a) contends,

Why is there a resistance to feminism and/or to the label of feminism? Some possible answers may be: (1) a desire to dissociate from socialist emancipation; (2) the association of feminism to anti-male attitudes and stereotyped western feminism, (3) the plain threat of westernization; and (4) the level of economic development (p. 279).

Indeed, Western feminism was (and is) rejected partly because of its presumed imported nature, but a general rejection of feminism was also a way of distancing the nation from state feminism during communist control, thereby gaining more distance from communism as a whole (Pető and Szapor, 2004; Fábián, 2002a; Fábián, 2002b; Barát, 2005, Goven, 1993).⁶³ Further, nationalism has been framed as at odds with feminism, which nationalist discourse defined as “unpatriotic” (Thun, 1999, p. 48). Erzsébet Barát (2005) explains that she hoped democracy and the fall of communism would bring with it a space for feminist discussions in the public sphere. Instead, however, she finds a gate-keeping strategy that has been discrediting feminism since 1990, connecting it to Westernization, communism, lesbianism, child abuse, and the breakdown of the family.

In 1999, a national “revival” was promoted by then and current Prime Minister Viktor Orbán for the 3rd millennium, and, in an effort to ensure “worried” Hungarians that joining the European Union would not dilute Hungarian culture, he remarked that worrying about one’s culture and language was an important—and positive—concern (Fowler, 2004, p. 76). While trying to gain entry to the EU, Orbán tried to quell openly racist sentiments,

⁶³ Although, in actuality, feminism was also discouraged under communism for being “bourgeois” (Fábián, 2002a, p. 279). But feminism is associated with communist promises of equality, demonstrated through employment, which has been targeted as problematic.

but these only gained new momentum since Hungary successfully entered the EU (Halasz, 2009, p. 492; Hinsey, 2010, p. 131). Orbán also pledged accessibility for all citizens to all public institutions—a goal which, in 2010, was reportedly still not met, a hardship for both mothers with strollers and citizens who are not able-bodied (Koronczay, 2010, p. 26).⁶⁴

In the 2002 election, Fidesz lost by only about 1% to the MSZP, who remained in power until 2010. In the April 2010 national elections, however, “Hungary lurched dramatically to the right” (Hockenos, 2010, p. 1). Very nationalistic Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, of the centre-right Fidesz party, was re-elected with a two-thirds majority. It is his purported desire to protect national interests (and talk of pre-Trianon Hungary) that won him the elections once again (Porter, 2010; Kardos, 2013).⁶⁵ Orbán argues that Hungary was great pre-Trianon, and he claims he can reestablish this greatness (Kardos, 2013). Once again, the state of the economy pushed many voters to the polls, as Fidesz supporters blamed the poor Hungarian economy on the MSZP, who had not created satisfactory changes (Gorondi, 2010). A 2006 study revealed that “the majority of respondents still feel uneasy and ambiguous about the future” (Hideg and Nováky, 2010, p. 232). In 2013 reporter George Szirtes argued that “the government is on a fast track back to the 1930s” (p. 3). Tellingly, journalists are informed that criticizing the ruling party, Fidesz, is “an attack on Hungarians generally” (Szirtes, 2013).

⁶⁴ From my observations in the fall and winter of 2012, these goals have still not been met as many public institutions in Budapest were not accessible, or had limited accessibility, for anyone with limited mobility. Further, anyone who is visually impaired is severely restricted in their mobility in the city as signage is predominantly geared toward sighted individuals.

⁶⁵ According to Dan Bilefsky (2013), Orbán “became famous in 1989 when, as opposition leader, he called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, articulating the aspirations of the entire region. He served as prime minister from 1998 to 2002, lobbying for Hungary to join the European Union, and seeking to overturn the old communist order, before narrowly losing power to the socialists and being consigned to opposition for eight years” (p. 3).

The 21st century continues to demonstrate a downward trend in fertility rates that had begun in the late nineteenth century, as discussed above. Michelle Behr et al. (2002) report that the United Nations predicts that Hungary's population will decrease by 25 percent to about 7.5 million by 2050. In 2011 Orbán tried to restrict women's access to abortion. The Hungarian Parliament passed a new constitution in April 2012 that includes distinctly pro-life language, promising to guarantee the protection of a fetus from conception (Clabough, 2011; Feher, 2011).⁶⁶ The constitution today specifically defines family as "marriage, and parental—child relations" which effectively excludes not only same-sex couples but also the childless (Davies, 2013, p. 1). Hungarian leaders argue that marriage between a man and woman is integral to the survival of the nation because the family is the key to Hungary's future (Feher, 2011; Gulyas, 2010).

Population concerns continue to fuel discriminatory practices and policies and the nationalist themes that dominated political discourse at the time of the first post-communist elections have re-emerged and intensified. Yuval-Davis (1997) presents an understanding of nation sees different levels which separate ethnicity can be distinct from nation, meaning groups can be included in a nation as citizens, but excluded based on their ethnicity. We see this demonstrated in Hungary (but also Slovakia and the Czech Republic, for instance), where Roma are blamed for nearly all petty crime in the country and the newspapers are rife with verbal attacks on Roma populations (Porter, 2010, pp. 135, 260).⁶⁷ In a 2002 survey, it was determined that Jewish, Roma, ethnic Romanian, Chinese, Serbian,

⁶⁶ The only commonality between the Hungarian constitution today and what was instated in 1949 is that Budapest is listed as the country's capital. The constitution was revised immediately after the collapse of communism in 1989 and has continued to be revised (Bilefsky, 2013).

⁶⁷ Roma have lived in Hungary for centuries, having settled in the region in the 19th century (Kende and Neményi, 2006, p. 507). Identification of Roma now officially relies on "self-categorization based on family tradition, life-style, customs, appearance, and language, as well as the result of external categorization" (Kende and Neményi, 2006, p. 508).

Ukrainian and Arab people are the most stigmatized ethnic groups in Hungary, and they face blatant and covert racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia (Vincze, 2011). Apparently even Hungarian pop culture is infused with nationalist, ethnocentric sentiments (Kürti, 2011).

Since the 2002 study, it has been approximated that about 50 percent of the population of Hungary is *overtly* racist (Halasz, 2009; Kende and Neményi, 2006). Although antiracist activists have been working in Hungary continuously since the 1990s, to eradicate racism and “hate speeches” from Hungarian culture (Boromisza-Habashi, 2011), the discrimination nevertheless persists at all levels of public discourses. Further, in the 2010 elections, support for an ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic and ultimately racist party, Jobbik, grew. Porter (2010) argues that in Hungary, anti-government, anti-minorities, anti-Semitic demonstrations have grown in aggressiveness and also in sheer representation.⁶⁸ In Hungary, the right-wing party, Jobbik, has made a point of aggressively disrupting public celebrations of Judaism since 2001 (Vincze, 2011). Their nationalist, racist rhetoric, which also targets Roma, has served to increase their popularity rapidly among voters (Halasz, 2009, p. 492). Because of these and other displays of anti-Semitism, Kata Szófia Vincze (2011) estimates that nearly 80 percent of Jewish Hungarians do not declare themselves as Jewish for the census (p. 261).⁶⁹ Further, open displays of Jewishness prompt tired discourses about Jewish domination of Hungarian society (Vincze, 2011, p. 267). Even

⁶⁸ By way of example, Porter (2010) writes “some demonstrations [have] turned into armed battles with the police. The mayor of Budapest was assaulted while speaking at a festival, and during a speech in early 2010, a mob shouted “Jewish pigs” as the mayor attempted to be heard; in 2009, actors were chased from the stage at a riverside poetry reading. The 2008 gay pride parade was attacked by screamers, stone-throwers and clubwielders who hit and abused the peaceful marchers, including József Orosz, one of the country’s best-known TV and radio journalists” (p. 250). Orosz has since left the country.

⁶⁹ This is compounded by a long history of having to hide one’s identity, particularly after the passing of the Nuremburg Laws, during the Second World War, and under communism.

after the Holocaust, and the small number of Jewish Hungarians living in the country today, such discourses have not lost their ardor.⁷⁰

Overall, László Kürti (2011) explains that “attacks on Roma and hostile attitudes towards them have been rampant” (p. 297) and in the 21st century the Roma are usually stereotypically depicted as lazy, dirty, uneducated, violent and superficial (Kürti, 2011). Roma citizens remain particularly targeted and the European Union’s Commission has found, overall, that legislation enacted to alleviate racism and discrimination in Hungary has been ineffective and, worse, that even parliamentary debates have been the site of many racist comments (Kemény and Janky, 2005; Szirtes, 2013). Carl Rowlands (2013) reports that Orbán’s friend and fellow founder of the Fidesz party, Zsolt Bayer, is quoted in the *Magyar Hírlap* (January 5, 2013) as saying,

Most Gypsies are not suitable for cohabitation. They are not suitable for being among people. Most are animals, and behave like animals. They shouldn’t be tolerated or understood, but stamped out. Animals should not exist. In no way (p. 1).⁷¹

Further, in March 2012, Andre Gruber (2012) reports that Roma journalists, with credentials, were not permitted to document the National Award Ceremony of Artists and Scientists at the Hungarian Parliament Building because of their ethnicity (p. 34).

Hungary’s 500,000 Roma face such intense attacks and discrimination that many families feel compelled to remove themselves geographically from the population and

⁷⁰ According to the World Jewish Congress, Hungary’s current population of Jewish citizens numbers somewhere between 35,000-120,000, which is indeed small compared to a total population of over more than 10 million.

⁷¹ This has been translated for the article; this is not my translation.

move to more isolated areas (Kürti, 2011) or leave the country altogether.⁷² The Roma are described as “a destitute, marginalized, and jobless ethnic group that makes up 7-8% of the country’s population and lives below the poverty line” (Kürti, 2011, p. 298). Indeed, Roma in Hungary face prejudice and segregation, and, despite their poor socioeconomic positioning, are often viewed as a threat to the survival of Hungarians and not part of the truly “Hungarian” population (Halasz, 2009; Szántay and Velladics, 1995).

At the same time that some Hungarian citizens experience a limitation of their rights (such as education rights for Roma children), ethnic Hungarians outside the national borders are granted additional citizenship rights. Concerns for the “lost” Hungarians of the Treaty of Trianon that were picked up immediately after the fall of communism and have since resurfaced. In the late 1990s, the governing party, Fidesz, framed concern for diaspora policies as necessary and a moral issue (Waterbury, 2009, p. 495). In June 2001, following a nearly unanimous vote, Hungarian parliament passed a law called “Status Law,” which provides social benefits and subsidies (like temporary labor permits and access to the social welfare system) to 3 million ethnic Hungarians residing outside of the geographical borders in neighboring countries like Romania and Serbia (Waterbury, 2006, p. 483). In addition to providing tangible benefits, this law recognized these ethnic Hungarians as members of the “Hungarian nation” (Waterbury, 2006, p. 484). The Status Law also harkens back to an earlier time because starting in the interwar period, “Hungary’s relationship to the Hungarian Diaspora has been an important feature of domestic politics and foreign policy” (Waterbury, 2006, p. 485). Current Prime Minister

⁷² Halasz (2009) cites 400,000-600,000 Roma living in Hungary. She also cites examples of horrific and violent attacks on Roma citizens, often in their own homes (p. 492). Such incidents and anti-Roma sentiments have, unfortunately, not been limited to Hungary but have occurred in other countries of the region as well, most notably in Romania.

Orbán has aspired—both in his first term as Prime Minister and since his 2010 re-election—to create a borderless Hungary and, although nothing can be done to change the land lost with the Treaty of Trianon, he aims to diminish and transcend those borders with policies that could help ethnic Hungarians resist assimilation in their countries of residence (Waterbury, 2009, p. 498).

Indeed, Hungarians have not forgotten the historic events of the pre-communist period and they have resurfaced after having been stifled by communism. Anger and sadness regarding the Treaty of Trianon have failed to disappear. As West (2002) points out, maps of Hungary prior to the Treaty of Trianon hang in many public buildings and private residences (p. 57). In the Museum of Terror, a museum focused on Nazi and communist-inflicted hardship, which opened in 2002, a map depicting the “tragedy of Trianon” (Kenez, 2006, p. 290) hangs in a prominent spot near the museum’s entrance. Porter (2010) reports that Hungarian soccer fans, when travelling to soccer matches in the countries of Serbia, Croatia, Romania and Slovakia, wave the pre-Trianon flag—which depicts “Greater Hungary” that includes lands that now belong to these countries (p. 233).

In the fall of 2006, John Joseph Cash (2011) conducted fieldwork in Budapest, where right-wing voters clashed with the newly re-elected Hungarian Socialist Party after confirming that Ferenc Gyurcsány had lied about the economic status of the country in order to win the elections. Protestors displayed the “hole-in-the-flag” banner of 1956—which is the Hungarian flag of the period with the communist red star cut out from the middle (Cash, 2011). Additionally, protestors had “a military flag of 1848, and the flag of the first kings of Hungary of the House of Árpád (now used by the far right). Cash (2011) describes this nationalist protest raging amidst an impressive commemorative display for the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution, consisting of 300 commissioned works of art,

giant photographs, banners, candles and other gestures acknowledging those who died, were imprisoned or forced to flee under communist rule. Cash also mentions an unnamed song played by protestors that further connected the events of 2006 to the 1848 revolution, the Treaty of Trianon, and the 1956 revolution. These examples, which complement the political discourses and policies sketched briefly above, further demonstrate how influential the historical events outlined in this chapter are to contemporary constructions of Hungarianness. Thus, I highlighted these themes because although they are a part of the country's history, they are recalled in the dominant discourse of motherhood and shape modern thought and expressions of Hungarianness.

The plight or tragedy of other ethnic groups in Hungary has not been addressed with such fervor. Indeed, the Holocaust has not been memorialized in Hungary as it is in countries like Germany, Austria and Poland (Foote et. al., 2000). For example, the aforementioned Museum of Terror does much to suggest Hungary's innocence (Porter, 2010). As Kenez (2006) explains, critics of the museum have pointed out that the "exhibition was based on the assumption that terror began in Hungary on October 15, 1944, that is, when Szálasi, a German puppet, took control" (p. 290) implying that pre-Second World War Hungarian policies were faultless and did not exact terror upon Jewish, Roma or other ethnic groups—which, as I have demonstrated, is false. Further, the museum's emphasis is more on communist terrors than on those caused by Nazis, suggesting that communism was a greater tragedy for the Hungarian nation.

Kenez (2006) argues that the implication still is that "Hungarians have always been victims" (p. 290)—a sentiment pointed to earlier in this chapter. Porter (2010) further asserts that Hungarians feel that the terror the country has faced—two world wars, the Treaty of Trianon, Soviet occupation, and the bombing, looting, raping and pillaging that

has accompanied these events—is far worse than the suffering that happened during the Holocaust (p. 217).⁷³ Indeed, Prime Minister Orbán’s speeches have been infused with emotional convictions, “directed at Hungarians’ sense of having been wronged” (Porter, 2010, p. 233).⁷⁴ During communism, when ideas about Hungarian identity were suppressed, ideas of having been wronged became a family tradition to talk about, which strengthened these discourses. In addition, Fidesz’s foregrounding them in the public sphere verifies these experiences and strengthens them further—voters are moved by these outcries of Hungarian suffering—and promises of a stronger Hungary (Kardos, 2013). Importantly, “loyalty to the nation is directly connected to the status of victim in one’s “own” nation or the acknowledgement of the nation as a pure victim” (Kašić, 2002, p. 190).

Conclusion

What are essential to take away from the present chapter are the themes that have shaped post-communist discourse, contemporary Hungarian identity and politics, and women’s social roles. Hungarians, as demonstrated, have a history which has been, and continues to be, a source of pride. Although nationalism was officially suppressed during communism, it has resurfaced in contemporary political debates. Old concerns—low fertility rates, land loss, the “proper” role of women, the impact of women’s roles on the

⁷³ Porter (2010) writes, “during my several stays in Hungary, I was astonished both by the culture of nervous silence about the Holocaust and by the openly anti-Jewish statements in some of the mainstream media” (p. 261).

⁷⁴ “According to the European Commission’s Eurobarometer Report, Hungary was the only former Communist country where more than 50 per cent of the people surveyed claimed to be worse off now than before 1989. Transparency International listed Hungary among the most corrupt countries in Europe” (Porter, 2010, p. 263).

success of the nation, and who is a "real" Hungarian, including a concern for "lost" Hungarians—have dominated in the post-communist period. In other words, what has been permissible to say post-communism has been steeped heavily in the historical, cultural and political milieu of the country. Although other formerly communist countries are demonstrating strong nationalist tendencies as well, the intense nationalism of contemporary Hungary, led by Orbán and his party, is extreme prompting journalist Rowlands (2013) to write, "few countries can boast nationalist sentiment more deeply warped than that of the Hungarians" (p. 3). This is not to say that Hungary is unique in its nationalist tendencies, but the kind of nationalism seen in Hungary post-communism has been shaped by some unique historical developments, sketched out in this chapter. Although the MSZP was in power for some of the post-communist period, the voting public seems to keep leaning toward the right: in the first elections, in 1998 and again in 2010.

Women, as child bearers and keepers of culture, are heavily impacted by nationalist and populist rhetoric, both historically, as demonstrated, and today. Women have been routinely called upon for nation-building purposes, demonstrating Yuval-Davis' (1997) arguments that women "reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically" (p. 2), and are called upon to act and dress certain ways, in addition to giving birth to the babies considered desirable (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p. 20). Some women throughout Hungarian history have pushed back against such demands, and dictated their own roles in nation-building by participating actively in revolutions and, at times, politics, demanding education, but arguing for it on the grounds that educated mothers produce better children. Still, as shown, women in Hungary have struggled with political participation. Although communism promised equality, women's roles were not renegotiated but simply added to, as they were expected to continue housework and childrearing, but also work outside the

home—which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Despite Hungarian women’s legacy of activism and feminism, in the post-communist era, some politicians have effectively worked against egalitarianism, de-legitimizing women’s issues and entirely negating any feminist history in the country, in an effort to encourage women to mother, undermine their desire to do anything else, and to distance post-communist politics from communism.

Studying this albeit brief overview of Hungary’s struggles as a nation and the contemporary climate will do much to contextualize the content of subsequent chapters, particularly further discussion of pro-natal and family policies and discourses, as well as the significance of post-communist representations of women, as mothers and non-mothers, in *Nők Lapja* magazine.

CHAPTER TWO

Developments in Pro-natal and Family Policies in Hungary from the 19th Century Onward, with a Focus on the 20th and 21st Centuries

Introduction

Susan Gal (1994) eloquently underscores the importance of studying “the intricate interplay, during any historical moment, of labor force participations, state policy, and planning on abortion, childcare and child welfare policies, and the official rhetoric about the nature of women and motherhood” (p. 266). In this chapter, I address key developments in pro-natal and family policies—as well as some of the discourses and (re)definitions of women’s roles that accompanied them—in Hungary from the 19th century onward. Primarily I discuss abortion policies, contraceptive use and availability, maternity leave, and childcare developments, contextualized in a brief study of the demographical, economical, political and social factors that influenced such policies. I connect the chronology of these policies to many of the social developments outlined in the previous chapter and I illustrate how these family policies have been enmeshed in nation-building projects, demonstrated by the intense focus on women’s reproduction and the repeated emphasis on the role of mothers in the success of the nation—addressed in Chapter One but fleshed out more fully here.

After extensive research, I assert that since the 19th century, women in Hungary have experienced intense scrutiny and curtailment of their reproductive choices. Yuval-Davis (1996) argues that women’s reproductive rights are often negated, in an effort to

ensure that women meet their so-called obligations to their national and ethnic collectivities (p. 17), which I demonstrate in this chapter. Indeed, demands made on ethnically Hungarian women—both as mothers and workers—have been tied consistently to women’s purported responsibilities to the success of the nation or state. Anthias and Yuval-Davis outline major ways women are drawn into nation-building and the most salient for my analysis are: as biological reproducers; as ideological reproducers of culture; signifiers of difference; participants in national and political struggles; and in regard to the labour market (1989, p. 7; 1992, p. 80-81). Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) further stipulate that these roles are shaped differently in different historical settings and the importance placed upon these roles, namely, what becomes prioritized changes accordingly, which I will attempt to demonstrate in the case of Hungary.

I also contend that the policies chronicled here demonstrate what Foucault refers to as “bio-power,” which

concerns the management of the production and reproduction of life in modern societies. It is oriented to such new objects of power/knowledge as population, health, urban life, and sexuality. It objectifies these as resources to be administered, cultivated and controlled (Fraser, 1989, p. 24).

In Foucault’s words, bio-power is “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving subjugation of bodies and the control of population” (Foucault, 1990, p. 140). Foucault uses the term bio-power to describe regulatory mechanisms, often pertaining to health, which are used to manage people collectively by exerting power over bodies. I will demonstrate in this chapter intense efforts, during various political regimes in Hungary, to control women’s reproductive abilities.

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Policies

As discussed, my research has revealed the residual effects of communism on contemporary Hungarian culture, politics, and social roles. In the post-communist period, much of the nationalism and populism stems from a rejection of communism and a corresponding desire to return to Hungary's idealized past. Thus it is valuable to begin with a brief overview of key late 19th and early 20th century pro-natal and family policies, and the concerns that accompanied these developments, to examine briefly the ways in which Hungarian women's reproductive abilities were controlled before communist intervention.

Gal (1994) characterizes the Hungarians' focus on population growth as an "obsession" (p. 269). As discussed, the birth rate in Hungary started falling already in the late 19th century, although it is suspected that it might have begun to fall, undocumented, in some agricultural regions even earlier (Behr et. al., 2002, p. 282; Good, 1964). Already chronicled in Chapter One, in the 19th century reproduction became especially important for nation-building purposes—coinciding with the birth of nationalism—and women were called on as mothers to help repopulate the Hungarian population. According to Marius Turda (2007), during the 19th century, Hungarian anthropologists, doctors and scientists were concerned with perceived racial and psychological differences between peoples in Hungary (p. 187-188). Maintaining the supposed purity of Hungarian ethnicity was a major concern that grew in the 19th century and gained momentum in the 20th (Holos and Yando, 2006; Turda, 2007). At this time, women's roles in nation building were taking shape. We have seen how, between 1840 and 1945, much attention was paid to families that had only one child (Bodó, 2001; Dreisziger, 2001) and parents—particularly

mothers—of only children were typically deemed “unheroic” by policy makers (Bodó, 2001, p. 190).

The 19th century also saw the creation of kindergartens in Hungary, which were created for nation-building purposes. According to Éva Bicskei (2006),

Kindergartens have a long history in Hungary, corresponding with the main stages of the process of nation- and state-building. A particularly aristocratic woman, Countess Teréz Brunszvik, established the first “kindergarten” [óvoda] in 1828, with the goals of promoting Hungarian national values beyond the care and education of small children (p. 155).

The first nursery for children under three (*bölcsöde*) was opened in 1852 and its purpose was to care for children of economically disadvantaged mothers who needed to work long hours during the day (OECD, 2006, 85; Korintus, 2008, 44). After the 1867 Compromise, state-sponsored kindergartens were used to “promote the cultural homogenization of the society” (Bicskei, 2006, p. 156) and were thus located predominantly in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. An 1891 law stipulated that unless a child (between the ages of three and six) could be provided for at home—which was typically only an option for middle and upper class families—kindergarten was mandatory, and it had a purpose to “magyarize” and educate young children, specifically those who were of a less desirable socioeconomic status (Bicskei, 2006). Indeed, by the turn of the century, the state had created a large system of state-funded kindergartens and had implemented fines for those families who refused to enroll their children—although only working-class families or those deemed ethnically not Hungarian were targeted by this legislation (Bicskei, 2006).

As in many other countries, the second half of the 19th century saw a preoccupation with birth rates, nationalism, and reproduction culminate in the restriction of Hungarian

women's reproductive rights. Specifically, in 1878 a law was enacted that made the interruption of a pregnancy, excluding certain medical reasons, punishable by law (David, 1999; Pető, 2002; Balogh and Lampé, 1994; Gyáni, 2004). Like kindergartens, these abortion restrictions were designed in the hopes of nurturing an increase in the number of “Magyar” children born or assimilated into Hungarian culture.

Barring times of war, emphasis on large families and concern for population growth remained intact in Hungarian society and became heightened after periods of population loss. Thus following the First World War and the resultant population loss particularly after the Treaty of Trianon, renewed and heated nationalist discourses concerning the “alleged deterioration of ‘Magyar racial qualities’” emerged (Turda, 2007, p. 204). Because the war had killed many citizens, the goal was to rebuild the nation (Turda, 2007, p. 206). However, in the interwar period, the Hungarian population still struggled. In 1924, a 12-week maternity leave was introduced in the hopes of encouraging Hungarian women to have more children, but this policy did little to boost the birth rates (David, 1999).

Due to a 1933 High Court decision, abortion became a criminal offense, except in the case of a justifiable medical reason (Pető, 2002; Gyáni, 2004, p. 276). This was another measure to encourage Hungarian women to have more children. But all efforts to produce larger families were unsuccessful: in 1940, Hungary had one of the lowest total fertility rates in East Central Europe—only 1.90 compared to 2.17, 2.36, and 2.26 in Austria, Romania, and Yugoslavia, respectively (Drezgić, 2010, p. 191).⁷⁵ By 1945, following the

⁷⁵ “2.1 is referred to as a replacement level because this means there is one child born to every parent, plus .1 to account for deaths of children. This level is desirable for prevention of a decreasing population” (Petrescu-Prahova, 2009, p. 5).

Second World War, abortion was made legal and free, if permitted by a medical officer.⁷⁶

Gal (2013) explains that this was likely due to the occurrence of wartime rape (p. 51).

Official regulations stipulated the “consent of two physicians, including one gynecologist whose professional judgments about the health risks to the mother formed the basis of the decision” (Gal, 1994, p. 262). However, the lax abortion laws did not go unchallenged; Gal (2013) outlines how nationalist parties—she does not name which—sought to criminalize abortion because the country had lost too many citizens as a result of the Treaty of Trianon (p. 51).

In a continued effort to encourage reproduction, following the end of the Second World War (but before communist takeover), a plan was devised by the nation’s leaders that would have seen Hungarian mothers who had six or more dependent children accorded a privileged status (Good, 1964). A child care allowance was also created in 1946 as part of the nation’s social insurance program, but benefits were small (Good, 1964). Additionally, women with large families were to receive special badges that would allow them preferential seating on public transportation (Good, 1964). Although Hungarian officials never had the chance to implement all of these policies, the intent is clear: rebuild the nation by encouraging Hungarian women to embrace motherhood and have many children.

⁷⁶ Pető (2002) explains that this policy was introduced because many women were sexually assaulted and raped during wartime by Soviet soldiers.

Women and Family in the Classical Socialist Period

As previously discussed, under communism—particularly during the 1950s and 1960s—employment was thought to be central to, and sufficient for, women’s emancipation, and was a crucial element of communist ideology (Einhorn, 1993; Adam, 1984). Women’s employment was demanded by the state and it was most important in the 1950s and early 1960s. Women were told not to work exclusively for pay, but for fulfillment—as a moral calling—and to achieve equality. To complement these ideas, communist propaganda featured visual illustrations of women as workers. Typical communist posters of the 1950s featured smiling men and women, ready to work and standing together side by side, suggesting equality earned through employment (Haney, 1994). In such posters, women are depicted as working in factories, as machine operators or in blue overalls (Haney, 1994; Kürti, 1991). Other communist posters featured attractive women being called to work, or dressed in work attire with their children beside them—to also remind women not to forget their other essential role: motherhood (Aulich & Sylvestrová, 1999; Haney, 1994).⁷⁷ These types of images were also repeated in *Nők Lapja* magazine (Kádár, 2002). Goven (2002) argues that “work was not to be seen as alternative to or in conflict with motherhood” (p. 9) and motherhood was expected to still be seen as important.⁷⁸

The Party considered women to be irrational and susceptible to reactionary forces, in addition to being naïve and less reliable than men (Fodor, 2003; Goven, 2002).

⁷⁷ These are just a few examples from “a vast campaign targeting the inclusion of women in the paid labour force and in educational institutions” (Fodor, 2002).

⁷⁸ Men also were encouraged not to forgo fatherhood and to work harder in production, but fatherhood was not framed as integral to their performance of communist social roles to the same extent as motherhood was for women (Goven, 2002).

However, these qualities were considered to be acquired, not innate, and many were blamed on women's lack of employment experience; thus labour force participation was thought to make Hungarian women better communists (Fodor, 2002). Women's productive work was considered key to their "rationalization," which, again, was thought to be essential to their absorption of communist ideals. Further, "by joining the 'socialist' workforce, their activities could be measured, structured, and planned, and they could be drawn into political rituals and political surveillance that had been made part of the workplace life" (Goven, 2002, p. 13). In these ways women could become better members of the new communist state. We can see in these arguments the lingering on of strongly patriarchal and sexist values that continued to exist in reality, whereas the official ideology professed the exact opposite, namely, gender equality.

Workforce participation was also framed as essential to raising good communist children during the 1950s and 1960s (Goven, 2002). Lynne Haney (2002) chronicles how women who sought help at Hungarian welfare offices were routinely reprimanded by caseworkers if they were unemployed. Mothers were told that working outside the home set a good example for children and women unwilling to assume both the role of mother and worker were labeled "irresponsible" (Haney, 2002, p. 47), their failure to work cited as a reason for any problems experienced with their children. In this way, women were tasked with raising good communist children and their workforce participation played a role in the execution of this responsibility.

As the 1950s progressed, it became clear that the alleged "liberation" of women from housework, cooking and raising children was not happening, as women were simply asked to work in addition to maintaining their homes (Goven, 2002; Heitlinger, 1979). In the mid-1960s, women who were married and employed spent 4.3 hours a day on

household chores, and non-working married women devoted 8 hours, whereas men spent only 1.5 hours (Markus, 1979, p. 33), pointing clearly to the gendered division of household tasks despite women's workforce participation. Women thus remained tethered to traditional "women's roles," such as cleaning, cooking and raising children—tasks made more difficult by the communist regime. In this sense, the gendered division of labor was little different than in capitalist countries like Canada. Ultimately women were not relieved of these duties because their completion of such tasks was less expensive for the state than nationalizing meal production, cleaning, etc. (Fodor, 2002; Corrin, 1992).⁷⁹ Further, state replacements for women's traditional tasks (such as cooking) were of poor quality and undesired by most Hungarian people (Markus, 1979; Corrin, 1992).

Moreover, unlike in Western countries where the "housewife" was socially acceptable, the *importance* of some of these household chores became devalued. Hungarian women were told that housewives or stay-at-home mothers were simply managing their time poorly and that once housework was conducted more efficiently, women would have adequate time to work, maintain their traditional social roles, and even enjoy leisure time (Goven, 2002; Fodor, 2002). To this end, a campaign engineered by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women (*Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége*, or MNDSz) informed women that "the home is women's realm, they must not neglect it, but it is not really demanding" (Goven, 2002, p. 18). Some relief to women was gained by the assistance provided by grandparents. Hungarians enjoyed a rather young retirement age in the classical period, and so some household work was "geriatrized" (Verdery, 2013, p. 20-

⁷⁹ Einhorn (1993), citing Hilda Scott, explains that this is due, in part, to that fact that communist norms were dictated by men and thus what was deemed important or what qualified as emancipation was decided through the lens of the male experience. West (2002) corroborates this claim, arguing that communism in Hungary was as male dominated as the Western capitalist systems.

21). Yet even among this generation the work was feminized as grandmothers, not grandfathers, were expected to help with the cooking, cleaning and, most importantly, to babysit their grandchildren.

Problematically, the basic structure of the nuclear family with traditional gender roles remained very much intact (Einhorn, 1993; Lobodzińska, 1995; Kiss, 1991; Goven, 2002; Heitlinger, 1979). In theory, gender roles were deemed “irrelevant” to communist life (Goven, 2002). In practise, from the very beginning of Soviet occupation, children were still socialized into conservative, traditional gender roles—with boys taught to be breadwinners, and girls taught to be secondary earners and demonstrate household cleaning prowess and motherly virtues—a process aided by the educational curriculum and media (Tóth, 1993; David, 1999). Although the stereotype of the woman in overalls accurately reflected the working experience for some women, who were able to pursue technical careers, Einhorn (1993) contends that in communist Europe, in secondary schools young men were more encouraged than women to pursue technical options, which resulted in disparities in employment as men entered more high paying positions (Einhorn, 1993). Rada Drezgić (2010) argues that instead of challenging patriarchy, the communist demand for women’s employment simply became a part of it (p. 199).

Illustrating the maintenance of traditional gender roles in the home is the example of how the workplace of the 1950s was adapted to meet “women’s needs” by providing flexible hours and longer lunch breaks during which women could run household errands, among other similar accommodations, which re-inscribed these tasks as feminine because such allowances were not made for men (Fodor, 2003). Some working women were even provided paid nursing breaks if they returned to work while still nursing a child (Haney, 2002). In the 1950s women typically gained custody of their children after divorce because

the official view posited them as “naturally better suited to be caretakers of children” (Goven, 1993, p. 234). Again, this view points to the failure of de-gendering social attitudes and laws.

In the face of communist dictated notions of equality, ethnic Hungarians continued to discriminate against other groups. For example, in 1952 a social services authority office (*Gyámhatóság*) was created and throughout the 1950s and 1960s caseworkers judged who was a “good” mother. They used this judgment to determine who received assistance as they actively worked to find absent fathers or change the home lives of Hungarians. Specifically, caseworkers were intolerant of mothering practices among Roma clients, especially their non-nuclear family models, standards of cleanliness and even décor (Haney, 1997, p. 218). As such, “Romani women were far more likely to be pathologized and stigmatized as ‘bad mothers’” (Haney, 1997, p. 218), which affected the social support they received.

1949-1954: The Ratkó Period

After the Second World War, Hungary was the first European country to have fertility rates drop below replacement levels (David, 1999; Frejka et. al, 2004). Faced with a declining population, the Party had a vested interest in increasing the nation’s birth rate—to meet the twin needs of more citizens and more workers—and thus focused on creating policy to boost fertility rates. More workers and more soldiers were thought to ensure the “final victory of socialism” (Balogh and Lampé, 1994, p. 140).⁸⁰ Throughout the

⁸⁰ Further, “it was believed that, unlike capitalist [societies], socialist society would be able to absorb high population growth due to the restructuring of economic resources and improvement of living standard of

communist bloc, “laws were adopted, committees were put into place, a whole apparatus of monitoring was devised to make sure that women have as many children as the Party wanted them to” (Petrescu-Prahova, 2009, p. 2). To help boost the population, concurrently with other communist nations, women’s freedom to abortion was severely restricted in the early 1950s. Known as the “Ratkó Period,” the period between the final communist takeover and Stalin’s death marked the most restrictive years for Hungarian women’s reproductive choices.⁸¹ Specifically, “a Hungarian Health Ministry directive issued in the summer of 1952, proclaimed in force on August 1, amended the ‘permissive’ legislation of the post-1945 period” (Pető, 2002, p. 52).

On paper the new abortion legislation claimed to provide abortions for medical reasons but denied abortions to women for any social, non-medical reasons (Pető, 2002). However, some scholars have argued that by 1953, women in Hungary were outright refused abortion, even for medical reasons (See Gal, 1994, p. 263; Bicskei, 2006; Szalai, 1988). In 1952 abortionists and their clients were subjected to trials—resulting in jail time and heavy fines—to dissuade others from performing or seeking abortion (Pető, 2002; Balogh and Lampé, 1994). Sentences of up to 15 years were handed down to doctors and abortionists whose pregnant patients had died, and the women who sought abortions were also prosecuted (Balogh and Lampé, 1994).

Any “social” reasons women might have cited for requiring an abortion were denied because the Party believed it had resolved the social and economic issues that prevented women from being able to raise a child, such as a lack of resources or childcare (Pető,

the working class. Moreover, it was believed that socialist economies, envisioned as continuously growing, would also need a growing labor force” (Drezgić, 2001, p. 191).

⁸¹ “The public referred to these times as the Ratkó-era, although Anna Ratkó headed the Ministry ‘only’ until April 3, 1953. However, the ‘era’ itself lasted until the summer of 1953” (Pető, 2002, p. 53).

2002). Additionally, the Party “prevented the marketing of contraceptives. These devices were already available before the Second World War—however, their display in pharmacy windows, thus their popularization, could not even come into question” (Pető, 2002).

Family allowances, originally created in 1946, rose between 1947 and 1951, even increasing with the birth of every child, thereby rewarding families with more children, while family allowances to mothers of only one child were no longer provided for (Good, 1964). In 1953 the government also announced a decree for the purpose of protecting mothers and their children which regulated medical care for pregnant women, provided family benefits, created childcare institutions, and offered pregnant women job protection (Klinger, 1977; David, 1999). As a result, Hungarian women also found themselves discriminated against in the workplace. Although the law aimed at protecting mothers and children, it barred women (even if they were not pregnant or desired to be mothers) from better paid heavy industrial jobs and night shifts (Bicskei, 2006; Goven, 2002).⁸² Additionally, in 1953 childless men 20 to 50 years of age, and childless women aged 20 to 45, had to pay a childless tax (Good, 1964). Women without children were most problematic for the Party, and rumors swirled as to how the Party remedied childlessness. Joanna Goven (2002) recounts a rumor that “childless women were being artificially inseminated by the state and then paid for the ensuing family” (p. 11).

All of these pro-natal policies were designed expressly to change public opinion on the ideal size of family (Klinger, 1977). Women were instructed to bear many children as a demonstration of their gratitude to the state (Goven, 2002). Employment was said to be

⁸² Even without such legislation, some managers of industrial workplaces outright refused to hire women or, if they did, subjected them to the worst work coupled with harassment, in an effort to discourage women from seeking work in certain fields (Goven, 2002; Heitliger, 1980). Women were encouraged, instead, to seek work in agriculture where they supposedly excelled and where work could accommodate their other roles better (Goven, 2002).

facilitated for working mothers because, during the early years of communism, “the Communists claimed to take the burden of child care from the shoulders of the parents (mothers), using the slogan, ‘Our greatest treasure is the child’” (Bicskei, 2006, p. 162). Women were expected to think “the state gives me a happy home and bountiful care to my child—I must prove with my work that I am worthy of this solicitude” (Goven, 2002, p. 10).⁸³ Communist discourses of the time reminded Hungarian women to prioritize the national needs over their own (Gal, 1994, p. 263).

Problematically, childcare lacked funding in the transition period and early years of communism (Bicskei, 2006). In the 1950s, fewer than 5 percent of children under the age of three were actually enrolled in childcare and less than one third of children between the ages of three and six in preschool or kindergarten (Tóth, 1993, p. 214). Instead, mothers had to ask family members to help out or leave a child at home in the care of an older sibling (Tóth, 1993, p. 214). Maternity leave at the time was only six weeks (Tóth, 1993). Further, childcare was not fully sponsored and parents had to pay expensive rates for their children’s meals (Bicskei, 2006). Some kindergartens could not even afford to feed children or provide heat, so some were forced to operate during the morning only, while other kindergartens had parents send their children to school with bread for lunch and wood for heating the building (Bicskei, 2006). Additionally, while factory-run kindergartens before communism had provided an education for children of various ages, under communism state-funded childcare facilities did not allow for this and parents with children of differing ages were often forced to bring their children to different facilities—coupled with daycare hours that did not match working hours (Bicskei, 2006). In 1953,

⁸³ This is a translated quote from the archives of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women (*Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége*).

kindergartens that facilitated the employment of women in the more highly paid heavy industrial sectors were closed by the Party because the employment of women in this type of work supposedly harmed the family (Bicskei, 2006). Although not enough funding was allocated for kindergartens, they were prized by the Party for being part of a process to help children become “healthy, brave, disciplined and self-conscious people” (Bicskei, 2006, p. 165). In 1953 a unified system of kindergartens was created but mothers and their children were not treated equally, as mothers who were economically disadvantaged were told their children could have a space only if one was available—only after the spots had been awarded to women of higher socioeconomic statuses (Bicskei, 2006).⁸⁴

Ultimately, the abortion restrictions—the cornerstone of reproductive policies of the time—did not yield the expected results: many Hungarian women opted to endure dangerous illegal abortions and although the birth rate spiked briefly, it fell to postwar rates as soon as the abortion restrictions were lifted (Gal, 1994; Bicskei, 2006; Pető, 2002; Petrescu-Prahova, 2009).⁸⁵ Further, there was a breakdown among many Hungarian families that aggressive pro-natal policies could not remedy. Deprivation and shortages of goods, the separation some families endured to be able to work, and the political persecutions that resulted in arrest, imprisonment and sometimes death of many Hungarians tore families apart and made family life very difficult (Goven, 2002). Further, Drezgić (2010) argues that many characteristics of the communist state actually contributed to lower fertility rates, including women’s increased rates of employment, rural-urban migration that accompanied the shift from an agriculture-based economy to

⁸⁴ Because the government simply could not meet the demand for childcare, some private freelancers were allowed to quietly operate childcare centres that were technically illegal but necessary to keep certain women employed (Bicskei, 2006).

⁸⁵ In 1950, between 100,000 and 150,000 illegal abortions were estimated to have been performed in Hungary (Balogh and Lampé, 1994, p. 140), some of which were in unsafe and unsanitary conditions.

industrialization, and the perceived (and real) increase in the cost of raising children that also accompanied the economic transformation (p. 192).

1954-1966: A Revolution and a Relaxation of Restrictions

After Stalin's death, "the Council of Ministers issued a completely new abortion ordinance on June 3, 1956" (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 142) and abortion was legalized in Hungary (Gal, 1994, p. 263; Lader, 1966; Einhorn, 1993). This decriminalization of abortion happened on the heels of the 1955 liberalization of abortion in the Soviet Union (David, 1999). In fact, in the mid-1950s, abortion was legalized in almost all of the communist-controlled Eastern European countries (Githens, 1996, p. 55), with the exception of Romania (Petrescu-Prahova, 2009, p.2).⁸⁶ In 1956 the childless tax was also dropped in Hungary (Good, 1964). Further, the same ordinance that decriminalized abortion ordered that affordable contraceptives be produced and sold, although few methods other than poor quality condoms were truly within reach of most Hungarians; thus abortion remained a widely used form of birth control (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 143).⁸⁷ Despite lingering rules concerning abortion, the relaxation of abortion restrictions was interpreted as freedom over one's body, a step away from the Stalinist communist mentality of blurring the lines between private and public life.⁸⁸ Many Hungarians interpreted this change "as a relaxation of the control of the communist party, who was allowing women to

⁸⁶ The situation for Romanian women was, overall, more severe as they were also subjected to monthly pelvic examinations at work; additionally both single and married women without children had to pay a "celibacy tax" (Petrescu-Prahova, 2009, p. 2-3).

⁸⁷ Roston and Eggbert (1994) criticize the liberalization of abortion before setting in place truly viable means of contraceptives, claiming that Hungarian women became too dependent on abortion (p. 143).

⁸⁸ For example, abortion was only allowed until the 13th week of pregnancy, unless a woman was single, in which case it was allowed until 18 or 20 weeks (David, 1999).

make their own decisions in this highly personal matter” (Petrescu-Prahova, 2009, p. 14). The official reason for the new relaxation was presented in terms of protecting women’s health and ensuring the protection of human rights exhibited by the freedom of choice in family planning (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p 143). However, the reasons for the liberalization of abortion had more to do with maintaining a healthy workforce—women risked their health and lives with illegal abortions (Githens, 1996; Good, 1964; Corrin, 1992).

1967-1979: Changing Needs

With the Hungarian workforce in less economic trouble than the period immediately following the Second World War, the Party was no longer as desperate for workers in the 1960s. Instead, policy makers were very concerned about fertility rates as fears of “depopulation” (Volgyes & Volgyes, 1977) swept across the nation. Further, in the second half of the 1960s, “the number of reported, legal abortions reached a high of 85.1 per thousand women in childbearing age between 1965 and 1969, among the highest in Europe” (Gal, 1994, p. 263).

Notably, abortion was not entirely socially acceptable in Hungary. Ivan Volgyes and Nancy Volgyes (1977) provide the anecdotal example of streetcar conductors frequently making a point of embarrassing women whose stop was the Abortion Committee. Further, in October 1966, Party Secretary János Kádár argued:

I believe that everyone should give birth to their first child, unless there are some serious obstacles, of course. That’s what I think should be in the

decree. If someone has at least a rental apartment, has a job . . . such a person should not be allowed to abort her first child (Fodor, 2003, p. 31).

Similarly, all over communist Europe, women endured lectures and disapproval when they sought legal abortions during this time (Einhorn, 1993).⁸⁹

At the same time, the Party was trying to find solutions to the low birth rates, and they also realized that because childcare remained a woman's responsibility, "Hungarian women spent 30-40 percent of their worktime on sick leave for children's illnesses" (Einhorn, 1993). The Party determined that women, who were too often absent from work to care for young children, were not ideal employees and, if given the choice, the Party preferred to keep Hungarian men employed and use women's labour in the home to relieve some of the burden from state funded services like childcare (Adam, 1984, p. 75). It was thought to be less expensive to pay mothers via a maternity leave (described below), to care for their own young children than to continue to provide this service through the State (Adam, 1985; Szalai, 1991). Thus, when a worker surplus loomed on the horizon, policy was required to subtly push women out of the workforce (Fodor, 2002; Szalai, 1991; Corrin, 1992).

In 1968, a series of reforms—including the NEM, briefly described in Chapter One—were introduced. The change in the country's economy had a dramatic influence upon the lives of Hungarian women, whose responsibility in the home was highlighted because more working hours required a stable and supportive family life (Matynia, 1994).

⁸⁹ Of the contraceptives used in the mid 1960s, "natural" methods were most common, including coitus interruptus, the rhythm method, etc., while only 15 percent of married women's male partners used condoms and only 8 percent used other birth control devices, including chemical contraceptives (Acsády et al. 1970). The birth control pill was only introduced nation-wide in 1967 (called Infecundin), although fewer than 4 percent of married women of childbearing age used it (Acsády et al. 1970; Balogh & Lampé, 1994). This could be linked to the negative publicity the pill received from the media (Balogh & Lampé, 1994).

Matynia (1994) contends that both men and women typically worked in state-controlled workplaces but it was usually men who then worked a second or third paid job while women were expected to create a home life that was conducive to men working additional hours. Women were expected to care for children, cook and look after the household and, “by managing the household and serving as a liaison between the family and the bureaucracies governing housing, health care, schools, and even vacation planning, the wife *made it possible* for the man to be involved in the second economy” (Matynia, 1994, p. 363-364 emphasis in the original).

Beginning in 1967, but fully instated in 1968 and changed in 1969, a maternity leave known as *gyermekgondozási segély* (GYES) was created. Pregnant women were obliged to accept a paid six week absence from work prior to giving birth and then an additional (also obligatory) six month paid absence following delivery (Fodor, 2003; David, 1999; Acsády et al. 1970; Adam 1984; Robert and Blossfeld, 1995; Haney, 1994; Szalai, 1988). When women did return to the workforce, they were provided special paid days away from work to care for a sick child as required (Fodor, 2003). However, not all women returned to the workforce after six months of paid absence. At first GYES also provided two and a half years additional (optional) total maternity leave but then in 1969 it was changed to provide mothers a total of three years of paid maternity leave (Adam, 1984; Corrin, 1994; David, 1999; Haney, 1994; Gal, 1994; Sulyok, 1979; Goven, 2000).

GYES provided an alternative to workforce participation for women that could still see them classified as “employed”—an important communist objective (Tóth, 1993; Corrin, 1994; Adam, 1984). In this way, GYES “maintained the illusion of full employment” (Vajda, 2012, p. 178). Women on GYES were categorized as “inactive earners” (Markus, 1979, p. 29). In theory, GYES encouraged some women to leave the workforce, opening

up, at least temporarily, positions that were filled by other job-seeking Hungarians. When it was introduced, GYES was coupled with guaranteed reemployment, job protection and paid sick leave to care for children once a woman was back in the workforce (Tóth, 1993; Goven 2000; Bicskei, 2006; Markus, 1979). Because the fixed payment was about 40 percent of the average female wage, it was ideal for women who earned a lower wage and could still earn money in the second economy—if their household duties left any time for it—typically via working the land (Tóth, 1993; Goven, 2000).

Although GYES did reinforce women's traditional social roles by framing childcare as exclusively a woman's duty, there is disagreement in the literature as to how beneficial the policy was for women themselves. Julia Szalai (1999) argues:

the lengthy stay at home on child care leave and other occasional returns to family duties did not imprison them [Hungarian women] in the household. Instead, these periods of withdrawal from their mostly dull, rigid, humiliating and exhaustive formal work facilitated a substantial accumulation of capacities and knowledge (p. 112).

Szalai (1999) further argues that women on GYES could work family businesses and do other work from home, which allowed them more freedom. However, Yudit Kiss (1991) disagrees and points to this period in Hungarian history as a time during which Hungarian women found themselves “pushed back into the private sphere” (p. 51). Chris Corrin (1999) contends that GYES “showed an ideological shift of a conservative nature in the protection of ‘the family’ and in reestablishing traditional roles within the family” (p. 16). Further, because, at the time, it was not an option for men, GYES, it has been argued, “is not a solution *for* women, but a solution at their expense, providing an ‘objective justification’ for the already existing anti-female bias of employers and also making any

improvement in the division of labour inside the home more difficult” (Markus, 1979, p. 34, emphasis in original). Katalin Sulyok notes that before GYES was officially launched, nationwide speculation began and people were particularly concerned with the amount of money that would be provided and if the new policy would be mandatory. Many suspected that this new policy had to do with reducing the number of workers who were available for work and believed women were being *chased back* into the home (1979, p. 6, my emphasis).

Women who did not want to accept the longer period of maternity leave were greatly disadvantaged and often forced to stay home because the childcare allowances meant a reduction in state money spent on public childcare, reducing the number of available spots (Markus, 1979, p. 34). To facilitate policy aimed at making childbearing and motherhood desirable for women, Hungary saw a return to increasingly traditional gender roles and the image of women promoted by the Party shifted from being primarily workers and then mothers, to primarily mothers and then workers. According to Haney (2002), women’s needs were newly “maternalized,” (p. 3), meaning that social policies affecting women suggested that their roles as mothers were of primary importance. An example of this shift in the official discourses can be found in the experiences of women accessing services at the time. Welfare offices no longer scolded Hungarian women for not being working mothers and, instead, case workers treated women as mothers first and workers second (Haney, 2002).

Although much contemporary scholarship outlines the negative ramifications of GYES, it “immediately gained popularity” (Vajda, 2012, p. 179). The year it was introduced, Vajda (2012) reports that 67 percent of eligible women took advantage of it and the numbers of women on GYES continued to grow (p. 178). By 1973, more than four-

fifths of eligible women took advantage of GYES (Szalai, 1991). Shortly after its introduction, workplaces proudly announced how many of their staff members were on GYES (Sulyok, 1979). However women's opinions of GYES soon diversified.⁹⁰

Other policies complemented and coincided with the introduction of GYES (including the establishment and maintenance of fewer and fewer government childcare programs) (Sulyok, 1989a; Sulyok, 1989b). Also in 1967, a decree was passed that outlined many benefits for pregnant women. For example, the decree ensured that pregnant women could legally request a transfer to a workplace that would not pose health risks (Fodor, 2003), such as a workplace not requiring physically demanding labour. However, at the same time, like earlier policies, “new labor policies forbade women from doing work that could impair their reproductive abilities” (Haney, 2002, p. 11), which made workplace safety less of a choice and more of a mandate for women of childbearing age. In other European communist countries policies varied but hinged on the same goal: to make motherhood more enticing and feasible for women.⁹¹

Although the New Economic Reform (and concerns about birth rates) was a factor in this newly prioritized social role for women, mothers were not explicitly asked to withdraw from the workforce for economic reasons, i.e. on the grounds of a worker

⁹⁰ According to Sulyok (1979), some found the time on maternity leave boring, others felt exceptionally busy and worn out from being stay-at-home mothers, some could not afford to accept GYES and the resultant pay cut, some worked odd jobs or sold handicrafts to supplement the support. Some were enthusiastic about this and wanted more children so they could stay home longer, some were pressured to go back to work, some were pressured to *not* return to work at all, most felt cut off and isolated from their place of work, others still were criticized for being lazy and staying at home, and many had great difficulty readjusting to the workplace when/if they chose to return.

⁹¹ In Czechoslovakia, for example, as in Hungary, young couples could receive interest-free loans to help start their lives and, if they reproduced three or more children, would be forgiven one third of the loan's value (Einhorn, 1993, p. 83).

surplus.⁹² Instead, women were encouraged to withdraw through the gradual introduction of discourses that represented mothers who stayed home as “better” mothers. For example, some media claimed motherhood was a woman’s most sacred calling, while psychiatrists chimed in, denouncing institutionalized childcare (Sulyok, 1979, p. 8; Sulyok, 1989a, p. 6-7). In the 1960s and 1970s childcare experts deemed stay-at-home mothering, at least until a child was three years of age, as most beneficial to a child’s wellbeing (Koncz, 1995; Haney, 2002; Sulyok, 1989; Szalai, 1991), a discourse that still resonates today. The Party also launched a campaign to discourage Hungarians from pursuing “petit bourgeois” lifestyles, marked by consumption of goods and dismissal of the societal obligation to have children (Tóth, 1993).

The campaign affected the birth rates little, but did much to instill in many Hungarians a feeling of guilt about their life choices (Tóth, 1993). What *was* affected most was the timing of births (Markus, 1979). There was an increase of women who had their first (and often only) child sooner, but ultimately few were motivated to have *more* children (Robert and Blossfeld, 1995). GYES alone was not enough of a motivation for Hungarians to have children, especially at a time when most families experienced financial strain. An expression popular at the time captures the decision facing many families: “*kicsi vs. kocsi* (‘a little one or a car’)” (Kiss, 1991, p. 54).⁹³

⁹² Some women did not have a choice at all, because childcare facilities during the 1960s and 1970s were typically full, and without a family member (usually a grandmother) to care for a child—many of whom were still working themselves—some mothers had to withdraw from the workforce and accept GYES (Corrin, 1994; Volgyes & Volgyes, 1977).

⁹³ This is Kiss’ translation. Kiss (1991) contends that the majority chose the car, a decision reflecting the loss of impact of the communist ideology and an increasing shift to a consumer-oriented society.

1970s: Abortion Restrictions Renewed

In the 1970s Hungarian women continued to be pressed by the Party to reproduce and were offered additional incentives, coupled with renewed abortion restrictions. After the 1974 World Population Conference in Bucharest, “most European governments resorted to fiscal measures to stimulate birth rates, rather than to legal-administrative restrictions (Drezgić, 2010, p. 193).⁹⁴ For example, in 1971 Hungarians were encouraged to procreate by the development of housing incentives (David, 1999). Families with dependent children (or those who signed a contract agreeing to having a certain number of children within an allotted timeframe) could enjoy a price reduction on housing, or even just a promise of housing, as state owned apartments were preferentially offered to families with three or more children (Corrin, 1994; Haney, 2002; Volgyes & Volgyes, 1977). Given the severe housing shortages in Hungary at the time (Robert & Blossfeld, 1995)—many Hungarian homes were, and continue to be, multi-generational as a result—such incentives marked an intensive effort on the part of the State to encourage Hungarians to have children. As a consequence, in 1974 GYES was modified and the monthly stipend increased per child (Sulyok, 1979; David, 1999; Blossfeld, 1995).⁹⁵

In 1973-1974, a new abortion policy—on paper so strict that Hungarian social scientists and students petitioned against it—was implemented (Gal, 1994; Petrescu-Prahova, 2009). The new abortion policy was presented as protecting women from the supposed harmful health effects of even legal abortion (Gal, 1994). However, its primary motivation was “repeated warnings concerning the high rate of pregnancy terminations and

⁹⁴ Only Poland and Bulgaria introduced a childless tax in the 1970s (Drezgić, 2010).

⁹⁵ However, after 1978, due to inflation, GYES lost its value substantially (Goven, 2000, p. 290).

the rapidly decreasing birthrates” (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 144). Policy was instated on January 1, 1974, formally restricting abortion access to women. Only women who were unmarried, older than 40 years of age (this age limit was reduced to 35 in 1979), faced a medical risk associated with pregnancy (demonstrated by a previous obstetrical report) or already had a family of three living children could access abortion (Wulf, 1979, p. 168; David, 1999; Szalai, 1988). The last part of the policy restrictions underscored the demographic, and not health, concerns of the restrictions.⁹⁶ Indeed, the women most at risk of being denied abortion were young women who had no children or only one child—“ideal” (future) mothers (Corrin, 1992). In addition to fertility rates, another motivating factor behind this policy was that *not* to instate an abortion policy would suggest the Party was “against the nation” (Gal, 1994, p. 271).

Although these restrictions humiliated and inconvenienced women, and abortion numbers did drop, it has been argued that most women could negotiate their way through the red tape and access abortion services when required (Kiss, 1991, p. 54; David, 1999; Gal, 1994).⁹⁷ Still, between 1973 and 1988, approximately 3,500 to 3,600 abortion applications were refused annually (Szalai, 1988).⁹⁸ Women’s contraceptive choices were improved at the same time with increased production and availability of a range of methods, including IUDs and other newer contraceptive choices, like the contraceptive pill (Balogh & Lampé, 1994). Further, family planning centers grew in number and provided

⁹⁶ Additionally, women could cite social reasons, such as lack of housing, poverty, or husband’s imprisonment (David, 1999; Gal, 1994; Bollobás, 1993). Women who could prove one of these reasons were to be permitted abortion only once granted permission by a medical-lay committee (Gal, 1994; Bollobás, 1993).

⁹⁷ Wulf (1979) reports that the 1977 fertility survey found that approximately 18 percent of women who had requested an abortion concealed its occurrence.

⁹⁸ In 1974, 102,000 legal abortions were performed compared to 170,000 in 1973 (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 146). Other sources report that, in the wake of the policy, legal abortions decreased by almost 50 percent (Gal, 1994, p. 265), although this number may also have been impacted by increased education concerning contraceptive use.

Hungarians with courses concerning family life and sex education (Legge and Alford, 1986).

In the 1970s, divorce rates in many communist countries in Europe, including Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union, were among the highest in the world and more than two thirds of these divorces were requested by women (Einhorn, 1993). The decreasing role of the nuclear family, coupled with falling birth rates, troubled the Party. Complementing the pro-natal legislation, a media campaign was created reminding women that breaking apart the family or acquiring an abortion was “overly individualistic” (Haney, 2002). There was a continuing assertion in communist discourses—stemming from the 1950s and 1960s—of the importance of the nation’s interests over individual desires and the “unhealthy” spirit of individualism was attacked as unacceptable (Szalai, 1988; Gal, 1994). *Nők Lapja*, the communist-published women’s magazine, featured an article for the “25th Anniversary of Liberation” that described the ideal woman as seeing her calling to be motherhood (Kádár, 2002). Accordingly, in the 1970s the image of the Soviet-type woman changed from the overall-clad woman, working alongside men, to a more maternal woman. However, women did not just passively go along with the changed expectations of the Party. Some studies of the 1970s (and also 1980s) revealed that work had become a valuable part of women’s lives and their definitions of “success” (Tóth, 1993).⁹⁹ Not all women wanted to leave the workforce they had initially been forced into, for the sake of

⁹⁹ Kiss (1991) contends that the generation of women first called upon by the Party to work were enthused to be able to actively participate in work and society.

being stay-at-home mothers, because they had finally adjusted—and some had come to enjoy—the social expectation to work.¹⁰⁰

Sometimes confusingly, women were not *fully* excused from the workplace. This was because select industries that employed mostly women, such as the textile industry, faced labour shortages in the wake of the creation of GYES and were desperate for some workers to return, so in 1976 work could be combined with GYES but GYES was lowered for these women (Sulyok, 1979; Adam 1984). Women were encouraged to return to work as soon as possible if they were employed in the light industry sector, because the industry's success was needed to boost the nation's economy (Bicskei, 2006). Further, because GYES secured women's return to their workplace, their vacated positions could only be filled by contract workers and other women, looking for work, tended to pick more permanent positions rather than a maternity contract, when possible, thus leaving gaps in the workforce (Sulyok, 1979, p. 189). As a result, some women experienced intense discrimination prior to leaving for GYES. Sulyok describes women who were expected by their employers and coworkers to work harder than anyone else in the months leading up to their leave, because they would be on leave and have time to rest then (p. 191). Women left behind while their coworkers left on GYES also complained of being burdened with the surplus of work, while women who had raised children in earlier decades, before GYES, were exceptionally frustrated having faced burdens then and now, to make up for women

¹⁰⁰ An article in *Nők Lapja* on the Kádár era points to some women who became mothers during this time, telling their own children to focus less on mothering and to prioritize their work instead (Milhalcz, 2011, p. 70).

on GYES (p. 194). In sum, the “good worker” model for women was not completely abandoned as some women’s employment remained important to Party goals.¹⁰¹

1980s: Waning Influence of Communism

By the 1980s, many Hungarians openly resented Party members, and advantages they enjoyed. Anti-feminist, traditionalist discourses blossomed (Kontler, 2002; Einhorn, 1993). The dominant discourse of motherhood defined the ideal woman as a nurturer, a mother, a wife and caregiver whose goodness was equated with self-sacrifice. In contrast, “emancipated women,” i.e., working women, were openly criticized for deviating from the approved social roles and “endangering the Hungarian people” (Goven, 2000, p. 287) by caving in to communist ideals. Goven (1993) cites authors who, in the 1980s, blamed women’s emancipation, at the hands of communist leaders, for an unwelcome reversal in gender roles, the alleged aggressiveness of Hungarian women, and the supposedly effeminate nature of modern Hungarian men. Anti-communists labelled these Hungarian women as

aggressive, selfish, sexually insatiable, destroyers of men’s health, and rejecters of children. Such women were allegedly produced by communism’s insistence on changing the “natural” relations between the sexes exemplified by the ideal “West-European” bourgeois family (Gal, 1994, p. 278).

¹⁰¹ To this end, in 1975 the Party sponsored an essay writing contest, inviting women to submit essays on the topic “Work as My Calling” (Haney, 1994, p. 124), reminding women that although motherhood was increasingly important, the importance of work could not be forgotten. Selected essays addressed the importance and value of work and how working fulfilled a moral purpose, representing “good” women as women who continued to value work and “good” mothers as those who accepted GYES.

Women thus became the scapegoats for everything from problems with children, to divorces, men's high mortality rate and the country's general unhappiness. The recommended solution was women's return to the hearth (Gal, 1994; Einhorn, 1993). Mothers who stayed home to raise children were often praised and described as beautiful and rejuvenated (Sulyok, 1989, issue 9, p. 8). Yet many women could simply not afford to stay home (Robert and Blossfeld, 1995, p. 212), even if some of them wanted to do so.

Collective opposition to communism began to grow, and so did various anti-communist factions.¹⁰² What Goven (2000) characterizes as "dissident" opposition positioned communism as the enemy and women's roles in combating communism and reaching democracy in the following way: "women's most constructive role was to enhance (through their labor, nurturing, and submissiveness) what the state strove to eliminate: male autonomy" (Goven, 2000, p. 288). The nationalist, populist opposition, on the other hand, reinvigorated debates from the 1930s concerning women's emancipation (and access to legal abortion) as a "threat to the nation," suggesting it was unnatural and dangerous (Goven, 2000; Huseby-Darvis, 1995; Gal, 1994). Further, as Gal (1994) points out, the populist writers of the 1980s, like those of the 1930s, attributed these losses to the moral decline of the nation.

The women who had abortions under communism were labeled "selfish" by nationalists (Verdery, 1994, p. 250). Einhorn (1993) explains,

in an exchange in the literary-political bi-weekly *Hitel* during the summer of 1989, Gyula Fekete, a prominent male politician, had written that feminists

¹⁰² Nationalism grew in other communist controlled countries during the 1980s as well, such as Yugoslavia (Bracewell, 1996, p. 26).

are “murderers of mothers”, involved in the “abuse and devaluation of the mother” (p. 196).

The Party itself was less and less enthusiastic about women’s employment because full employment had been reached (Gal, 1994).¹⁰³ Interestingly, the new communist policy and perspective concerning women no longer marked a deviation from a traditional, conservative, “bourgeois” model (formerly rejected) and actually mirrored the discourse of the democratic opposition, a group that sought to oppose communism by regaining control of the private sphere (Gal, 1994). Propaganda about large families—specifically, families of three children—was foregrounded at the time (Kiss, 1991). By 1985, fertility and birth rates became such a major issue for the Party that social policies were implemented to make employment outside of the home more difficult for women (Fodor, 2003).

Promoting home life to Hungarian women served another purpose, in addition to an interest in boosting population and preventing over-employment: the Party was struggling to provide the social services it promised, such as childcare but also care for aging citizens (Gal, 1994). Goven (2000) adds:

at a time when Hungary faced worsening economic conditions and burgeoning debt levels, the implication that women should spend more time at home suited a government that already was trying to retreat from a policy of full employment and was seeking ways to reduce social spending without inciting a political backlash (or a further drop in the birth rate) (p. 288).

¹⁰³ Tóth (1993) refers to the 1980s as the “period of so-called full employment” (p. 218) as 95 percent of Hungarian women worked full-time.

In 1984, Hungarian women—commensurate with their peers in other communist countries in Europe—spent 6 hours a day on childcare and household chores compared to the typical one hour men devoted to such tasks (Einhorn, 1993, p. 49).

The abortion committees created in the early 1970s remained intact until the late 1980s, when the restrictions placed on abortions were lifted and the committees dissolved (Gal, 1994; David, 1999; Kürti, 1991).¹⁰⁴ In 1982, new laws finally allowed fathers to take advantage of GYES, but true to traditional gender roles, few fathers did (Barta et. al., 1985; Corrin, 1992; Einhorn, 1993).¹⁰⁵ The year 1985 saw the creation of a new form of childcare allowance, the GYED (*gyermekgondozási díj*), which was a one year wage-related childcare fee that women could choose to accept in lieu of GYES (Corrin, 1992; Panayotova and Brayfield, 1997). Unlike GYES, which was a flat-rate monthly allowance based on average wages, GYED was tied to the individual woman's income—75 or 65 percent, depending on her work history (Oláh, 1998, p. 8).

Between 1971 and 1989, of the 980,000 apartments built, more than 70 percent were built for the use of families only (Szalai, 2000, p. 216). Couples with children were also offered housing discounts in the 1980s, sometimes a 20 to 25 percent discount but also as high as 80 percent (Barta et. al., 1985). However, in the 1980s and 1990s Hungarians still experienced housing shortages (Robert and Blossfeld, 1995).¹⁰⁶ Further, state funded childcare only had room for 15 percent of children by the late 1980s (Corrin, 1992). Overall, communist policies had failed to encourage larger families and the cost of living

¹⁰⁴ However, contraceptive diaphragms were no longer easily accessible (Corrin, 1994).

¹⁰⁵ In the early 1980s, only in Hungary and Yugoslavia were these benefits extended to fathers as well (Drezgić, 2010, p. 199).

¹⁰⁶ *Nők Lapja* featured stories from young mothers, living with parents, in-laws or other family, struggling to assert themselves in blended families and burdened with more work piled on by others in the home (Sulyok, 1989, issue 11, p. 3).

continued to rise, making a family—let alone a large family—a financial impossibility for many Hungarians (Robert & Blossfeld, 1995). When in 1989 communism fell, Hungary was left with a struggling economy, a declining population, low fertility rates and an inexperienced new government intent on prioritizing women's maternal roles and distancing itself from communism as much as possible yet with very few creative ideas as to how to get the country out of its economic and social challenges.

1990s: Dominant Discourse of Motherhood

Shortly after the collapse of communism, Kiss (1991) lamented that “the situation of women in Hungary is markedly worsening” (p. 53). True to the desire in the early stages of democracy to liberate the country from any lingering influences of communism, practices associated with the previous regime—such as women's emancipation and employment—were labeled alien to Hungarian culture. As Gal (1994) points out, communist policies continued to impact post-transition policies by constraining what policies were considered socially acceptable, beneficial, and “appropriate” for a newly democratic country. As discussed, women in Hungary continued to be “othered” as allies of communism for their workforce participation, which was deemed wrong and in opposition to the natural order of things (Verdery, 1996, p. 80; Verdery, 1994, p. 251). The private home life continued to be valued as a reaction to communism's blurring the lines between the public and private spheres (Corrin, 1992; Goven, 1993; Haney 1994).

As discussed, in the first post-communist democratic election, party leaders referred to the nation and promoted nationalism, partly because failing to do so was associated with communism (West, 2002). Problematically, “only if gender polarity is restored, argue[d]

political groups across the spectrum, will Hungary again become a healthy society” (Verdery, 1994, p. 253). In the first democratic election, Einhorn (1993) describes how the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*, MDF) argued in campaign posters that “Hungary needs more babies if it is to be strong” (p. 149). Haney (1994) and Martha Lampland (2013) describe some of the posters during the first democratic post-socialist elections, and point to the highly pro-natal theme of pregnant women, smiling women with babies or women tending happily to domestic duties. A poster by the MDF featured a woman and a baby with the text, “We Are So Happy That We Can Finally Go Home” (Haney, 1994, p. 137). Notably, it was not just one party concerned with women returning to the hearth. Haney writes of the “excessive” talk of the first democratic leaders in the 1990s, who focused on “the sanctity of the family and the need for women to go home and guard it” (p. 114).

Haney (1994) explains how on March 18, 1990 a televised discussion among party representatives aired and the topic was “The Future Roles for Women” (p. 138). Party leaders debated ways to help women choose to withdraw from the workforce, providing little encouragement and support for women who wanted to remain employed. Indeed, any presumed right of a woman to stay home to mother her children was prioritized and openly justified as a means to alleviate unemployment rates in the country (Goven, 2000). Socialist MP István Timár, cited by Goven (2000), argued that policies supporting women’s staying at home were important because “life for working women with families had become even more difficult, particularly given the loss of such services as childcare and cheap laundries and the sudden need to shop around for lower prices” (p. 301). Although Timár did point to social and economic problems such as the lack of childcare and inflation, instead of suggesting policies to help alleviate these problems, he advocated

women stay at home to deal with these issues themselves rather than participate in the workforce. As Goven (2000) points out, this kind of discourse (that increasingly gained ground across the whole political spectrum) solidified gendered ideas of social roles, reminding Hungarians that laundry and shopping are women's work.

In the immediate post-communist period, there was an air of nostalgia—a longing to return to the alleged glory of pre-communist Hungary described in Chapter One, which impacted representations of women's roles and supposed responsibilities. In 1994, Gal noted,

the decline of population also evokes, among the educated people, echoes of an older worry: the warnings about the imminent death of the nation, enunciated by populist writers in the 1930s who turned to the countryside in an effort to redefine national consciousness after the losses of Trianon (p. 269).

Indeed, losses associated with repeated occupations culminating in the Treaty of Trianon, provided fodder for conservative nationalists still concerned with the “death of the nation,” and this fear-mongering was employed to pressure Hungarian women to have larger families (Tóth, 1993; Haney, 1994). For example, during a 1996 debate over maternity leave, Zoltán Pokorni, a traditional populist, rang the alarm for the age-old problem of the “death of the nation” and revealed interesting insights into connections between individual procreative choices and nationalism. Pokorni, cited by Goven (2000) argued, “if a community, the society of the present, refrains from childbearing and child rearing in order to have an easier life, that community consumes its own future” (p. 297).

Overall, a “cult of motherhood” developed in the early 1990s and the traditional roles of women as wives, homemakers and mothers became glorified (Einhorn, 1993; Kiss,

1991; Huseby-Darvas, 1996). Mass media remained male dominated (Adamik, 1993) and made much use of words like “natural” to describe women’s nurturing, kind and loving characteristics, represented by motherhood in contrast to the cold, heartless feminists of the West (Corrin, 1994). Women were told that “real” Hungarian women were mothers—mothers of large, Hungarian families (Corrin, 1994). Women’s complete return to traditional roles was seen as the only way the nation could flourish (Einhorn, 1993; Haney, 1994; Kürti, 1991). Politicians framed “women as mothers with a ‘sacred duty’ to reproduce the nation” (Einhorn, 1993, p. 106). In 1996 Éva Huseby-Darvas argued that the romanticized image of Hungarian women fulfilling their destiny by focusing only on motherhood—reproducing Hungarians—was “fostered in a patriarchal system, survived the repeated transformations of society from feudal to pre-capitalist, to capitalist, to state socialist, and finally to the current pre-democratic order” (p. 169).

Despite the economic instability of many families, the “breadwinner ideology,” which deemed men responsible for the family’s main source of income (Fodor, 2013, p. 241; Verdery, 1996, p. 80), was promoted by conservative leaning party leaders. Men were also encouraged to exert their dominance in the family.¹⁰⁷ The breadwinner ideology served two purposes: to further contribute to a social climate that would push women back into the home and to undermine communist ideologies of equal employment (Fodor, 2013, p. 242). In her 2001-2002 study of Hungarian masculinities, Éva Fodor (2013) interviewed forty-eight Hungarians, revealing that Hungarian men reported feelings of inadequacy and loss of

¹⁰⁷ For example, Kata Beke, the State Secretary for Education in the new regime rallied for traditional family roles and is quoted by Goven (1993) as having argued that Hungarian parents in the 1990s had abandoned their children because of selfishness and that patriarchy—and the welcome return of “real” Hungarian men, masters of their households—will see normal women subordinate themselves to these men and resume traditional family dynamics. Beke did not blame all women for the nation’s problems—something others, like journalist Magda Gubi did—but specifically focused on “emancipated women” versus “real Hungarian women,” the latter being more admirable and the key to the nation’s success (Goven, 1993, p. 230).

masculinity when they were unable to fulfill their supposed obligation as a primary breadwinner (p. 244). I use this example to suggest that post-communist discourse seeking to redefine both men and women's social roles was sometimes successful in influencing ideas of masculinity and femininity. However, this example also reveals the fact that people were far from happy with the newly imposed gender ideology.

Concerning reproductive policies, from January 1, 1989 until January 1, 1993, the abortion law in Hungary had many clauses, but was legal.¹⁰⁸ The gynecologist who determined a woman was pregnant could rule on cases concerning medical reasons, while the Family and Women's Welfare Centres ruled on social issues and the Abortion Committees handled appeals (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 147).¹⁰⁹ More than 90,000 induced abortions were performed in Hungary in 1991, compared to 125,000 births (Balogh and Lampé, 1994, p. 139). As a result, in the 1990s there were "powerful attempts to abolish the right to abortion" (Adamik, 1993). Indeed, one of the major issues on hand for the first elected parliament in 1990 was banning abortion. Kiss (1991) addresses the poignancy of this by writing: "it is rather intriguing that in the middle of a deep economic crisis, political chaos and social insecurity, when the very foundations of society are to be reshaped, abortion has become a primary question in almost all post-socialist countries" (p. 53). Gal (1997) argues the abortion debate was also an argument against communism, which had relaxed abortion restrictions during the Kádár consolidation period (p. 123).

¹⁰⁸ An abortion could only be granted if: "a. there is a medical condition, b. the foetus is likely to develop severe defects and/or is unlikely to survive post-natally, c. the pregnant woman has not lived in a marital union or has been divorced for at least six months, d. the pregnancy is the result of a crime, e. the applicant or her spouse do not own or rent a dwelling, f. the pregnant woman is over 35 [years of age], g. the applicant has two living children, h. the pregnant woman or her spouse is in prison, i. her spouse is employed in military service and there are 6 months or more left, j. or it is clearly justified on other social grounds" (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 147).

¹⁰⁹ The communist abortion committees had been abolished in 1988 (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 149).

Further, the abortion debate had different meaning in Hungary—where it was linked to nationhood and the unnaturalness of communism—as opposed to the North American context of women’s rights (Gal, 1997, p. 130). In other words, although abortion debates are not unique to Hungary, the context is specific to the country.

The re-opening of the abortion debate is attributed to a group called “Defenders of the Fetus” who rallied for a law to regulate more stringently abortion in post-communist Hungary (Petrescu-Prahova, 2009, p. 9; Gal, 2013, p. 47). Scheppele (1996) explains that in the immediate period following the 1989 transition, in the wake of the nation’s new constitution (October 23, 1989) the Hungarian Constitutional Court was petitioned by a group of Catholic law professors to extend the right to life to fetuses and a public debate concerning abortion rights ensued. The language concerning abortion changed from the humanitarian concerns voiced during communism to sentiments steeped in religious dogma (Githens, 1996, p. 65). The Court declared questions concerning the right to life a matter not suitable for determination within the constitution, and passed the issue onto Parliament in the hopes of having the fetuses’ right to life expressly written into the constitution (Einhorn, 1993)—which has since been done, as discussed in Chapter One.¹¹⁰

In 1993, the abortion law was updated and the new law “On the Protection of the Foetal Life” came into effect January 1, 1993 (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 153). The law allowed abortion until the 12th week if

- a. the pregnant woman’s health is in serious danger; b. the foetus suffers from a medically proven grave illness or defect; c. the pregnancy is a

¹¹⁰ This attempt to undermine women’s rights by prioritizing the citizenship rights of an unborn fetus did not occur in isolation in Hungary. Urged by the Catholic Church, similar pressures were exerted in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Slovenia as well (Einhorn, 1993).

consequence of rape; d. the pregnant woman is in a situation of grave crisis or stress (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 153).

Abortion was permitted up to the 18th week on different grounds. Specifically, if the above conditions were met and if

a. the pregnant woman lacks the ability to act independently, or has a limited ability in this regards; or b. the pregnancy exceeded the 12-week limit for reasons beyond the woman's responsibility—e.g., unexpected diseases, administrative delay, diagnostic failure (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 153).

It was permitted to the 20th and 24th weeks if the fetus had a 50 percent chance of serious malformation (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 154). At any time, regardless of the gestational age, a woman could obtain an abortion if her life was in danger or the fetus had suffered a “malformation” that was “incompatible with post-natal life” (Balogh & Lampé, 1994, p. 154). The law was coupled with counseling, provided by 300 counselors hired nationally, tasked with informing women about child support, the supposed dangers of abortion, adoption options and also birth control, in an effort to decrease the number of abortions (Githens, 1996; Gal, 1994). Having endured this mandatory counseling and a three-day wait period, a Hungarian woman seeking an abortion had to then sign a statement arguing she was in a crisis situation in order to access abortion.

Reducing women's autonomy, husbands were encouraged to be present during the abortion and, even after having completed the counseling, the wait and the paperwork, hospitals and doctors were given the authority to refuse to perform an abortion at their discretion (Gal, 1994, p. 265). Anti-abortion lawyers claimed that four parties are involved in cases of abortion: the mother, father, fetus and society (Gal, 1994, p. 275). Women's autonomy as a person was thus undermined. In the early 1990s rhetoric on banning

abortion, “the figure of woman emerges as ignorant (they don’t know what they are doing when they have abortions), but also as willfully so, since they don’t want to know, to the extent of being likened to “trainable dogs,” sad dupes of the Communist system” (Gal, 1994, p. 276). Although abortion access was framed in politics as associated with communism, women opposed to strict abortion legislations rightly pointed to a paradox in the post-communist anti-abortion discourses as they related abortion restrictions to Stalinism, recalling the strict Stalinist era (the Ratkó years in Hungary) of the criminalization of abortion (Gal, 1994, p. 282).

Abortion was deemed a serious problem concerning the nation not only because a potential citizen was being aborted, but because some doctors continued to argue that abortion risked women’s future fertility (Gal, 1994, p. 274).¹¹¹ Premature births and childhood neurosis in the early 1990s were blamed on women’s previous abortions (Corrin, 1992). Connecting women’s reproductive choices with the nation’s success or failure, abortions were yet again discussed in the narrative of “lost Hungarians”. For example, “on December 28, 1990 pro-life groups prayed for the almost five million Hungarian children who could not be born in the last thirty-five years because their environment decided that there was no room for them and the church bells tolled for the ‘victims of abortion’” (Einhorn, 1993, p. 85). The five millions aborted fetuses are still sometimes referred to as the “biological Trianon,” or “Hungarian Holocaust” by right-wing nationalists (Petrescu-Prahova, 2009, p. 15; Verdery, 1994, p. 250; Huseby-Darvas, 1996, p. 170). In 1994 Gal reported that aborted fetuses were routinely referred to as “people” and their “loss”

¹¹¹ These arguments were not swayed, not even by statistics that demonstrate abortion restrictions, overall, did little to raise birth rates (Gal, 1994, p. 274).

compared to losses experienced in military battles (p. 271). In 1996 Verdery confirmed that

Nationalists in Hungary have gone so far as to compare the aborted Hungarians with the (many fewer) dead from Hungary's worst historical military disasters (the Turkish defeat in 1562, the battle of Stalingrad in World War II) and to erect, in the town of Abasár, an "Embryo Memorial" to those sacrificed Hungarians (p. 79).

The populists who spoke of a "biological Trianon" also linked the aborted fetuses—whom they described as *Hungarians*, not fetuses—"to the Hungarian losses in the sixteenth-century patriotic battles against the Turks" (Gal, 1997, p. 125). Further, "they linked these losses to a lack of national consciousness and a lack of appropriate morality" (Gal, 1997, p. 125).

Despite the crack down on abortion, even in the 1990s sex education was nearly non-existent, IUD's and condoms were scarce, the birth control pill required a prescription and was expensive while the diaphragm had been banned for being unhygienic (Einhorn, 1993, p. 88). Thus it was difficult for Hungarian women to prevent unwanted pregnancies.¹¹² Further, other policies encouraged stay-at-home motherhood and discouraging women's employment. Kiss (1991) mentions the "shutting down of "economically unprofitable" crèches, day schools, play centres, the cut-back of subsidies on restaurants, ready-made food, children's clothes, laundries, cultural services, etc." (p. 53)—all of the services that somewhat reduced the burdens on women with children. During the 1990s, however, the values of child-raising benefits and maternity leave were changed and

¹¹² Scheppele (1996) summarizes how, after anti-abortion legislation was passed, abortion dropped by 13 percent in Hungary, but whether it can be attributed to the law or contraceptive education/access is unclear (p. 42).

parties struggled to balance budgets with the continued pressure on women to have children (Goven, 2000; Aassve et al. 2006). Concerning employment, by July 1991 Hungarian women no longer had job protection following their maternity leave and many public childcare centres facilitating women's work began to close (Corrin, 1992, p. 226). In 1998, a Hungarian mother interviewed in *Nők Lapja* argued that she only successfully found employment when she lied on her application about being childless—at the time of writing, a year later, her employers still did not know she had a child; her boss, in particular, believed mothers could not be counted on as workers (V. Kulcsár, 1998, issue 30, p. 32).

As part of the growing nationalist attitude certain groups, predominantly Jews and Roma, were increasingly discriminated against. Michelle Behr et al. (2002) argue that who is deemed “Hungarian” is a question of importance in Hungary, and the obligation to reproduce and raise more ethnic Hungarians has shaped procreative demands on women. Indeed, nationalism, fused with pro-natal and family policies, manifest in the concern for the desirable babies. For example, in 1996, a proposal to modify parental leave so that it would no longer be connected to employment prompted heated debate about parental leave and the question of who warranted state support was also addressed. From the Socialist Party, Minister of Social Welfare, György Szabó, argued that the families in the most need had to be helped first, but the opposition argued that families were important to the nation and that instead of focusing on who needs assistance, the nation would benefit more from policy that encourages and supports the “right *sort* of children” (Goven, 2000, p. 296, emphasis in the original).¹¹³

¹¹³ As Goven (2000) explains, speaking about social strata has been code for racialized debates delineating between Roma (“certain social strata”) and ethnic Hungarians (the “middle class”) (p. 295).

Chiming in, populists once again reminded Hungarians at this time of “threats to the nation” and “race suicide” (Goven, 2000, p. 297). If maternity leave was no longer connected to employment and based on a percentage of the income a woman earned, these populists—in agreement with the Young Democrats (Fidesz)—argued that undesirable mothers might have child after child as a source of income and this would be a detriment to the nation (Goven, 2000).

2000s: The Emphasis on Motherhood Intensifies

The post-communist period has seen a chilling commonality among formerly communist ruled East-Central European countries: “increasingly visible ethnonationalism, coupled with anti-feminist and pro-natalist politicking” (Verdery, 1996, p. 79). As can be surmised from Chapter One, the situation in Hungary worsened in the 21st millennium. Current Prime Minister Orbán has been criticized internationally for his intensive nationalist policies. For example, Clabough (2011) reports that he recently misused European Union money to fund an anti-abortion campaign, putting up billboards around the country pleading with women to consider adoption instead of an abortion—the billboards featured the image of a fetus with the copy, “I understand if you aren’t ready for me, give me up for adoption instead – PLEASE LET ME LIVE!” (Clabough, 2011, p. 1, emphasis in original).¹¹⁴ And, in a move that has caused global controversy, Orbán has proposed offering mothers with small children extra votes in elections—a suggestion unheard of in

¹¹⁴ Translation is by Clabough.

modern democracies (Phillips, 2011) that has not yet gone any further.¹¹⁵ Glass and Fodor (2011) argue

state policies reflect and shape public opinions, which have been identified as exceptionally “traditional” in postsocialist Hungary. More so than in most European Union countries, Hungarian men and women support the notion that women’s primary calling is in the household and motherhood is women’s natural state (p. 9).

Discrimination against certain groups has been woven into family policies and it has become clear that not all children are valued equally. Specifically, the children of Roma in Hungary are often treated as less desirable than ethnically Hungarian children. For example, Anna Kende and Maria Neményi (2006) argue that Roma children are often segregated in the Hungarian school system and funneled into lower quality institutions originally intended for children with mental disabilities, which contribute to their exclusion and prevent or limit further education (p. 509). Further, Einhorn (2009) explains that in Hungary, “female welfare officials apply gendered and racist discourse against Roma women welfare claimants, labeling them as ‘irresponsible’ mothers for having too many children of the ‘wrong kind,’ ethnically speaking” (Einhorn, 2009, p. 57). Officials have even been known to deny Roma women their entitlements (Einhorn, 2009, p. 57). Notably, these examples are drawn from before Orbán and Fidesz resumed power—demonstrating that this discrimination crosses party lines and has only intensified since Orbán was re-elected as Prime Minister.

¹¹⁵ Concern over the number of children in Roma families actually posed an obstacle to this proposed legislation. It was reported that party leaders feared this would provide too many extra votes to Roma families (Phillips, 2011).

Further highlighting Hungarian attitudes concerning desirable babies, Rita Izsák (2004), in a study for the European Roma Rights Centre, reports that Roma women are often discriminated against in hospital settings, particularly pertaining to their maternity. Specifically, the study reports that of 131 Roma women interviewed in 2003, 44 cases revealed that pregnant Roma women are often segregated in “Gypsy rooms” in the maternity wards—which were not as clean as other rooms, and worse, the cleaning was left to the Roma patients to do (p. 1).¹¹⁶ 33 cases suggested that Roma women were victims of negligence in hospitals while 16 cases exposed the practice of providing Roma women health care services by professionals with inadequate qualifications (p. 1). Additionally, the report points to 22 cases of verbal abuse and 31 cases of extortion—doctors demanding payment from Roma women and refusing service until payment is made (p. 1). Concerning the verbal abuse, the study reports that some Roma women were criticized for their pregnancy, asked questions such as “are you giving birth to your child in order to get child allowance?” (p. 4). One woman was interrogated by a doctor as to why she has so many children (she is a mother to five) and he reportedly told her, “I don’t want to see you here [in the maternity ward] again!” (p. 4).

Verdery contends that typically theories as to why nationalism and racism have blossomed to such an extent under post-communism suggest old hatred re-opening after communism suppressed them, but she argues that this typically Western view is not accurate (Verdery 1996, p. 84; Verdery 1991, p. 433). Instead, she counters that while histories of ethnic disputes have certainly played a role, communism did not actually suppress

¹¹⁶ Some doctors reportedly confessed to the existence of such rooms, but indicated that it was to spare Roma women from the verbal assault they experienced when placed with non-Roma women, and it was also argued that poorer women do not like to be put in the same room as more wealthy women, thus it was respecting this choice of Roma women to be put in different rooms—a feeling not reiterated in interviews with Roma women (Izsák, 2004, p. 2).

nationalism but instead helped to *foster* national consciousness (Verdery, 1996, p. 84, my emphasis). She argues that the nationalism that has boiled over has been brought about, by a myriad of factors different for each country. Although she is unable to explain them all, she foregrounds the complexity of the post-communist political and cultural milieu (Verdery, 1996, p. 54). In her view, communism fostered nationalism because ethnic groups stuck together and saw their ethno-national identities as a site of resistance to communism (Verdery, 1996, p. 87).

As explained in Chapter One, communism tried to homogenize the countries it governed—trying to break down racial and ethnic barriers in the same way it purported to break down gender dichotomies (Verdery, 1996, p. 93). Communist leaders wanted all citizens of a country to be equally dependent on the Party for survival (Verdery, 1996, p. 93). But Eastern Europeans rebelled, in action (as demonstrated by the Hungarian revolution in 1956) and in spirit. Communism may have been able to dictate the lives and, to some extent, the actions of Hungarians, but Verdery suggests that communism could not force Hungarians to like different ethnic groups or to feel any less united as a people—demonstrated by the ways in which Roma, for example, continued to face discrimination during communism, and denied access to welfare and other state benefits. Anti-communism thus became an identity that fuelled national identities—an “us” and “them” mentality (Verdery, 1996, p. 92, 94; Verdery, 1999, p. 433; Petrescu-Prahova, 2009).¹¹⁷ Communism kept the question dormant but “without a doubt, the question of national or ethnic identity is one of the most salient issues in Hungary since the collapse of the socialist regime in 1989” (Huseby-Darvas, 1995, p. 166).

¹¹⁷ Miruna Petrescu-Prahova (2009) contends that post-communist discourses in Hungary are actually very similar to Romanian discourses during communism, both marked by an emphasis on the status of women and the nation (p. 12).

Concerning pro-natal policies, presently all women are entitled to unpaid maternity leave for a period of 24 weeks, but women who have been employed for at least a full year within two years of having a child can receive payment for this maternity leave—a father is eligible if he is solely responsible for the children or if the mother is very ill (Korintus and Gyarmati, 2012). Paternity leave is only five days. In terms of benefits and further leave, non-insured mothers and fathers can accept GYES while GYED can be accessed by parents with insurance. GYES is used until a child’s third birthday if the parents are uninsured and used by parents with insurance after GYED runs out on a child’s second birthday (Korintus and Gyarmatic, 2012; Kováts, 2009a, issue 24).¹¹⁸

The lack of employment protection policies for mothers, chronicled above, was only remedied in 2004 when, anxious to join the European Union, Hungarian parliament enacted a law forbidding discrimination based on gender, motherhood or family (Glass and Fodor, 2011, p. 10).¹¹⁹ Current law forbids employers from terminating a woman’s employment or failing to hold her position following maternity leave. However, in contemporary Hungarian society, the policy is barely enforced and employers have circumvented the law protecting women’s jobs while on maternity leave by “restructuring” such positions and making them redundant during a woman’s maternity leave (Glass and Fodor, 2011, p. 16). As Éva Fodor (2003) points out, a study of the literature concerning Hungarian women and

¹¹⁸ There are further, complicated, qualifying factors for GYES and GYED, including who can use it and for how long. Notably, GYES can be used by grandparents, who must then forfeit their pension for the duration. Additionally, families with more than three children can acquire additional funding, GYET (*gyermekgondozási támogatás*) until the children are eight years of age, and it is also equivalent to a monthly pension payment (Kováts, 2009a, p. 7).

¹¹⁹ “In its successful bid to join the European Union in 2004, Hungary passed a sweeping antidiscrimination law, Government Decree no. 362/2004 (XII.26.), aimed at eliminating direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, unlawful segregation, and retribution based on sex, family status, and motherhood. The 2004 Decree established the Equal Treatment Authority (ETA) to enforce the law” (Fodor and Glass, 2011, p. 10).

policy reveals that, in general, post-1989 policies moved “in the direction of inhibiting, rather than enabling, women’s participation in an otherwise tight market” (p. 133).

In a series of 33 in-depth interviews with executives responsible for hiring professional workers in the Hungarian finance sector over the course of four years (2004-2008) Fodor and Glass (2011) found that not only is it difficult for mothers to *keep* their jobs, it can be difficult for women to find desirable work, especially if they are of childbearing age or already have children. Specifically, employers create jobs with requirements that are not compatible with the demands on mothers. In addition, because of the long maternity leave women are entitled to, employers actively try to screen out mothers in the interview process, knowing it is illegal but not facing any reprimands for doing so (Fodor and Glass, 2011, p. 13).¹²⁰

Concerning other barriers to employment for mothers, in 2006 it was reported that Hungarian state-funded childcare provides for only eight to nine percent of children aged three to six (OECD, 2006, p. 85; Fodor and Glass, 2011, p. 9-10), while the European Union average is 26 percent (Fodor and Glass, 2011, p. 9-10). Indeed, “between 1984 and 2003, more than half the child care places and a substantial number of kindergarten places disappeared” (OECD, 2006, p. 85). In 2010, a reader of *Nők Lapja* lamented that parents can only find a place for their child in government-run daycare if they have connections,

¹²⁰ Some methods used for such screening include eliminating candidates who have a three year gap in their employment record which suggests to employers that a woman has been on maternity leave and it is assumed she may again, while another tactic involves aged-based discrimination—refusing to hire women who are of prime childbearing age (Fodor and Glass, 2011). If women perceived as mothers or potential mothers were not screened out, they find themselves disproportionately filling lower level positions despite their educations and aptitude (Fodor and Glass, 2011). Further, “owing to rather limited gender awareness and still-powerful traditional gender norms, companies and managers are likely to refuse or outright ridicule programs and measures that are introduced exclusively for women” (Tóth, 2005, p. 373).

while another counts herself as “lucky” because her child was accepted into daycare (Hulej, 2010, issue 17, p. 25).

Conclusion

I contend that the policies outlined here constitute an expression of what Foucault calls bio-power, “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving subjugation of bodies and the control of population” (Foucault, 1990, p. 140). These techniques and regulatory mechanisms exert power over people and are involved not only in knowledge production regarding reproduction but also in specific policies that propose to better the life, and health, of the population (Rabinow and Rose, 2006, p. 197). Certainly, this has demonstrably been the case in Hungary. For generations, Hungarian women’s bodies have been seen as tools to build the nation—through their labor, through their education of future citizens, and through their reproduction. As state needs changed, so did the policies put in place to direct women’s actions and reproductive choices. These policies were not always presented on the basis of their real intentions (boosting population, relieving a worker surplus, etc), but were said to be of benefit to the population. For example, as discussed, abortion was criminalized to “protect” women and GYES was promoted because it was “healthier” than institutionalized childcare. Further, many of the policies put in place rely on what Yuval-Davis (1996) calls the “people as power” discourse (p. 18). This discourse, she argues, frames the success and future of the nation on its growth and women are thus called upon to have more children who might be needed as workers or to carry on the ethnicity themselves.

However, women adapted to workplace demands and many have been reluctant—or financially unable—to abandon their roles in the workforce in the post-communist period. Consistently low fertility rates suggest an unwillingness or inability to subscribe to state reproductive demands. Indeed, some women risked dangerous illegal abortions in the face of severe 1950s abortion restrictions and later found ways to circumvent restrictions that resurfaced again. As Foucault argues, where there is power, there is resistance (Foucault, 1980, p. 95) and I see resistance in low fertility rates and the lengths women have gone to abort unwanted pregnancies.

Sketching such a history also points to the context that shapes how motherhood and non-motherhood can be talked about in the post-communist period. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) argue that women's social roles are shaped differently across different historical settings and the importance placed upon these roles, namely which are prioritized, changes according, which I demonstrated in this chapter, illustrating the fluctuating emphasis on women's workforce and family roles. What has been consistent is that for generations of women—across various political regimes—there has been no relief from the pressure they have experienced to shape their life's goals to be in accordance with the greater good—whether the service is expected to be expressed through employment, mothering, childcare, housekeeping or working the land. Bracewell (1996) has argued that in formerly communist East-Central European countries, “a woman's task is no longer to build socialism through work, but to regenerate the nation through her role as mother” (p. 25). I have demonstrated this shift in social pressures, but have also complicated this dichotomy, pointing to the emphasis on reproduction during some phases of communism and the waning emphasis on women's employment even under communist control—all dictated by the country's changing needs.

In the post-communist period, the period of study for my next chapter, Hungary has seen an ardent return to the mythologized pre-communist past as well as a rejection of what is associated with communism; Hungarian nationhood is shaped and defined by an intense desire to shed any aspects of life under communism (Fowler, 2004 p. 5; Panayotova and Brayfield, 1997, p. 635; Morvai, 2004; Verdery, 1996). Hungary has also undergone a “refamilisation”—meaning that tasks associated with reproduction are increasingly left to families to deal with as the state withdraws support and funds (Vajda, 2012, p. 180). In this way we see more clearly that “the contemporary nationalist/postcommunist nostalgia for tradition, identity and authenticity produces a conception of gender whereby women become symbolic markers as guardians of the nation in their capacity as biological reproducers” (Kramer, 2009, p. 82).

CHAPTER THREE

Studying the Popular Hungarian Women's Magazine *Nők Lapja* with a Focus on Representations of Childlessness

Introduction

As demonstrated, generations of Hungarian women have faced intense pressure to be mothers, workers, Hungarians and wives—at times all at once, sometimes with varying emphasis, but rarely on their terms—underscored by pro-natal discourse and policies that define motherhood as key to the nation's success and survival. In the post-communist period, the dominant discourse of motherhood sees women as mothers only, and the motherhood of desirable women is positioned as integral to the success of the nation. I sought to understand where, within this historical and geo-political milieu, women who choose *not* to have children fit in. I questioned what kind of representations of women without children exist in the post-communist period. Because childlessness in Hungary is relatively unexplored terrain, I chose to use the popular women's magazine *Nők Lapja* as my guide for beginning to understand Hungarian representations of childlessness and the experiences of women without children. In a society where women had to be cajoled into having children, bribed with money and apartments, and encouraged to reproduce for decades how the country's favorite women's magazine discusses not having progeny in the post-communist period marks a good starting point for this research. *Nők Lapja* has proven to be a rich cultural text that reflects and shapes many aspects of Hungarian culture—including the dominant discourse of motherhood.

My study revealed many conflicting and contradictory themes in the magazine, and a significant evolution in content and style. Ultimately, I contend that the magazine echoes many pro-natalist and traditional sentiments concerning women's supposedly "natural" tendencies and social roles in the post-communist era—foregrounding motherhood and suggesting that all women have a biological urge to procreate. Further, practices of exclusion in the magazine work to reinforce who is, and is not, considered "Hungarian" and thus of a desired maternity. However, I argue that the magazine is also a site of resistance, carving out a space for women who do not conform to traditional conceptions of Hungarian womanhood, and occasionally contesting traditional ideas concerning women's roles. In this chapter, I first introduce readers to *Nők Lapja* and chronicle briefly its evolution. In my analysis, I highlight the traditional and pro-natal themes in the magazine, particularly the assumption that all women have a biological desire to have children but then I examine in detail the articles on childlessness. In my study, I have pinpointed a few dominant themes that are illustrative and encompass the rules of what is "sayable" about childlessness—which I will refer to as the discourse of childlessness: i) disbelieving and negating women's decisions not to have children; ii) demanding to hear and iii) then pathologizing women's reasons for not having children; iv) alleged characteristics of childless women; and v) delineating between the childless and mothers.

Brief History of *Nők Lapja* Magazine: Its Communist Roots

Nők Lapja is a rather generic name for a women's magazine, as it literally means "Women's Journal" and thus the name has been used before.¹²¹ *Nők Lapja* reported in 1993 that a magazine of the same name began in 1872—it is considered an "ancestor" to the contemporary publication (Anonymous, 1993, issue 9, p. 27). After that, feminist organizations created another publication of the same name between 1916 and 1919. This publication, like that which preceded it, focused on non-fiction and other educational materials (Anonymous, 1993, issue 9, p. 27). Between 1939 and 1944 another publication was created called *Magyar Nők Lapja* ("Hungarian Women's Journal") and alongside the non-fiction material of its predecessors it introduced themes like handicrafts and housekeeping (Anonymous, 1993, issue 9, p. 27). Although there were these earlier magazines of the same or similar name, today's *Nők Lapja* was launched in 1949 and was originally funded by the Hungarian Workers' Party (Medvedev, 2011, p. 209). The Party created a women's organization, referred to as the Women's Council, and the purpose of this council was to "monitor the situation of women and to transmit the party's policies to them" (Fodor, 2002, p. 249). Most research concerning women was done through the council and, between 1938 and 1988, the council published approximately 40 books written to appeal to women (Fodor, 2002). Fodor (2002) further explains that

by far the most important and profitable publication of the council, however, was a weekly magazine that was initiated to aid the quest for a unified gender politics. *Nők Lapja* (Women's Journal) was a successful magazine that achieved the highest circulation rate of all the weeklies in the country

¹²¹ Kádár (2002) cites the end of the 19th century as the birth of the genre of women's magazines in Hungary.

since it was read—as its publishers hoped—by all strata of women. No other major women’s journal targeting a more specialized audience was published until 1989 (p. 249).

Haney (1994) argues that *Nők Lapja* parroted the Party’s ideas of women’s workforce responsibilities. Women were quoted in the magazine thanking communism for helping them realize their equality and for freeing them from the home (Haney, 1994; Kádár, 2002). Haney (1994) explains that the tone of *Nők Lapja* was “heavy and filled with talk of the creation of a new world” (p. 122). The magazine also implored women to help their husbands understand the necessity of the new gender order and women’s workforce participation, pulling women into the process of transitioning to communism (Kádár, 2002). Elaborated on in Chapter One, the Party argued that part of the creation of a new world necessitated severing ties with what Hungary was (and also severing loyalties to this past). To this end, the Party used the magazine as a platform for demonstrating how much communism had improved the lives of Hungarian women. Specifically, the magazine portrayed pre-communist Hungarian women as “isolated in the home, owned by men, and restricted from becoming fully human” (p. 122). Haney (1994) illustrates:

For instance, in a 1955 article three older women who had returned to school praised the state for “letting us out of the home” and “giving us a chance to show that we are equal and just as good as men.” Other women addressed themselves directly to Rakosi Matyas, then the head of the Hungarian Communist Party, thanking him for “not making us like our grandmothers” and “freeing us from the shackles that have oppressed women for so long.” Another example of this transcendence of the past can be seen in a 1952 article, “The Light in Our Eyes,” in which the author expressed her gratitude

for the chance to escape the “shame, poverty and absent self-respect of yesterday.” And a 1955 article, “The Hungarian Women's Question,” echoes this—condemning the social relations of the past for drawing women away from the collective and denying them “humanness.” This was juxtaposed to the new order, where women were connected to the collective and achieving humanness through participation in paid labor (pp. 122-123).

The magazine was thus used as a means of defining women’s roles (Kádár, 2002).

However, it is crucial to point out that not everyone who worked for, or read the magazine, was interested in communist propaganda. In an article on women in the Kádár era, *Nők Lapja* writer Csilla Mihalicz suggests that the magazine actually offered resistance to communism, and argues that readers had to read between the official lines of the magazine to find stories about Hungarian women’s actual struggles, problems, desires and lives (Mihalicz, 2011, issue 4, pp. 68-70). Kádár (2002) also points to printed letters in the magazine that contested communist ideas, such as the example of a woman who wrote in to complain that equality was draining her as she worked like her husband, but still tended the home, gave birth to children, diapered them, cleaned everyone’s clothes, and cooked in addition to her job, becoming exhausted.

Since 1949, themes of femininity and womanhood have changed many times in the magazine (Kádár, 2002). As the goals of the Party and the demands on Hungarian women changed, so too did the propaganda printed in *Nők Lapja*, which emphasized employment or motherhood as required by the State (Tóth, 2001, p. 76).¹²² Although I would like to

¹²² An excellent illustrative example of how the magazine’s content mirrored the goals outlined by the Party is presented by Medvedev (2011), whose work demonstrates how all at once fashion was no longer considered relevant to the lives of Hungarian women and was removed from the pages of the magazine (p. 209).

spend more time charting this evolution, that goal must be set aside for another project and in what follows I describe in more detail the evolution of the magazine after the 1989 regime change.

***Nők Lapja* Magazine after the Fall of Communism**

After 1989 newspapers and magazines became privatized. Accompanying this privatization, across the industry the titles of many publications that survived the changeover were modified—of 1243 “new” periodicals, 304 had a former title (Nagy and Gazdag, 2000, pp. 29, 32). In December 1989, *Nők Lapja* changed its title to *Magyar Nők Lapja* (which it dropped again in 1994). The adapted title first appeared on the cover of the December 2nd issue.¹²³ In 1989, the magazine was described by a tagline—on the inside of the first page of every issue—as “A Magyar Nők Szövetségének Hetilapja,” (“The Hungarian Association of Women's Weekly Journal”), a description changed to “Képes Politikai Hetilap” (“Illustrated Political Weekly Magazine”) in 1990.

However serious the intentions of the magazine’s editors and writers, some scholars have argued that since the 1989 transition *Nők Lapja* has devolved from a staid, politically oriented publication to a magazine more akin to the stereotypical, Western “women’s magazine”. The magazine has been heavily criticized for this transformation and in what follows I briefly chronicle this disappointment and the magazine’s transformation because it explains why few scholars have studied it to date. These criticisms are also important to

¹²³ The numbering of issues changed, returning to number 1 in December, 1989, running through issues 4-5, then returning to issue 1 in January, 1990.

address in order to better articulate why I have chosen this particular magazine for my research.

Haney (1994) considers post-communist *Nők Lapja* comparable to the American publication *Better Homes and Gardens*, a women's magazine that focuses on entertaining, cooking, decorating and tending to the home. Underscoring this comparison, in her M.A. thesis concerning advertisements in *Nők Lapja*, Hatházi (2011) studies *Nők Lapja* alongside another American women's magazine, *Good Housekeeping*, an analogous publication to *Better Homes and Gardens* that she argues has a similar profile and market as *Nők Lapja* (p. 15). She explains that the articles in *Nők Lapja* focus on “personal stories, health, fashion, beauty, psychological advice, housekeeping and gardening, [thus] the magazine's content is very similar to that of *Good Housekeeping*” (p. 16). Haney (1994) elaborates that *Nők Lapja*

used to be filled with articles on work and politics but is now [in 1994] devoted to fashion, home improvement, and cooking. Recent articles keep women abreast on all of the new appliances hitting the Hungarian market, hairstyles popular in the West, and advice on how to “please” one's husband sexually. They have even begun to publish makeovers in which previously tired, overworked Hungarian women are transformed into taken-care-of women with the help of a little mascara and blush (p. 137).

Haney is not the only scholar disappointed with the magazine's transformation. In 1991, Kiss demonstrated her displeasure that the magazine did not become a progressive women's magazine. Instead, the traditionalism it demonstrated at the time of her writing was in keeping with the dominant, traditional attitudes (promoted by many party leaders) at the time of the first post-communist elections. Kiss (1991) argues,

it is illustrative that the most important women's weekly, *Nők Lapja*, has a new motto on its cover, written in the 1930s by the charming male poet, Dezso Kosztolanyi: 'Compassion be the bright light of your eyes'. However nice it is, the idea again is caring, enduring and understanding—by no means awakening or demanding (p. 53).

Judit Kádár (2002) argues that after communism, *Nők Lapja* fell in line with the beauty cult—promoting diet, plastic surgery and cosmetics. In her study of the magazine between 1989 and 1999, Tóth (2001) recognizes that the editors of the magazine believed *Nők Lapja* was a serious publication, but added what she terms “esoteric” content to appease readers (p. 70). Tóth chronicles in detail the changing structure and focus of the magazine and explains how its content shifted from an emphasis on educational articles and interviews, to current affairs largely focused on the lives of Western celebrities.¹²⁴ Tóth argues that politics were slowly removed from the magazine's pages, mirroring the post-communist societal belief that politics are a man's, not a woman's, business (p. 78). Tóth is quite critical of these changes and argues the magazine moved away from “quality” and “intellectual” content by 1999 (p. 72, 79).

In 1989 the thematic content of *Nők Lapja* focused on a variety of issues of importance in Hungary, including poverty rates—specifically the increasing divide between the rich and the poor—healthcare restrictions, rising alcoholism, divorce laws, agriculture, regions in Hungary, unemployment, the Holocaust, youth in 1989 and their career choices, etc. Sometimes, specific well-known people were interviewed or featured, such as a profile of famous French painter Paul Cézanne or women like contemporary Hungarian artist

¹²⁴ After the change from communism to a free-market economy, the number of advertisements also grew and by 1999, 21 percent of the magazine was devoted to advertisements—approximately 18.5 pages, compared to only one page of advertisement in 1989 (Tóth, 2001, 69).

Katalin Szávoszt. International stories were also examined or reported. The magazine combined political and social articles—including news about new laws, the economy, occasionally women’s issues, like abortion—with “lighter” content, like theatre reviews, poetry, ballet reviews, short fiction, etc.

Few articles in 1989 addressed “women’s issues” by speaking explicitly and exclusively to an audience of women. Instead, articles focused on certain political or social issues and considered men’s and women’s experiences, often interviewing a man and a woman as an illustrative example. Instead of interviewing women about issues that affected them exclusively, such as menopause, an issue that could affect any Hungarian was selected and both men and women were interviewed for their thoughts and experiences. Differences between the experiences of men and women were, in some ways, erased by *Nők Lapja* in 1989 and even the early 1990s.¹²⁵ Conversely (and problematically), during this time I also noticed—and this confirms Tóth’s findings (2001)—that there was an emphasis on interviews with intellectual or political men in Hungary, a “phenomenon [that] reinforces the stereotype that bright and deep ideas can only come from men” (Tóth, 2001, p. 74) and that it is men who run culture and society.

As the magazine changed, certain issues were foregrounded, like household management and cooking (Tóth, 2001). Some categories of the magazine’s overall objectives, however, remained constant throughout the changeover. For example, articles that educate readers on certain topics remained a constant feature, but Tóth (2001) explains that the content of these sections changed. She reports that in 1989 the number of articles about sex numbered 0, but by 1999, 8 percent of educational articles in the magazine were

¹²⁵ Men continued to be included in some stories of the magazine, right up until the end of the period of study, however their experiences were given equal weight in the earlier issues of the magazine, whereas by the mid-1990s more and more articles concerned women exclusively.

about sex (p. 70). Tóth (2001) reiterates that the magazine decreased the number of articles on social problems and Hungarian society, opting instead for lighter content (p. 78). Further, just as political articles were included more infrequently, so too was any reference to feminism (Tóth, 2001, p. 80). Kádár (2002) confirms that the magazine has, for most of its existence, distanced itself from feminism, an exclusion not remedied in the post-communist period. Quietly noting the change in content the aforementioned scholars criticize, in 1998 the words “Képes Politikai Hetilap” (“Illustrated and Political Weekly Magazine”) were removed from the magazine with no explanation or comment.¹²⁶

Concerning media in Hungary, in 2000 Anikó Nagy and Elizabeth Gazdag explained “new owners have appeared, including “western-type” businessmen who manage the press according to economic principles” (p. 31). The authors elaborate, explaining that financial concerns drive the industry, resulting in more advertisements and also an abundance of new publications which vie for readers’ attention in the market. According to correspondence with Sanoma Media, the media company that currently publishes the magazine, Sanoma Media acquired VNU Budapest Rt., the media company that was producing *Nők Lapja*, in 2000 and thus acquired the magazine as well. Under new management, the magazine doubled in size, increased the number of advertisements and became more focused on family, parenthood and motherhood. The section for children included in every issue also doubled. At the same time, the magazine increased its presence in the market and on November 1st 2000 a complementary website (www.noklapja.hu), still active today, was launched. Currently the content is divided evenly into two categories: readings (which Sanoma Media defines as weekly topics, life stories, interviews with celebrities, literature, opinions and editorials) and service articles

¹²⁶ Issue 10 still featured the description, but it was removed suddenly for issue 11.

(which include health, beauty, fashion, home, garden, kitchen and psychological advice) (Sanoma Media, n.d.a).¹²⁷ Pulled from the website, the style is described by Sanoma Media as “authentic,” “high quality and stylish,” “useful,” “easy to understand,” boasting “varied content” (Sanoma Media, n.d.a). In other words, *Nők Lapja* claims to offer entertaining content that also “serves the reader” (Sanoma Media, n.d.a). Current editor-in-chief, Gabriella Molnár, quoted on the Sanoma Media website, argues that

the great success of this brand—and of the journalists, editors and photographers of this magazine—is that it managed to remain credible and authentic through several generations. It is a great challenge to transmit constant values in a world characterized by constant change and lack of universal values: but this is the challenge that makes *Nők Lapja* stay alive. This magazine wishes to be a partner and friend for readers: it offers everyday advice and tips on a wide range of topics, from healthcare to Sunday lunch recipes (Sanoma Media, n.d.b).

Examining twenty three years of the magazine’s issues in such a compressed time period, like Haney, Kiss and Tóth, I too noted a shift in the themes of the articles and stories, particularly a decline in politics and hard-hitting news and an increase in articles concerning celebrity gossip and women’s appearances. I agree with Hatházi that today, *Good Housekeeping* is a good comparison, although it does not feature the celebrity gossip and Western popular culture that *Nők Lapja* includes. I think American publications like *Cosmopolitan*, *Women’s Day* or *Women’s World* (a weekly tabloid-type magazine) are more similar. In Canada, *Chatelaine* magazine today, although it is a monthly publication,

¹²⁷ All quotes from Sanoma Media are translated by the company—the website contains nearly identical information in both English and Hungarian.

is also very comparable in that it attempts to cover some world and news issues but is dominated by recipes, recommendations for what to read, housekeeping, home décor and fashion.

Why *Nők Lapja* is a Valuable Resource

While I agree with critics who claim the magazine has become less political and more akin to Western women's magazines, I do not believe that the decreasing political nature, or even decreasing "quality" of the magazine, if that is true, makes it any less valuable for study. Studying a women's magazine for a scholarly publication is not always a popular choice. As demonstrated, Kiss, Haney, Tóth and, to some extent, Hatházi, all provide negative characterizations of the magazine and obviously disdain the direction the magazine took. This is unsurprising, as Valerie J. Korinek (2000), in her influential study of Canada's *Chatelaine* magazine, points to an international contempt among scholars concerning the academic study of commercial women's magazines (p. 9). This disdain stems partly from a belief that women's magazines are by nature conservative and politically backward and serve only to encourage consumption (Korinek, 2000, p. 11). A major failing, Korinek points out, is that many scholars assume such magazines are prescriptive and provide a single dominant message (p. 14-15). Hermes (1995) asserts that another major failing of studies concerning women's magazines is the "concern" (p. 1) expressed by researchers for women who read these publications because it is assumed that reading such a publication is problematic and even dangerous to women.

Although *Nők Lapja*, as I shall demonstrate, is a rather conservative publication which does often mirror conservative ideas of what is sayable and what is not—supporting

traditional, heteronormative conceptions of womanhood—the magazine has also expressed sometimes subtle disagreement or displeasure with government and workplaces policies, sometimes present in readers’ letters and, more cautiously, in the articles themselves. The magazine also offers advice to Hungarian women faced with decisions regarding abortion, adoption, aging parents, balancing motherhood with other responsibilities, living affordably, finding work, paying debt, etc.—that is sometimes in conflict with dominant discourses about these matters. Certainly, the magazine has upheld *many* traditional ideas concerning women’s roles, framing parenthood and household management as women’s work and—central to my project—pathologizing childlessness, but, as I will demonstrate, it has also become a site of resistance, affording some women an opportunity to contest traditional ideas concerning women’s social roles, in an environment where there are few forums for women to speak out publicly. What is perhaps even more significant than the debated quality in the content of the magazine is its pervasiveness and popularity among Hungarian readers—especially women.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were few competing magazines on the market (Tóth, 2001, p. 67). However, after the regime change, there was an “explosion” of new magazines for women (Kádár, 2002). Despite the purported decline in quality content, in 2000 it was reported that between 1994 and 1999, despite new competition, *Nők Lapja* was still one of the most popular women’s magazines in Hungary, reaching approximately two million readers (West, 2000, pp. 117, 123). In 2001, despite her dismissal of the publication, Tóth also admitted that “although new rivals emerge year by year, *Nők Lapja* is one of the most important women’s magazines today” (p. 79). Tóth further explains that while some magazines in Hungary are geared toward young women and others toward housewives, *Nők Lapja* is geared toward both (p. 79), this broad range of readers further

accounting for its popularity. Today, according to the website of Sanoma Media, *Nők Lapja* is “the market leader among weekly female magazines” (Sanoma Media, n.d.a) and has the highest circulation and subscriber rates among all weekly publications geared toward women (Sanoma Media, n.d.a). During 2012-2013, there were 208,010 paid subscriptions to the magazine, but 660,000 readers (Sanoma Media, n.d.a).¹²⁸ The target market consists of independent, educated women, between the ages of 25 and 49, who have a high school or university education and are also family oriented.¹²⁹ However, in a 2009 celebration of the 60th anniversary of the publication, it was reported by the magazine that it appeals to all generations of women. For example, in 2009 five generations of women, ranging from a 96-year-old great-grandmother to her four year-old great-granddaughter, were interviewed and all claim to enjoy some part(s) of the magazine (Kováts, 2009b, issue 46, p. 79). In a 2010 article, “Graduated in *Nők Lapja*?” (“Érettségi a *Nők Lapjából*?”), Júlia Kegyes and Szilvia Richter interview 19-year-old women whose favorite magazine is *Nők Lapja* (issue 39, p. 6-7). Further, the success of the brand has fostered spin-off publications: *Nők Lapja Psziché* (psyche) *Nők Lapja Konyha* (a quarterly gastronomy magazine, geared toward young men and women), *Nők Lapja Évszakok* (another quarterly publication with similar content as *Nők Lapja*, but designed to be kept, like a book), *Nők*

¹²⁸ The number of readers is much higher than the number of subscribers. Sanoma Media does not explain this difference but it is not unusual for a magazine. Korinek (2000) explains that according to market research experts, magazines are “semipermanent” (p. 55) because unlike newspapers—which typically are recycled or reused the next day—magazines are held onto, passed to family and friends and gain a readership larger than circulation figures. Indeed, in Hungary anecdotal evidence also suggests that family and friends share an issue, with many also sent to relatives and friends living in other countries. The magazine intended this, demonstrated by features appealing to multiple generations, such as a 2008 fashion spread “3 Generations” (Anonymous, issue 18, pg. 42-45) which suggested clothing styles for a grandmother (65), mother (43) and daughter (20). Already in 1994, a survey on readers suggested such efforts had been successful as all members of a family, men included, were reported as reading one woman’s subscription to the magazine (Anonymous, issue 22, p. 8-9).

¹²⁹ Anecdotal evidence suggests that women both younger than 25 and older than 49 also enjoy reading the magazine. Further, Sanoma Media suggests that there are few Hungarian households in which a mother or grandmother does not read the publication (Sanoma Media, n.d.a).

Lapja Ezotéria (astrology), and *Nők Lapja Egészség* (focused on mental and physical health).

It is interesting to explore how the magazine was able to survive the 1989 transition. As discussed, in the post-communist period, many Hungarians struggled to shed reminders of communism, but the magazine remained popular and although it altered its title and ultimately developed its content, it never hid its communist past. In fact, a 2007 article, entitled “A Nők Lapja munkatársak időutazása” (“The Nők Lapja staff’s travels through time”), lightheartedly pokes fun at the long history of the magazine, imagining the reactions of current magazine employees if they had to work in its inaugural year (Anonymous, issue 51-52, pp. 120-121). That *Nők Lapja* has remained popular, among a broad spectrum of readers, throughout the transition period and into the 21st century—despite aggressive competition from national and international publications and a rejection of many communist reminders—speaks volumes about its importance in shaping and reflecting representations of women in Hungary.

Reflecting Foucault’s ideas that people are produced through discourse, Thun (1999) argues that women’s identities are greatly shaped by popular media. Kádár, in her study of three Hungarian women’s magazines—including a brief discussion of *Nők Lapja*—uses Naomi Wolf’s argument regarding the influence of magazines on women’s changing roles—to suggest that the same is true in Hungary as elsewhere (2002, p. 1). Kádár argues that women’s magazine have relayed the expectations facing Hungarian women and that such portrayals have had an impact on women. Texts like *Nők Lapja* further reveal “among other things, the articulation of a certain mode of gender relations which some researchers consider pivotal for the functioning and boundary setting of the nation’s ‘imagined community’” (Gapova, 2002, p. 82).

Studying *Nők Lapja*

For my research, I have used *Nők Lapja* in a few ways: first, I am interested in how the magazine shapes and reflects representations of women without children through specific articles and the selection of what to print as well as the placement of reader input in a context determined by writers and professional experts. Second, because of the interactive nature of the magazine, many examples from the magazine illustrate how women in Hungary challenge traditional, motherhood-centric conceptions of womanhood, using the magazine as a forum. Lastly, the magazine illuminates the experiences of women without children through reader letters and interviews, demonstrating representations of childlessness in the broader social context as well. Since it has been argued that media is never truly a window (Branston and Stafford, 2006) and depictions of society are actually sites for construction (Fyfe and Law, 1998), I cautiously examine any depictions of Hungarian society, careful not to think of them as factual but as filtered through the lens of *Nők Lapja*.

Ballaster et al. (1991) explain:

Critical analysts of women's magazines attend to two kinds of issue. First, there are those which come under the heading of 'theme' proper, or subject-matter, such as gender opposition, domesticity, royalty, and so on. Second, issues come under the heading of 'formal textual features' to do with layout, the 'tone' of address to the reader, distribution of advertising, fiction, features, and so forth (p. 8).

I am concerned primarily with the first issue: the theme and subject matter, only minimally with the tone of the articles and I have not addressed advertising distribution, fiction or layout. However, although I focus on theme and not tone, it is important to note

many analysts [of women's magazines in general] have been struck by the intimate tone employed to address the reader, the cozy invocation of a known commonality between 'we women' [but] . . . such inclusivity is patently false. The 'ideal' or 'implied' reader of most women's magazines is self-evidently middle-class, white, and heterosexual. This inclusivity of address effectively marginalizes or makes deviant black, working-class or lesbian women (Ballaster et al., 1991, p. 9).

Indeed, *Nők Lapja* does employ a tone of inclusivity, often speaking to the reader as if she is an old friend. In 1994 the magazine conducted a survey—entitled *Nők Lapja Tükörben* [*Nők Lapja in a mirror*—and admitted that criticism (and praise) from readers has a direct impact on content, reinforcing the relationship between reader and writer (Anonymous, issue 22, pp. 8-9). Countless articles asked readers to write in because the writers and editors wanted to hear from them—this was in addition to the standard “Letters to the Editor” section many magazines, including *Nők Lapja*, have. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the magazine, a letter was written to the readers, signed only “the editor,” which began with: “Kedves Olvasók! Régóta ismerjük egymást.” (“Dear Readers! We have known each other for a long time”) (A szerkesztő, 1999, issue 2, pg. 12). However, as Ballaster et al. (1991) contends, although it may not be spelled out, there is a particular social group spoken to so genially by women's magazine. In this case, the “we” are ethnic Hungarians. The magazine often reminded Hungarians what the right or common thoughts on an issue are, such as an article on GYES that tells readers “We Hungarians believe in

GYES, in the significance of those three years spent a home” (Hulej, 2011, issue 40, p. 60). Further, as I shall demonstrate later in this chapter, many people were excluded from the magazine, their issues, concerns, and experiences ignored or included only minimally: the Roma, non-heteronormative couples, non-able-bodied readers, non-ethnic Hungarians, and the childless.

In a study of this kind, a discourse analysis of a sampling of the magazine is typically the method employed. As Korinek (2000) explains, a study such as this allows for the “tapestry” of the magazine to be seen and not just individual threads (p. 16). She explains that as with woven cloth, individual strands can be examined in isolation from the whole but by doing that one cannot see the overall patterns. Examining randomly selected issues in depth—considering all of the themes, patterns, styles and concerns—is a valuable means of understanding a publication more deeply. Korinek also studied two decades of *Chatelaine*. However, as it is a monthly magazine her random sampling resulted in a first stage analysis (which catalogued the page counts, price, number of letters, editor’s name and cover art) of 240 issues and then a more in depth study of each year’s January, May and September issues, which restricted this portion of the study to 60 issues (p. 17).

Although I agree that the tapestry is notable, I am interested in specific threads, contextualized not exclusively against the magazine’s tapestry, as is the focus of Korinek’s study, but also against the Hungarian histories and policies unpacked in other chapters.

Given the sheer volume of the number of issues I worked with, content analysis proved to be too time consuming and did not reveal what I was most interested in: representations of women, particularly women without children. I was spending too much time cataloguing superfluous themes and was buried under too much information and data. *Nők Lapja* was, and continues to be, a weekly publication which means that over the course of my 23 year

period of study (1989 to 2012), there were approximately 1100 issues to consider. I rightly worried that a random sampling of the magazine, although it would reveal a great deal about the publication, might accidentally result in a study of the issues that had nothing to say about women without children. Thus, I adopted a different, painstaking approach.

Over the course of my four month research stay in Budapest, I skimmed through *each* issue of *Nők Lapja*, from January 1989 until December 2012.¹³⁰ I then photocopied, translated and read in detail articles that had to do with women without children. This is a similar method West (2000) used for her study of two Hungarian women's magazines (*Nők Lapja* and *Kiskegyed*), although, again, her sample size was smaller. By counting the frequency of my specific theme (childlessness) in a defined sample of texts I did some very narrow content analysis, thoroughly cataloguing only the frequency of the theme of childlessness in articles or stories. I then paid closer attention to the textual interpretation necessary (Branston and Stafford, 2006, p. 27). In this sense, by pointing to a systemic absence, my brief foray into content analysis proved useful (Branston and Stafford, 2006, p. 28). My research revealed fewer articles concerning women without children than expected, and thus this laborious method was indeed necessary in order to capture all of the articles in question. Additionally, to capture some of the tapestry, I made note of the dominant themes in the magazine (further unpacked in Chapter Four), but abandoned content analysis for these themes.¹³¹

¹³⁰ I must thank my mother, Anita Oja, a Hungarian-language translator, for her assistance with this time-consuming task. All *Nők Lapja* translations in this dissertation were done by my mother and I.

¹³¹ I began doing a content analysis marking these different themes: childlessness, motherhood, fatherhood, etc., but as the days of my short research period flew by, I was spending too much time cataloguing so that finding articles concerning women without children became jeopardized. Rose (2012) notes that content analysis must be exhaustive and exclusive (no overlap of categories) and although it helps to produce a study others can replicate and helps manage large quantities of data with consistency, it does not help to understand the productions of texts (p. 55-60). I had a limited time period to work with the magazines and,

Concerning my analysis, I found Hermes' (1995) method—repertoire analysis—for analyzing interviews to be helpful for my study of the text. She explains that “repertoire analysis is not a prescriptive or rigorous method. It simply consists of going back and forth through the text, summarizing interview transcripts according to different criteria, for as long as it takes to organize the bits and pieces in meaningful structures” (Hermes, 1995, p. 27). A repertoire is a way of describing something, using words, expressions and images. In other words, in her analysis of interviews, Hermes sought to find and group themes, a similar process I have also employed for my analysis of the articles.

Although I did not follow the *exact* same methods for analysis as Korinek, her study, particularly her theoretical framework proved to be very influential. Informed by Roland Barthes, Korinek “prioritizes the act of reading” (p. 18) by paying careful attention to the role of the readers, who are active participants “in constructing meaning as they read and interacted with the magazine” (p. 18), something which can be accomplished by examining the ways in which readers respond and react to the magazine without necessarily conducting interviews with them. With regard to this, in the pages of *Nők Lapja* women were (and are) afforded a small space to criticize dominant messages. In this sense I am influenced by Korinek’s study and her emphasis on reader input and disagreement with dominant themes in *Chatelaine*. I contend that in the post-1989 period we increasingly see Hungarian women refute ideas of Hungarian womanhood and struggle to define the concept for themselves, using the magazine to converse with other women and voice their concerns, agreements and objections addressed at the magazine and society at large.

as it was, barely finished. Although I appreciate the value of this type of analysis, it would be better suited to different, future projects concerning the magazine, with a much smaller sample size.

For my study, the role of the reader was key because the style and format of the magazine encouraged reader participation.¹³² Articles, sometimes given weight by the voice of an expert, often focused more on the Hungarian women interviewed than explicitly on the author's viewpoint. In fact, some articles featured only an introductory or concluding paragraph from the author(s) and the bulk of the article was simply quoted content from Hungarian people and/or readers of the magazine. However, the author's opinion is not lost as s/he (and likely the editor) determines what letters from readers to print, what letters to exclude and how to contextualize them.¹³³

Also inspired by Korinek's study and theoretical framework is my use of Foucauldian discourse analysis and theorizing about power. A key aspect of using Foucauldian discourse analysis is to examine what is sayable and what it not (Hall, 2012, pp. 72-73). Indeed, what many understandings of discourse—not just Foucauldian definitions—have in common, is that “they consider discourses to be organized around practices of exclusion. Whilst what is possible to say seems self-evident and natural, this naturalness is a result of what has been excluded, that which is almost unsayable” (Mills, 2004, p. 11). Importantly, this exclusion is intentional. As highlighted in the introduction to this project, pulling from Foucault, Mills (2004) defines discourses as “groups of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have coherence and a force to them in common” (p. 6). Thus it is possible to talk about specific discourses, like

¹³² Tóth, in her study of *Nők Lapja*, has a similar methodology—she studies *Nők Lapja* from the perspective of the reader. Neither the intent of the authors nor the truth of the information is unimportant to her study. As Tóth (2001) eloquently explains, “for a reader, the ‘menu is of interest and not the consideration of the people who created it for her/him” (p. 68).

¹³³ I am not naïve enough to assume that the women's voices included in the magazine are necessarily demonstrative of overarching concerns among readers, nor do I think that writers and editors did not often select reader input to meet their own objectives, whether to cause controversy or to support the magazine's ideals, for example.

a discourse of femininity or motherhood. Foucault considers discourses to be regulated practices, meaning that rules and structures direct them (Mills, 2004, p. 6). However, discourses are complex and a particular discourse may not spell out a consistent message (Ballaster et. al, 1991, p. 4).

In her study, Korinek foregrounds Foucault's theorizing concerning "relations of power, resistance and the multiplicity of discourses" (p. 18). Power—and resistance to it—is particularly significant to my project. Foucault defines power not as institutions or mechanisms that force compliance from people. Nor is power "a system of dominations exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body" (1980, p. 92). Instead, Foucault (1978) understands power to be a

multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organizations; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus (pp. 92-93).

Further, he argues that power is, and comes from, everywhere (1978, p. 93).¹³⁴ In other words, "Foucault's account of power is not applied to individuals by the state or sovereign in a top-down fashion. Rather, it cultivates everywhere, even through the tiniest capillaries

¹³⁴ Elsewhere, he has explained it as "power is not an institution, a structure, or a certain force with which certain people are endowed; it is the name given to a complex strategic relation in a given society" (Foucault, 1980, p. 236).

of the social body” (Fraser, 1989, p. 26). Thus, while a study of pro-natal policies chronicled in Chapter Two is important, because this discussion contextualizes dominant discourses, points to dominant ideas concerning women’s social roles and the control of reproductive policies, laws and policies are only one piece of the pie concerning power relations and control over women’s bodies.

Significantly, as discussed, “where there is power, there is resistance . . . [and] these points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham (1999) cite Julian Henriques who summarizes quite succinctly, “the rules delimit the sayable . . . [but] in practice, discourses delimit what can be said, while providing the spaces—the concepts, metaphors, models, analogies, for making new statements within any specific discourse” (p. 41). As such, “discourses should not be interpreted at face value; individuals actively engage with discourses in order to forge particular positions of identity for themselves” (Mills, 2004, p. 81).

This theorizing suggests that not only are discourses not the final word, there is no one central, dominating point of power nor is there one great source of resistance. There is also no one discourse and no one counter-discourse, there is a multiplicity of discourses—in this case, concerning motherhood and non-motherhood in Hungary—and they conflict, compete and come from different sources, and may be accepted or challenged—sometimes both. I argue that a magazine like *Nők Lapja*, purportedly devoid of important political content, is actually a source and site of resistance. As Mills (2004) argues, various studies have confirmed that “discursive structures are sites where power struggles are played out” (p. 87) because women do not always have the same speaking rights as men in a society. Certainly in Hungary, where feminism has been undermined and women have been pushed out of the political arena, it can be difficult for women to voice their concerns. *Nők Lapja*,

however, has provided a space for women—not just the female journalists, who write and research articles, but also women who provide fictional content and women readers who write in to ask for help, voice their thoughts or contribute to discussions. Hermes (1995) explains that a magazine may be opened but not really *read* (p. 15) and often women particularly read magazines in the little time they have—sometimes while watching television, sometimes in the bath tub. Hermes elaborates that “texts may be said to have ‘preferred meanings’ that invite the reader to read them in line with dominant meaning systems (Hall, 1980). However, this invitation need not be taken up. Readers may negotiate with texts or even read them against the grain” (Hermes, 1995, p. 25).

Who is Excluded by *Nők Lapja*

Rose (2012) points to a feature of discourse analysis: “reading for what is not said” (p. 157). She argues that “absences can be as productive as explicit naming” (p. 157). Further, as discussed, what becomes sayable seems self evident and natural because of what has been excluded (Mills 2004, p. 215). Thus it is important to consider what topics—and who—were excluded by *Nők Lapja*. Throughout the course of my period of study, the magazine featured hundreds of different topics.¹³⁵ However, there were some themes that

¹³⁵ Although it was not my focus, I made notes of the various themes that emerged—particularly ones that were focused on throughout many issues, caused reader uproar, were emphasized somehow or said something about the issues addressed that captivated the attention of the journalists and editors, as well as the readers. This casual list is intended simply to underscore that the magazine was did not focus exclusively on gossip and recipes, and although some articles were rather light hearted others were concerned with serious issues. Indeed, among the stories covered in the post communist period, readers were provided articles concerning: the contemporary experience of childhood, historical sites in Romania, natural disasters, decorating, global affairs, youthfulness, famous artists, poverty, unemployment, abortion, health care policies, life inside prison, drug use among Hungarians, divorce rates and laws, crafts and children’s projects, fashion, gardening, international women’s movements, hairstyles and beauty, day-to-day life in various parts of the country, theatre, child support and maternity leave, global and local

persisted and other themes that were notably absent. An intersectional approach helps to reveal that there are many social groups missing from the magazine's pages. For example, concerning Roma citizens, Tóth (2001) found that between 1989 and 1999, there were only three articles about Roma Hungarians and two of these framed the Roma in question in a negative light (p. 78). I too found only a small number of articles during the entire period of my study that had anything to say about the Roma. I also found that Roma only escaped negative connotations if they demonstrated exceptional work ethic, for example, an article entitled "I am a gypsy and a college student" ("Cigány vagyok és egyetemista") is different from other articles on college life, or post-secondary education in general in Hungary. It highlights and praises these Roma for being different from the perceived norm, implying that Roma who attend college are worthy of attention, ignoring the social conditions and institutional barriers that make attaining an education difficult for many Roma youth (Hulej and Jónap, issue 14, pp. 16-19). Overall, however, the lived experiences of Roma in Hungary are absent from the magazine, reflecting the broader societal exclusion and marginalization of Roma discussed in Chapters One and Two.

Also missing are articles concerning any social groups other than the dominant white, ethnically "Hungarian" citizen. Few articles in the entire period of my study—23 years—referred to any other cultural or ethnic groups. Although Christmas was celebrated

economies, local artisans, child abuse and abusive partners, parenting advice, tragic personal stories and events from around the world (such as mothers who commit suicide and the Mars exploration), household and cleaning tips, Western popular culture, celebrity gossip and interviews, horoscope, polygamy, scientific findings (i.e. genetic discoveries and learning to read body language), film and theatre reviews, adoption, pregnancy, difficulty conceiving/infertility, how to interview successfully, smoking and drinking problems and statistics (particularly how to quit), breastfeeding, sex, adultery and marriage, friendship, weddings, weight loss and fitness, Hungarian history and important events (such as the 1848 revolution), sex workers, sex crimes and sexual abuse, sports stories, gender roles (both questioned and affirmed), work/life balance, life without television, singletons, history of the magazine, education, discrimination against mothers, immigration and emigration to and from Hungary, local events and celebrations, entrepreneurs, increased cost of living in Hungary, Facebook and other internet topics, gambling, and more.

extensively by the magazine, with articles regarding Christmas decorations, recipes, and gift-giving ideas, I found little reference to other religious celebrations, such as Hanukkah, also reflecting the (here latent) anti-Semitism pointed to in Chapter One. Although love, marriage, sex and relationships were and continue to remain dominant themes for the magazine, the type of relationship included was and continues to remain limited to heteronormative ideals. Articles on topics concerning relationships speak almost exclusively to heterosexual pairings and only a few articles featured or discussed same sex relationships at all. Articles that did discuss same sex relationships were always discussed in isolation, in an article explicitly about same sex love. Stories of same sex couples or non-heteronormative relationships were never mixed in with the commonplace stories of love and relationships between men and women—they are consistently treated as something unusual and diverging from the norm. In fact, one title about same sex partnerships among women reads “Happiness—in a different way” (“Boldogság— másképp”), suggesting that same sex love is different (V. Kulcsár, 2006, issue 26, pp. 24-26). Another article provides straight readers the chance to read answers to 19 questions about gay men (Kertész, 2008, issue 2, pp. 58-59), a voyeuristic approach that implies gay men are an oddity to be examined and interrogated.

However, the fact that the magazine included *any* stories concerning same sex relationships is notable, and perhaps a positive reflection of the magazine, because in her study of print media in post-communist Hungary, Erzsébet Barát (2005) explains,

the discourse of exclusion on the grounds of sexual orientation, unlike those on the grounds of racial and ethnic belonging, does not need to be hedged or implied in a modulated manner. It can be spoken about without any anxiety or concern: after all, who would want to risk any kind of implication, let

alone identification with them through speaking up on behalf of the non-heterosexual collectives in contemporary Hungarian society? (p. 215).

Thus perhaps it was a brave step for *Nők Lapja* to carve out a space, however small, for same sex relationships.¹³⁶ Despite this small token of inclusion toward one particular group, the magazine was and remains very exclusionary, speaking almost exclusively to able-bodied, white, ethnically Hungarian, heterosexual, married (or desiring to be married) women who have children or wish to have them.¹³⁷ Further, Kádár (2002) points to an emphasis on beauty, and critiques the magazine for promoting the idea that women in Hungary can only be successful if they are young, fit, skinny and beautiful—although she does not explicitly mention it, we can add, able-bodied, a theme I noted in my own review of the magazine. Articles about single women have become more and more commonplace in the magazine. Yet they spoke to women as if it was understood that they *will* someday be mothers, even if they currently were not. Such articles also focused on coping with being single—which will be addressed more in the next chapter. Articles about single parenting were similarly infrequent, while articles with advice about how to find a man or improve a marriage were much more common. The expectation of motherhood and the exclusion of women without children will be discussed in more depth.

Feminism has been excluded and discredited by post-communist Hungarian media and *Nők Lapja* is no exception. In the broader media, feminists are often portrayed as violent, aggressive amazons whose behavior purportedly proves that women are better

¹³⁶ Perhaps it was a marketing step, to make the magazine more sensational. V. Kulcsár, in a 2009 article concerning women who have children but do not immediately feel motherly toward their children, remarks that the theme is “taboo” and people do not tend to talk about these women but *Nők Lapja* takes up the issue (issue 20, p. 24).

¹³⁷ Concerning women’s bodies and the ideal body type promoted by the magazine, diet and exercise have consistently been promoted and models used for stories are always slim. Further, makeup, beauty and fashion are also all promoted.

suiting to, and happier in, the domestic sphere and that non-feminist women are actually “terrorized” by feminist conceptions of non-traditional families (Barát, 2005, p. 215). Although *Nők Lapja* did not make such explicit claims concerning feminism, it certainly did not provide any space for feminism and further contributed to the dominant discourse of motherhood, which suggests that women are happier in the domestic sphere. As an example, cooking remained a constant feature of the magazine, which grew in size to become a multi-page spread in every issue, with full color photographs and extensive instructions. Even as the Hungarian market became flooded with easy-to-prepare meals, the magazine promoted home cooked food as central to a Hungarian woman’s interests and responsibilities. West’s (2000) findings reveal that “cooking contributes to the social and moral evaluation of full female personhood in Hungary, while throwing something together does not” (p. 117), an image supported by *Nők Lapja*’s representation of womanhood.

Women without Children—Excluded but Provided a Limited Space

When I began reading *Nők Lapja*, I did not think that childlessness or women without children would be a dominant theme, but I also did not realize that the magazine would become so focused on families and motherhood as it developed. As mentioned, the magazine is marketed to, and read by, a broad range of women. There are other magazines on the market that cater exclusively to mothers and parents. For example, after 1989 there were new publications geared to housewives like *Meglepetés* (Surprise), but motherhood grew to be a dominant theme in *Nők Lapja* anyway, overshadowing other themes and topics. What makes a woman a “real” woman, and what makes a mother a good mother, have both been regulated by the magazine. The exclusion of childlessness contributes to

naturalizing motherhood because what becomes sayable and natural is a result of what is excluded (Mills, 2004). Conversely, themes or narratives that are repeated by media make them seem more natural as they become familiar (Branston and Stafford, 2006).

In my period of study only fourteen articles/stories/letters/pieces were written explicitly about women without children.¹³⁸ Earlier in my study period, women without children—even if they were the subject of a story or article—were not explicitly mentioned at all. Further, like stories concerning same sex couples, often articles concerning childlessness were discussed in isolation—as something unusual to examine—or in contrast to motherhood, which is naturalized and rewarded. It has been argued that a “*childless woman* is the *other* of the *other*, doubly lacking first as a woman (not man) and then as a non-mother (not fully woman)” (Gandolfo 2005, 114, emphasis in original). As an “other,” childless women were often excluded from discussions, even when the topic could have—or should have—included them. For example, in an article about people who chose to live alone, entitled “The homo singularis has been born” (“Megszületett a homo singularis”), the author explains that more and more people are choosing to live alone (Mörk, 1992, issue 46, pp. 10-11). No mention is made explicitly about childlessness, although the “problem” associated with this choice, according to the author, is that people who live alone will have no one to look after them in their old age (p. 10). The article is obviously about women (and men) with no partners or children but even in this article childlessness is not named or discussed.

¹³⁸ However, this is not to say there was nothing in the magazine *for* women without children. Although the magazine increasingly featured articles concerning motherhood and parenting, the magazine, as discussed, also included a variety of other topics from popular films to celebrity gossip to health and wellness concerns. Thus, it can be argued that the magazine did not entirely ignore women without children because many articles could appeal to a broad range of women, regardless of whether or not they have children.

A 1996 article, “Do we need children?” (“Kellenek nekünk gyerekek?”), presumably about whether or not women/society needs children, instead of discussing childlessness, discusses whether GYES or GYED is necessary (with one reader veering off topic to complain that for the “lumps” in Hungary, it is their main source of income) (Mörk, 1996, issue 18, p. 44). The article also addresses families with children wanting *more* children, but the childless are excluded from consideration. In a follow-up to a 1998 article “Why are (or aren’t) we women having children” (“Miért (nem) szülünk”), women without children are again entirely removed from the discussion. The authors report being inundated with replies to the original article and apologize for not being able to print every letter but claim the letters in the follow-up article capture the broad range of replies sent in by readers (Mörk et al., issue 24, pp. 5-8). However, no reference is made to being childless. The other stories are all from readers who have at least one child and would like a larger family but cannot, for various reasons (typically a reluctant spouse).

In 2009, in an article entitled “Why (don’t) we need children?” (Miért (nem) kell gyerek?), author V. Kulcsár explains that the letters are in reference to a woman who has written in and admitted she does not want children. Men and women write in, both for and against childlessness, but V. Kulcsár also calls on two psychologists—Zelka and Miklós Baktay—to help address the letters from readers. Poignantly, they cut short the discussion of childlessness and instead outline the ways in which Hungarians must recognize that childrearing is difficult, but rewarding work (p. 85). Although a letter by a childless woman sparked the debate, the concerns and opinions of women and men in her situation are set aside. Instead, an impassioned case for the beauty of parenthood is presented. Thus the magazine excluded women without children from one of the few dialogues initiated by and geared toward them, further naturalizing the decision to have children. Indeed,

discussions of childlessness were often sidelined by discussions of having more children or finding the right time to start a family, by both writers and readers of the magazine.

Although I argue childless women were largely excluded from *Nők Lapja*, I also have to be aware of the broader societal content in which the magazine operates. This is why it is important to understand the historical background as outlined in Chapters One and Two. These chapters help to create a link between what is defined as Hungarianness and traditional conceptions of women as mothers and wives. Even under communism when nationalism was suppressed, I chronicled how pro-natal sentiments were woven into policy. In the post-communist period, nationalism has intensified and Hungarian women have been targeted as responsible for the nation's success or failure based on their procreative decisions. Ideas about Hungarian women's social roles and duties thus have a long history of being tethered to their procreative abilities and mothering. Considering this context, I contend that *Nők Lapja* was somewhat bold in including discussions of childlessness in the magazine at all. Indeed, in the article "Without children. Happily—unhappily" ("Gyerek nélkül. Boldogan—boldogtalanul"), author Zsuzsa Vadas explains that it was difficult to find a happy childless couple to discuss their choice *and* have their names printed in the publication, a similar finding of Lilla Koronczay when she wrote "Happiness, without child(ren)" ("Boldogság, gyerek nélkül") in 2001 (issue 45).

In the absence of finding Hungarians to share their stories, the magazine included Western celebrities. For example, in 1992 the "Hír világ" ("World news") section of the magazine featured a small blurb about women who chose not to have children and Katharine Hepburn and Diane Sawyer, respected and admired American stars, both voiced their decision to remain childless (Anonymous, issue 42, p. 13). However small the number of articles/stories focused on women without children, the magazine afforded

readers a place to voice their concerns, and also to hear simply of women—both happy and unhappy—who did not have children. Certainly not every childless woman wrote in to *Nők Lapja*, and undoubtedly not all could relate to the stories that were shared, but for that issue at least the childless were not excluded from the magazine and a story spoke directly to them. Increasingly, Hungarian women without children began to speak up.

In 2006, a woman without children, Judit, who had previously found no other forum to talk about her childlessness took advantage of this space and wrote a letter to V. Kulcsár Ildikó, a staff writer who pens a sort of “Dear Abby” column. Entitled “It is also possible without children” (“Gyerek nélkül is lehet . . .”) (issue 8, p. 57), the letter from Judit describes how she does not want children. She is responding to another reader who asked for more features concerning parenting, and she asks that the magazine not oblige. This is an excellent example of resistance to certain assumptions about womanhood made by the magazine—resistance to pro-natal messages and the assumption that all women want to read about parenting and childcare. This reader explains she never wanted children which may mean that others would condemn her, but she saw children as a liability, a test of patience and a costly expenditure. She argues that one cannot assume all women want children, which is why she wrote in to the magazine. Judit argues that many women without children have just as interesting lives as do mothers. Such women wanted articles geared toward them because they too have families, health problems, questions, and joys (p. 57). She asks not to be judged, but to be accepted as another kind of person that exists in Hungary. Judit actively engages with the magazine and demands a less limited conception of what is acceptable for women concerning motherhood and non-motherhood. Further, she demands the magazine not direct its content exclusively to mothers. She explains that at least she has finally been able to express her thoughts which have occupied

her for some time. She points out that there is no other forum for such thoughts, because the childless are not an example for society (p. 57). She even thanks V. Kulcsár for listening.

V. Kulcsár responds that there are many kinds of prejudice among women but that many women, like her, do not see only one good way of life. She explains that she even has a girlfriend who is childless. She agrees that the magazine must keep a healthy balance between meeting the needs of those with and without children. However, she writes “I say this in spite of my belief that it is good for the country if many (more) children are born” (p. 57). She continues to explain that her children are the most important thing to her, but motherhood is not necessarily a lifestyle pattern to follow—at most, one of many. Thus, even though the magazine was not providing the editorial content some childless women desired, it did open a limited space for these women to air their concerns, even against the convictions of some of the staff.¹³⁹

In 2009 V. Kulcsár was written to again by another woman without children. This woman is less confident in her decision than Judit, in that she feared criticism from V. Kulcsár concerning her choice. The letter is entitled, “Am I a waste”? (“Selejt vagyok?”) (issue 38, p. 72). The author of the anonymous letter had contemplated writing to V. Kulcsár for months. It was only when a friend of hers recently had a baby girl that the woman decided she would not be afraid and would share her thoughts. She explains that she does not want children, does not like babies, and is not moved by them. Further, she

¹³⁹ In 1996, V. Kulcsár wrote an article entitled “Late sorrow” (“Késő bánat”) in which she compiled a list of regrets, featuring real stories from Hungarian men and women. Among them is a man who has left his wife because she has decided she wants children, when she previously promised him she did not. He asks V. Kulcsár for advice and her response is “the smartest decision in my life was to give birth to three children” (issue 35, p. 25). Her consistent message to readers was that choosing children is an excellent decision—the right decision.

does not want to lose her figure, or lose her position at work because she loves her job. She has already found a life partner who also does not want children. Still, her family and friends laugh at her and claim she will change her mind. No babies born around her have awakened in her the desire to have children so she asks V. Kulcsár if she is a waste, if she is missing the instinct of continuing her species (p. 72).

In reply, V. Kulcsár shares some anecdotes. One is of a woman whose decision not to have children was supposedly shaped by a conversation she overheard as a child, about a woman who had died in childbirth. Another woman V. Kulcsár knows does not want children because her friend's partner cheated on her while she was pregnant and she does not want the same fate to befall her. A former colleague is childless because she does not want to lose her figure and become overweight like her own mother. V. Kulcsár draws the conclusion that if a woman does not want children, there must be some underlying reason, which may or may not be known to the woman. In the case of the letter writer, V. Kulcsár explains she cannot know the reason but she does know this: time can be cruel and perhaps in six or seven years the woman will have changed her mind but it might be too late for her. She clarifies that she does not believe that a woman cannot live a nice life without children—again she references the same childless friend she spoke of in 2006—but she is certain that a woman loses a lot if she passes on a “miracle” because of comfort, fear, selfishness, or her career. To her, every life is a miracle. Nevertheless, she answers that she does not view the letter writer as a “waste,” because she had received *twelve similar letters* from childless readers that year (my emphasis). Although this letter writer is seeking acceptance and not just voicing her rejection of traditional ideas about womanhood and motherhood, in simply sharing her story she contributes to a different understanding of women's childlessness and the purported naturalness of motherhood.

“Confession” has been associated with submitting to power (Mills, 2004, p. 74). In the case of *Nők Lapja*, the confessions of these two women without children work to help them locate themselves within a larger group with similar concerns, feelings, and criticisms. I argue that they challenge dominant conceptions of motherhood tethered to womanhood, using the magazine as a site of resistance. Further, although V. Kulcsár provides a problematic response—an interest in the “reasons” why a woman is childless chapter—, she herself confronts conceptions of Hungarian womanhood tethered to motherhood and, however meekly, admits that women who choose not to have children are not a “waste”. The two letters and V. Kulcsár’s replies both challenge women’s social roles and worth defined by motherhood.

Who is the Focus in *Nők Lapja*

While certain groups were notably excluded from the magazine, one group—mothers—was increasingly made the focus. In 1989, and even in some early 1990s issues, motherhood, or childlessness, although an important theme in the magazine, was not a central focus. If the women interviewed, featured or otherwise discussed were childless, no mention was explicitly made. However, although there were articles on parenting and children, in interviews with various women throughout 1989, women’s roles as mothers were often perfunctorily mentioned, if at all. For example, in a 1990 article entitled “Wives” (“Feleségek”) by Erzsébet Schäffer, the wives of politicians are interviewed and although their age, number of children and occupation are listed under their respective names, the women who do not have children are not described as childless (issue 22, p. 5).

The women are simply listed as having a certain number of children, or not. In each interview, no other mention of children or motherhood is made.

Yet it is evident that motherhood was ultimately praised by the magazine, even if it was not the central theme in 1989. Tóth (2001) noted that if an interviewee did not have “enough” children, she faced criticism from the interviewer and was expected to provide some sort of reason for not having more children (an unwilling partner, tiredness from current family size, etc.). In one fashion spread (one of the first to include mother/daughter fashion), a model who is described as having been unafraid of pregnancy and losing her figure, is photographed with her daughter. The author fawns over the attractive, fit young mother and her daughter (Lazarovits, 1990, issue 45, p. 18-19). Further, even if little was said about motherhood in 1989, I contend that authors for the magazine just assumed most women readers *were* mothers, demonstrated by the fact that every issue contained a section for children.

Revealingly, in 1991, in a survey of European women’s lives, *Nők Lapja* asked its female readers to answer a short survey composed of the following questions (Szilágyi, 1991, issue 9, pp.14-15):

1. How old were you when you got married?
2. How many children do you have?
3. Are you happy with the connection you have with your partner?
4. When was your first sexual experience?
5. What kind of birth control do you use?
6. How many hours per day do you spend on yourself?
7. What are you afraid of?
8. What are you waiting for?

It was assumed that, first, readers were married and, second, as suggested by the second question, “how many children do you have?” as opposed to “do you have children?” that they were also mothers. Indeed, a common theme in the magazine has been the discussion of when to have children, and many articles and authors do not even consider the option of not having children. For example, in 2000 the magazine featured a recipe for happiness, entitled “Recipes for happiness in 2000” (“Boldogság receptek 2000-re”). Pages 30-32 featured a quiz with one question asking “Should the baby come now, or later?” (Anonymous, issue 23, p. 30). Much like the questionnaire above, there was no option for whether or not a woman or a couple wanted a child; the only options concern the right time to have a baby, thus implying that motherhood is an inevitable and certain path for women.

This assumption that all women want or should have children was promoted by the magazine throughout the entire period under examination. For example, in 2007 (issue 21, pp. 18-21), the magazine published an article entitled, “Men’s problem, women’s complaint. Why does every woman want children?” (“Férfigond, női panasz. Miért akar minden nő gyereket?”), in which women are portrayed as baby-obsessed while men are positioned as reluctant to have children. The authors begin the article with the story of Gábor, who is frustrated that his new, younger girlfriend—as exciting as she is—wants children. The authors suggest that the older man who wants a fun, younger wife is not an uncommon phenomenon but points to the other half of the story: “the thirty-something woman, whose biological clock ticks non-stop” (p. 19). The authors predict that Gábor’s new girlfriend will want children and a family because of her biological clock—biological programming is said to steer women toward motherhood (p. 19). The article depicts a struggle between the women who want children and families and the reluctant or unwilling male partners who refuse or feel trapped by the desires of their female partners. In the real

life stories printed, readers witness a struggle between conceptions of “family” and whether a couple without children can be considered a family—the men interviewed say yes, the women supposedly at the mercy of their biological clocks say no. The women interviewed also claim that a woman raising a child alone is also not a complete family without a father figure. Although this article only focuses on reluctant men and baby-crazed women, a situation suggested as relatively normal or common enough to be of concern even in regard to men’s reproductive desires, the term “biological programming” is used by one interviewee. This biological programming is deemed to be defective in men resistant to having a family, while another male interviewee admits to being called selfish and child-hating for his childlessness. He is told he will feel differently about children when he has his own). The desire for children is treated as inevitable—and certainly natural—for women and also for men.

The article discussed above is actually quite sad, chronicling in particular another story of a woman who wanted children but whose longtime partner refused, asking her to raise his child from another woman and repeatedly cheating on her. When she asks for a pet to keep her company he almost refuses but allows her this small solace. As the years pass, she finally accepts that she will not have children but before her fortieth birthday he proposes and says he would like children. By this time she has changed her mind (I think we are also led to believe that perhaps fertility might have been an issue). He promptly leaves her and marries a woman twenty-five years younger than him, with whom he subsequently has a child. I include this example to point out that this article is not light-hearted or meant to be funny. Instead, it paints an unhappy portrait of heteronormative pairings and the purported inability of men and women in Hungary to agree on parenthood.

It also offers an implied criticism of patriarchy's mechanisms of keeping women in dependency of men who treat them badly.

The biological clock was referenced quite often in articles concerning women's lives, roles and choice, underscoring the naturalness of motherhood and implying that motherhood is inevitable but childlessness was only a phase in a woman's life. Having children is positioned as a central reason for women to get married, listed second to loving a man (Vass, 1996, issue 20, p. 5-7). In 2005, an article was published with the title "Men, why are you afraid?" ("Miért féltek, férfiak?"), and it chronicles the fears Hungarian men supposedly have (issue 37, pp. 14-15). V. Kulcsár (2005b) asks why so many men live alone and why a lot of men fear marriage and having children (p. 14). A few men are interviewed to get to the bottom of this concern. Once again, men are represented as reluctant to have children, but no mention of *their* biological clocks is made. The implication is that women naturally want to have children but men need to be convinced.

Again and again the phrase biological clock was used to explain women's actions and solidify the naturalness and inevitability of motherhood for women. For example, in a 2006 article "I would like to have a child! But when...?" ("Gyereket szülnék! De mikor...?") the caption beneath the title—essentially the first lines of the article—read: "The evil biological clock with its common sense is ticking... Definitely, it is persistently ticking and it cannot be tricked!" (V. Kulcsár, 2005a, issue 29, p. 48). Although the biological clock is framed as being rational, it is also cruel because women must have children within their fertile years if they wish for a family. Their time for motherhood is limited (p. 48). Once again, in this article, desiring children—in this case only women are discussed—is treated as inevitable and natural for women. Sometimes the term biological clock was directly used in the title of an article, pointing to its predominance: "When does

the biological clock begin to tick?” (“Mikor kezd ketyegni a biológiai óra?”) (Fejős, 2003b, issue 21, pp. 52-53) and “When should the child come?” (“Mikor jön a gyerek?” (Schäffer, 2002, issue 10, pp. 25-28). These articles ask *when* the biological clock begins to tick and when should women have children, not whether or not it will begin to tick.

The magazine acknowledged that women wait for the right time or spouse, such as in articles like “Family? First I’d like to still live a little!” (“Család? Előbb még élni szeretnék kicsit!”), but it emphasized that women will eventually have children and start a family. Much energy was devoted by the magazine to exploring when the right time is, and encouraging women not to wait too long (Orvecz et al., 2008, issue 17, pp. 64-65).

Interviewees, particularly single or childless women, were often pressed on this issue, and asked about their biological clock. For example, in an interview with American singer and actor Jennifer Lopez, reporter Návai Anikó (2000) asks her about her plans for a family, and how marriage will fit into her busy schedule. Lopez, unmarried at the time, says she would like to be married sometime in the future, with children, but that her schedule is too busy for the moment. The interviewer presses her and pointedly asks, “But how long can you live like this? After all, you are thirty years of age. The biological clock is ticking . . .” to which Lopez responds “Let it tick! Right now my life is about something else” (issue 32, pp. 12-14). American actor Sandra Bullock is similarly grilled in a 2005 interview.¹⁴⁰

With this sampling of articles I have demonstrated the intensity and repetition with which the biological clock was underscored by *Nők Lapja* in the post-communist period. This theme remained a constant and was discussed consistently. This discursive theme

¹⁴⁰ The same interviewer asks about marriage to which Bullock replies, “you also want to ask about marriage?” (Návai, issue 15, p. 12). Undeterred by her frustration, Návai replies, “well . . . yes. Until now has it not worked out or did you not want it?” (p. 12). She is so adamant about talking about children and marriage that she presses a very reluctant interviewee on the subject.

strongly supports the pro-natal sentiments bandied about in politics in the post-communist period, particularly during the first democratic elections. Women continue to be told by politicians that their rightful, natural place is in the home, tending to their husbands and offspring, and the magazine they sit down to read reminds them of this same inclination. Although *Nõk Lapja* has supported women's work outside the home (discussed in the next chapter), by harping on the significance of a biological clock, *Nõk Lapja* also plays a role in nation-building projects, supporting claims of all women desiring children and also suggesting that men and women are biologically different when it comes to wanting to have children, negating any influence of society upon feelings toward reproduction.

Women without Children: What Is and What Is Not Sayable

Although the disproportionately few articles concerning women without children was disappointing, a smaller number of articles allowed me to delve more deeply into exploring and examining the discourses of these articles. Rose (2012) cites Fran Tonkiss who argues what matters is “the richness of textual detail, rather than the number of texts analyzed” (p. 143). After translating the texts, I noted that the articles concerning childlessness can be grouped into themes that overlap and intermingle making it difficult to pull apart individual threads. However, I have done my best to examine certain threads separately and I argue that what is sayable about childlessness in *Nõk Lapja*—the discourse of childlessness—is limited to the following themes, mentioned above, that complement and support the exclusion of childlessness and its treatment as a peculiarity: i) disbelieving and negating women's decisions not to have children; ii) demanding to hear and iii) then

pathologizing women's reasons for not having children; iv) alleged characteristics of childless women; v) the supposed divide between childless women and mothers.

Disbelief

Although it is my argument that women (and some men) who do not have or do not want children were provided some limited space in the magazine, this is not to say that the decision to remain childless was not undermined or second guessed when reported by the magazine. Indeed, it is not uncommon, in Hungary or in North America (see Gillespie, 2000, for North American examples) for the decision not to have children to be met with disbelief or disregard. For example, in the 1998 article, “Why aren’t we having children?” (“Miért (nem) szülünk?”) (Mörk et al., issue 24, pp. 5-8), two women without children were included in the story. The first woman explains that external reasons have led to her choosing to be childless: the economy, the state of the world and the inability to find a good mate. The second woman interviewed is often asked if she wants children—which she does not—and she wants to respond angrily in the negative, but instead relies on socially acceptable excuses: work is overwhelming, she and her partner are moving, etc. She explains that she also does not want children because she is fearful of the pregnancy itself, plus the tiredness and isolation that she believes accompanies motherhood. Despite listing these varied reasons, according to the author of the article the interviewee seems too long for a baby when she holds one in her arms, a speculation the interviewer notes *twice*, despite the woman’s vocal and vehement refusal to have children. The interviewer hears her say she does not want children but reads into the woman’s body language while she is holding a child, disbelieving the woman’s choice and instead speculating that she actually desires a baby (Mörk et. al., 1998, issue 24, pp. 5-8).

This disbelief that a woman would choose not to have children mirrors the experiences which women without children describe. In the real life stories of childless women printed in the magazine, the women often report that they are informed by those around them that they will eventually change their minds. For example, in the aforementioned article “Happiness, without child(ren)?,” the author notes that Márta, a 37 year old woman without children, is “embittered” (Koronczay, 2001, issue 45, p. 20) when she talks about wanting to wear a sweatshirt decorated with an image of a baby with a red “X” through it, to ward off questions she routinely receives concerning her decision not to have children. People dismiss her decision not to have children and tell her the American singer Madonna had her second child at 42, so she still has time to change her mind. She laments that Hungarian society promotes a culture of singletons and individual happiness but ultimately does not accept someone who chooses not to have children (p. 21). Childlessness, it is explained, is considered defective in Hungary. Likewise, another woman interviewed, Melinda, shares her story and explains that while she was in university no one pressured her to have children, but once she graduated, the pressure from family, especially her mother, grew (Koronczay, 2001, issue 45, pp. 22-23).

In the lives of all of the women interviewed, people around them—even the interviewers from *Nők Lapja*—fail to believe that these women do not wish to have children. Instead, the women are informed that they will change their minds. Further, their actions are (mis)interpreted to suggest desire for a child. This disbelief serves a purpose: negating and disbelieving women’s accounts of choosing not to have children “preserves notions of motherhood as natural, inevitably desirable and central to understandings of femininity” (Gillespie, 2000, p. 229), further compounded by the constant use of the term biological clock.

Questioning Childlessness

As illustrated earlier, the term biological clock is common in *Nők Lapja* and its discussions of motherhood. According to Rose (2012), coding articles in discourse analysis requires an examination of how discourse works to persuade “effects of truth” which can be done so by claims to the truth or naturalness (p. 154). Complementing explicit discourses of biological clocks, disbelieving articles about childlessness in *Nők Lapja* do much to suggest motherhood is the right, natural decision. As a result, women without children are implicitly encouraged to have children, or at least to re-think their decision, a pattern already demonstrated in the aforementioned letters written to V. Kulcsár, in which she cautions women not to wait too long to have children, lest they change their mind but are no longer fertile. The happiness of women without children is also extensively questioned, with the implication that women should rethink their childlessness.

For example, in the 1992 article mentioned above, “Without children, happily-unhappily,” the first line reads: “What does a woman want from a man: happiness or children? Naturally, both” (Vadas, 1992, issue 31, p. 10). The article questions who is happy: women with families or women without children? The author asks: “Is there any greater happiness than motherhood? (p. 10). Although she begins the article othering women who do not want children as unnatural, she also points to societal pressures women face to have a family, contextualizing the perceived naturalness of childbearing within the broader society. The author explains that Hungarian women have been and are still raised with two traditional goals: marriage and family. She argues that life is not much easier for contemporary women without children than it was during the communist period—confirming my point that women were pressured to conform to traditional gender roles under communism as well. Although she explains that Hungarian women are more

liberated now concerning reproductive policies, she contends that there is still social stigma against the childless and they often find themselves discriminated against in the workplace, where they are expected to work longer hours than coworkers who are parents. This is arguably one of the most childless-centred articles of the entire period under examination because it interviews only Hungarians without children and does not redirect the focus toward parenting, as other articles do. However, the use of the word “natural” when discussing parenthood suggests to the reader that these childless interviewees are anomalies. In a 1994 article entitled, “I’d like to have a child, but if I cannot?” (“Gyereket szeretnék, és ha nem lehet?”), the first line of the story informs the reader that it is only “natural,” in every couple’s life, to have children (V.K., 1994, issue 27, p. 37). The article not only suggests that having children is natural but that having children is something everyone should be happy about. In the article, “Happiness, without child(ren)?,” the happiness of women without children is also questioned. To discuss this happiness, the author references biological programming. Instead of relying explicitly on naturalness, she references completeness and wholeness. In the introduction, she explains: “The question is, can their [childless women’s] lives be complete without them [children]?” (p. 20). Again, this article suggests that women without children are marginalized and their happiness and wholeness as women are doubted.

In the 1992 article, “Without children. Happily—unhappily,” the completeness a child supposedly brings to a family is reiterated. A childless couple is put on the spot, asked to confirm for the readership whether or not their life is missing something because they have no children. Specifically, author Vadas interviews a Hungarian couple who have found great success with their careers in the entertainment industry—Márta Zárny and János Vámosi—and after listing their many accomplishments, asks them: “only a child, the

so-called family happiness has been missing from your lives. Is this something you wanted or was it fate?” (issue 31, p. 11). In the same article, Vadas muses: “is there any greater happiness than motherhood?” (p. 10). She ponders who in life is happy, the woman who is proud of her husband and children or the childless-by-choice couple who live together in harmony (p. 10).

Just as having and wanting children is presented as natural and as providing a woman or family completeness, not having children is presented to readers as unnatural, an oddity. In a small caption beside a photo of American actor Sarah Jessica Parker (as her popular television and film character Carrie from *Sex and the City*), the plot for the film is briefly described and Carrie’s childlessness is confirmed. The caption, written by an unnamed writer, reads, “Carrie doesn’t opt for a baby and motherhood? Peculiar!” (Anonymous, 2009, issue 38, p. 12). The author continues that the large flower brooch Carrie is photographed wearing symbolizes her fertility, intimating that it is strange that a woman who *can* have children chooses not to. This repeated emphasis on naturalness illustrates Gal’s point that gender and reproduction are discussed in the post-communist period as natural rather than socially constructed categories (1994, p. 257).

De-naturalizing childlessness makes it a less desirable choice for women. Probyn (1997) argues new-traditionalism does just this: positioning motherhood, specifically stay-at-home mothering, as a natural and normal choice, and when something is the “natural” choice, it becomes no choice at all. By naturalizing the home, women have no choice but to accept re-domesticized roles lest they be deemed unnatural—further complicated by the situation in Hungary, where women are additionally accused of doing harm to the nation and allying with communism with their unnatural emancipation and failure to maintain the family life. Domesticity is framed as a choice for women but because it is presented as a

natural choice, it is not, in truth, a choice at all (Probyn, 1997, p. 130). By representing childlessness as odd and motherhood as natural, the magazine negates the choice women have in terms of their reproductive decisions. Gillespie, citing Chris Weedon (2000) argues that “the maintenance of ideology requires the discrediting and marginalising of experience which seeks to redefine it” (p. 229).

Pathologizing Childlessness

Complementing discourses of childless women as unnatural or peculiar (or unhappy or incomplete), women who choose not to have children are often depicted as defective; specifically, it is often suggested they are suffering from some kind of trauma that has impeded their ability to make the right decision and have children. Within the pages of *Nõk Lapja*, women without children are expected to explain their choice to the magazine and these reasons are listed, and often evaluated, by the magazine’s authors and experts. In the example of childlessness in the “World news” section, cited earlier, three American celebrities (Katharine Hepburn, Diane Sawyer, and Liza Minelli) who do not have their own biological children are featured and in each case, their reasons for not having children are highlighted, suggesting the childless must have a (suitable) reason for their decision or childlessness, which each of them explain. In each short blurb about the celebrity in question, her reasons for not wanting children dominate the story. In fact, other than the reasons and circumstances that brought about their childlessness, nothing else is said about these women or their lives (Anonymous, issue 42, p. 13). Although this example simply foregrounds the reasons, many other articles and stories in *Nõk Lapja* actually evaluate them and suggest that the reasons for childlessness can be remedied or solved.

For example, in the article “Happiness, without child(ren?),” after the stories of women without children are shared—which I discuss in more detail below—Dr. Erzsébet Tusor, a holistic doctor, is interviewed. She questions women’s reasons for not wanting children, and suggests some malady must have occurred in their past, such as a frightening event, which has impacted their decision to be childless. Tusor further hypothesizes that sometimes therapy is enough to understand this “psychological barrier” as she calls it (Koronczay, 2001, issue 45, p. 6). She references fear as one barrier, suggesting that women who do not want children have formed this decision simply because they are afraid. It is implied that therapy will help women without children to move past the fear holding them back from choosing motherhood. Childlessness thus becomes treated as an illness that needs to be cured so that women can choose motherhood and thus fall back into normalcy. Despite these implications, Dr. Tusor does qualify this advice with the suggestion that motherhood is not the path for all women, because a higher power has deemed another life’s purpose for them, such as Mother Theresa, who although she was childless, did good things for the world (p. 22). However, even with this example, Mother Theresa acted in a maternal role.

V. Kulcsár’s line of thinking in 2009, when she addresses the concerns of a childless woman’s letter to her entitled “Am I a waste?,” was similar. She surmised that there must be some *reason* a woman has chosen not to have children and the implication is that this reason is incorrect and could be solved so the woman can change her mind. V. Kulcsár implies that the decision not to have children is a result of some flawed decision making process, but then reassures the childless that there is more than one possible life path (2009b, issue 26, pp. 24-26). However, I contend that the message of “Happiness, without child(ren?)” and of V. Kulcsár’s letters to her readers, is that choosing not to have

children is not a normal course of action for women. This peculiarity makes it of interest for the magazine to study. For this reason, discussions of naturalness and normalcy are interwoven into concerns for the “reasons” women have for not wanting children. In *Nők Lapja*, choosing to be childless is pathologized and even turned into a mental health issue—caused by “psychological barriers” that therapy can remedy.¹⁴¹ Pearl A. Dykstra (2007) affirms that demanding a rationale for childlessness serves to reinforce the normalcy of parenthood (p. 1277).

Conversely, the magazine portrays motherhood as an unproblematic decision and actively works to dispel any negative associations with this choice. For example, in 2006, an article entitled “Why do we bear life?” (“Miért szülünk?”) asks if having children is a natural desire or a rational decision (issue 50, p. 54). The article talks about the gift of children to further the family history and name. The author claims some people think having children is a selfish act—that people do it so there will always be someone to love them—but dispels this notion by arguing that the act of parenting is *selfless* and requires a mother to give of her body, feelings, time and knowledge. The author echoes the pathologizing of childlessness by commenting: “for those who have a shocking experience with breach of trust or intimacy, choosing to have children might be particularly difficult” (p. 55). Once again, choosing childlessness is treated as an oddity while choosing motherhood is framed as normal and exalted as a selfless act.

The focus on *why* a woman might not want children was not exclusive to *Nők Lapja*. Although I did not study any other magazines, other than in passing, a friend in

¹⁴¹ Infertility was also suggested to be a mental health concern by *Nők Lapja*. In 2012, an article entitled “Let your desire, not your mind lead you” (“Ne a tudat, a vágy vezessen!”) claimed that women who are experiencing infertility should undergo therapy to help calm the fears that might be keeping their bodies from conceiving and while this may not guarantee a baby, the psychological aspect must not be ignored (Rist, issue 14, p. 52).

Hungary sent me a 2009 issue of the Hungarian version of the magazine *Wellness*. It features an article on “taboos,” in Hungary, entitled “Modern taboos” (Bakos, issue 9, p. 96). One taboo unpacked is childlessness: “I would not like to have children” (p. 96). The author, Zsuzsi Bakos, provides advice and speculates about potential reasons why a woman would not wish to have children: she still feels like a child, she has not met the “right” man, or she is afraid she cannot give the child the attention it deserves (p. 96). Bakos counsels these women so that they can openly discuss these concerns and perhaps “help” them resolve them (p. 96). In this text, the reasons for childlessness are once again foregrounded and positioned as something that can be solved. Interestingly, this publication also pinpoints supposedly common characteristics of childless women. In this case, women who choose not to have children are accused of being immature and child-like themselves.

The “Character” of Childless Women

Complementing discourses concerning the naturalness and normalcy of childbearing and the peculiarity of childlessness is an interest in the character of women without children. Women without children are assumed to be somehow very different from women with children, and this difference is implied as something which can be read from the body. For example, in the article “Happiness, without child(ren)?” the author, Koronczay, describes an interviewee, Ágnes, who admits she will not have children, unless she finds the right husband. Koronczay is surprised by this “kind looking” 29-year-old’s determined tone and explains that she “would not have made [her] think for a minute that she is not planning to have children” (p. 23). Koronczay implies that women who do not want children could have certain characteristics that would distinguish them from women who want children. Further, she explains that for women a child represents an

achievement. In contrast, childless women are deemed “selfish,” “cold,” “career oriented” and “frigid” (Koronczay, 2001, issue 45, p. 21).

The negative characterization of childless women—particularly the term “selfish” deserves further discussion, for it is incredibly common in the literature concerning childlessness and women. According to Badinter’s (2011) study of European motherhood, voluntarily childless women across the continent are typically dismissed as irresponsible as well. In literature from North America, “women who choose not to have children are often regarded as selfish, maladjusted, unhappy, hedonistic, irresponsible, immature, abnormal, and unnatural” (Vissing 2002, 23). I contend that such a negative characterization of women without children is connected to nationalism and the supposed responsibilities to the nation select women have.

In Hungary, the choice to be childless is in direct opposition with the dominant discourse of motherhood, which has been promoted so as to meet the alleged social and economic needs of the nation. I contend that procreative choices not in line with these needs are thus characterized as deviant and selfish. This has been demonstrated in the previous two chapters, as researchers studying women’s social roles have noted that women who were active in the workforce during communism, had abortions or in any way acted in opposition to the dominant discourse of motherhood are labelled selfish (Goven, 1993, p. 227; Goven, 1993, p. 234; Gal, 1994, p. 278; Verdery, 1994, p. 250). This connection between attaching various labels to women and their desired contribution to the nation is made all the more clear by the fact that Roma women with large families are not at all characterized positively—their procreation does not fall within the dominant discourse of motherhood as this discourt only applies to the “right” Hungarian women. The aforementioned article, “Happiness, without child(ren)?” includes feedback from readers,

one of whom corroborates the idea of certain characteristics accompanying women without children, explaining “she’s not the ‘mother type’ or her career is more important to her” (p. 22) suggesting there are different qualities mothers and non-mothers embody. Some childless women, however, use these same forums to challenge such ideas, as is the case of an anonymous reader, who argues “someone either wants children or doesn’t. I am 30 years of age, I don’t have children, and I do not want any” (Koronczay, 2001, issue 45, p. 24). Another woman interviewed, Anna, admits she does not like to speak about her childlessness because no one understands and in response she is labelled materialistic (Koronczay, 2001, p. 21).¹⁴²

Another letter writer, a woman with children, complains about her sister-in-law, whom she describes as vicious and vile (2012, issue 14, p. 53). She makes a point of mentioning that this woman has no children, and speculates that it is the reason she behaves so poorly and why she is so cruel to her niece (p. 53). V. Kulcsár agrees with this assessment and tells the readers that women without children often behave in a more empathetic way with other women who have not given birth. She advises the reader to not pass judgment on the childless woman but to feel sorry for her instead.

Ultimately, given the content of the aforementioned articles, I argue that although childlessness is not excluded entirely, few articles discussed it. Further, what is “sayable” about childlessness is very limited: voluntary childlessness is treated as a peculiarity, and although I argue that *Nők Lapja*, and its readers, offer some resistance to dominant conceptions of women as mothers, the writers were hesitant to offer support to childlessness. Further, women who claimed not to want children were disbelieved and their

¹⁴² Her reasons for remaining childless include her fear that she would lose her salon clients and she enjoys her financial independence and her work.

decisions negated. Women without children were expected to provide reasons for their childlessness, which were then pathologized, further underscoring the peculiarity of their reproductive decisions.

The “Divide” Between Childless Women and Mothers

Articles and letters in the magazine suggest that post-communist Hungarian society is not very receptive to childlessness. Women without children are presented, among other classifications, as deviant, peculiar, selfish and ultimately pitiable. Women with children, however, are none of these things and thus, because of the chasm of difference that is supposed to exist between these women, women with children and women without children are, according to *Nők Lapja*, locked in a bitter battle. In 2010 V. Kulcsár wrote an article to remedy this divide, entitled “The childless vs. [those] with children” (“Gyerektelenek vs. gyerekesek”) and subtitled “An irregular war between the two camps” (“Nem törvényszerű háború a két tábor között”) (issue 5, pp. 16-19). The accompanying image of two identical-looking women (likely the same woman photographed and digitally altered) arm wrestling pits the women against each other. The childless woman has an empty background behind her, a strip of her midriff is showing. The mother has two boys, a television and a plant behind her, thus suggesting that her life is fuller because of her family, whereas the childless woman’s life is represented by only emptiness. Although the article simply interviewed childless women and women with children, a few weeks later, a follow-up article was published and V. Kulcsár explained that the effort to moderate between the two camps seems to have been a success because the letter writers were no longer as “emotionally fuelled” (p. 28).

Conclusion

In Chapters One and Two, I demonstrated that after more than a century of policies aimed at controlling Hungarian women's reproductive decisions, the dominant discourse of motherhood has intensified in the post-communist period. Mothers, particularly stay-at-home mothers are portrayed as integral to the success of the nation. Women's rejection of this duty is said to contribute to its demise. Given this understanding, when I began studying *Nők Lapja* I questioned how the magazine would present women with regard to motherhood or non-motherhood. I have argued that *Nők Lapja* both supports and challenges dominant discourses.

Although *Nők Lapja* may not demand outright that women reproduce to repopulate the country, or accuse women without children of impacting Hungary's success as a nation negatively, the magazine does support claims of the naturalness of women's childbearing and motherhood. The magazine also implies *whose* motherhood is praised and welcomed. It is my argument that themes in the magazine concerning women's biological clocks and the peculiarity of childlessness shape and reflect traditional ideas concerning women's appropriate reproductive roles in Hungarian society. Specifically, the discourse of childlessness outlined in this chapter is wrapped up in a nation-building project of normalizing and naturalizing having children. Further, desirable women who fail to reproduce are labelled irresponsible and selfish.

Ultimately, when women without children are discussed by the magazine's writers, there are a select few themes employed, certain frameworks for what is "sayable" concerning the decision not to have children: the choices of childless women are discussed either as a mental health issue or brought about by trauma, their decisions are disbelieved

or second-guessed and their happiness and wholeness questioned and scrutinized.

Combined with articles that repeatedly refer to women's biological clocks and desires, childlessness is framed as unnatural and going against the instinct of mothering.

By naturalizing motherhood, and representing childlessness as devious, *Nők Lapja* in many ways does the same work as interwar and post-communist populists: encouraging the “right” women to have children. In Chapter One, I pointed out how Kunó Klebelsberg, Minister of Education in Hungary during the late 1920s and 1930s, paid particular attention to the reproductive choices of rural women: “mothers who have given birth to at least three children, he contended, deserve our greatest respect” (Bodó, 2001, p. 188). In many ways, the magazine has supported this sentiment by offering the most encouragement and attention to mothers, providing them more respect in the magazine than the childless women who are excluded and criticized.

Further, by speaking almost exclusively to straight women of Hungarian ethnicity, and excluding other groups from its content and implied readership, the magazine supports conceptions of the “imagined community” as defined by Anderson. The very same groups that are excluded from membership in the Hungarian nation, in parliament debate, popular discourses and even policy are excluded from the magazine. As Gill Branston and Roy Stafford (2006) remind us, themes that are repeated by media make them seem more natural, because they become familiar, thus the role of media should not be discounted as a powerful supplement to public policy.

However, it has also been my argument that at times, the magazine marked a site of resistance, given that childless women could, at times, make their voices heard, using the magazine—and the accompanying website—as a forum. Gillespie cites Susan Bordo who “cautions against oversimplifying the notion that the discursive domain represents a

straightforward site for liberation from the effects of normalisation and control. Bordo argues that to resist normalising discourses can involve considerable personal risk: for example, those associated with feminine appearance contained within advertisements” (p. 231). In other words, there can be negative ramifications for those who do not wish to or who are unable to conform to the societal ideal. Thus, although my examples were ultimately few in number, I did demonstrate instances of women without children using the magazine to challenge ideas of women naturally desiring children, or needing a family to feel happy and fulfilled, and these cases marked, for lack of a better word, great bravery, given the pro-natal, nationalist environment in the country. Importantly, staff writers even chimed in occasionally, offered minute support through the repeated suggestion that there is more than one life path for women.

CHAPTER FOUR

Constructions of Motherhood and Nationalism in *Nők Lapja*

Introduction

Conducting research for the previous chapter, I was struck by the prominence of significant themes in *Nők Lapja*. Although I had not originally intended to address them, they were obviously hot-button issues for the magazine. I decided to include a brief discussion of these issues here, connecting them to previous chapters, and also pointing to further avenues of research. Specifically, in Chapters One and Two I demonstrated how Hungarian women have been pulled into nation-building projects, and in Chapter Three I connected these projects to representations of motherhood and childlessness in *Nők Lapja*. In *Nők Lapja* women without children—as well as Roma Hungarians, same-sex couples and other non-dominant groups—have been marginalized. Instead, motherhood has been presented as the natural, normal choice for women who are supposedly propelled by their biological clocks. In this chapter, I discuss further some of the ways in which the magazine prioritizes and normalizes motherhood, and emphasizes *whose* motherhood is valued, by unpacking the themes of the “singleton,” solutions for working mothers, and the magazine’s intense focus on nationalism and demography to further my argument.

Although I argue that the magazine has served to uphold, reflect and shape dominant discourses concerning who is expected to mother in contemporary Hungarian society, and that motherhood and womanhood are inextricably linked, the magazine is also a site of resistance. While political leaders have tried valiantly to coax women back into

the home, *Nők Lapja* has resisted such goals and instead offers Hungarian women an abundance of articles on how to balance work and family life—in direct opposition to the long-standing back-to-the-hearth political agenda for women. I recognize that even within this example, the magazine largely frames parenthood as a woman’s responsibility and I argue that this is truly problematic. However, although infrequently, the magazine also draws attention to the disproportionately large responsibility women have in Hungarian households, with some articles even calling explicitly for men to assume more duties in the domestic sphere. In what follows, I continue to highlight the struggle to define what it means to be a woman in Hungary, paying particular attention to—and fleshing out more clearly—the role of *Nők Lapja*, and how it represents motherhood and draws women into nation-building projects.

Singletons—or Spinsters?

Although childlessness was largely marginalized by the magazine, single women were increasingly included. Discussions of being single initially caught my eye because many of the single women depicted were childless, but I quickly realized that being a singleton was not synonymous with childlessness and that, instead, it was routinely depicted by the magazine as a temporary state on the road to motherhood. Thus, I decided the singleton would not be a focus of my study, but I found that the overwhelming number of articles and weekly and monthly features on singletons spoke to the relevance of the theme. For the purposes of this chapter, I did not study all articles representing this theme, as I did for women without children, but I do highlight what is “sayable” about the singleton. Indeed, the ways in which singletons (“szingli” in Hungarian) are represented

supports my claims from the previous chapter regarding the naturalization of motherhood, as well as help me unpack some conceptions of what it means to be a woman in Hungary.

The Singleton As Helpless

Predominantly, the singleton portrayed in *Nők Lapja* is a woman in her thirties who is unmarried and lives alone (or with parents and roommates). She is typically without children (although some divorced or widowed mothers were newly categorized as singletons as well), always heterosexual, and in search of a husband. In later issues of the magazine, articles concerning singletons often referenced the film *Bridget Jones*—the 2001 blockbuster based on a novel about a single woman desperately seeking a husband. However, in 1994, before the film was released, readers were introduced to *Pamcsi*, a Hungarian comic strip featuring a young, single woman by the same name. Pamcsi has hard luck, consistently makes bad decisions and is generally depicted as rather foolish. For example, once she bought a live chicken at the market but felt sorry for it and could not kill it. She is depicted laying in bed, with the chicken keeping her awake as she glares at it. The day she pays to get her hair done at the hairdresser, it rains. She buys a washing machine but cannot learn how to use it, so she uses it as a stand to hold her basin for hand-washing laundry. She lives alone, but reads frightening novels and then she is unable to sleep. Overall, her single life is depicted as frustrating and Pamcsi clearly cannot handle daily responsibilities—even simple ones like learning to operate a washing machine—implying that she needs a man to rescue her.

Pamcsi is also preoccupied with her attractiveness. She thinks every man is interested in her. When a fish touches her while swimming, she slaps a nearby man, thinking it was him. When a man points to her grocery bags, she slaps him too, thinking he

was leering at her. Despite rejecting these mistaken advances, she is ultimately in search of a mate. She even kisses a frog to find a prince, but to her disappointment, the frog remains a frog. Overall, Pamcsi's life is depicted as frustrating and hopeless. It is my contention that the comic strip suggests that a mate would make her happier and her life better.

Pamcsi disappeared from the magazine by 1995, but the theme of the singleton did not. The magazine was fascinated by singletons—be they Western stars, Hungarian women, or characters in fictional tales.

The idea underscored by Pamcsi, that single women require rescue was common to the articles concerning single women. Tips were frequently provided to the singleton. In 1989 the magazine translated an article from the American publication *Playgirl* and relayed the advice to Hungarian single women. The advice included leaving a light on in the house when it is unoccupied, asking neighbors to call the police in the event of unusual activity, not walking home in secluded areas, etc. (Mezei, 1989, issue 41, pp. 22-23). Although this is certainly prudent advice for women's safety, the article suggests single women are at increased risk and so they must behave differently than women with partners, or single men, although leaving a light on when one is not home is arguably practical advice for any person, coupled or not.

Challenging Negative Conceptions of Singlehood

The magazine wavered between negatively characterizing perpetual singletons and supporting them. In an article entitled "Old girl unmarried spinster" ("Öreglány aggszűz hajadon"), the author, Erzsébet Schäffer, names a few famous unmarried women (including fictional characters like Mary Poppins) and asks: "why is life without (romantic) love so painful?" (1995a, issue 6, p. 8). She cites stories that mostly men have written about the

unmarried woman and although she admits there are exceptions (like the happy Aunt), she argues that “spinsterhood,” as she calls it, is not considered a happy life path by these writers, or by society in general. She interviews other Hungarians and asks them what spinsters are like. The respondents describe the spinster as a woman with piercing eyes, dark clothes, no social life (she watches television all day and night), but has time for handicrafts (p. 9). Although some people interviewed claim to love unmarried women and marvel at the things they can accomplish, the overall portrait painted is of a sad, lonely and pitiful woman.

Despite this negative characterization, singletons found more acceptance on the pages of *Nők Lapja* than women without children. In a 1996 article, entitled “Alone but not lonely,” (“Egyedül de nem magányosan,” issue 37, pp. 28-29), author Schäffer changed her tone and defended the single women, pointing out that men’s singlehood is less scrutinized than women’s, demonstrated by the fact that “bachelor” is not a negative term but women who are uncoupled are pitied. She argues that there are many women (as well as men) who may be alone but who are not lonely or unhappy being single. In another article, entitled “An old maid’s life can also be beautiful” (“A vénlány élete is lehet gyönyörű”, 1995b, p. 9), Schäffer further refutes the image of the sad, lonely, unmarried woman by interviewing Hungarian stage actress Itala Békés about her roles as an unmarried, older woman. Békés admits that the unmarried woman is labeled a perpetual virgin, a man hater and ultimately unhappy but she argues this is untrue as people in large families can feel lonely while the alone can feel quite content and happy.

This is just a sampling of the articles that sought to understand, define and redefine conceptions of the single woman in Hungary. I point these out to support my argument that, although *Nők Lapja* often supported dominant constructions of womanhood in

Hungary, the magazine also acted as a site of resistance—in this case challenging conceptions of single women as unhappy and lonely. However, despite these small tokens of acceptance, and this effort to redefine marriage and family as not necessarily integral to Hungarian womanhood, representations of the singleton were more commonly understood as a *temporary* condition because all women supposedly want to find a male partner and have children.

Singlehood, a Temporary Condition

To demonstrate the consistency with which the temporariness of singlehood was discussed, I introduce the example of the “Singleton Salon,” (“Szingli Szalon”). This is a special section of the magazine carved out for singletons—in addition to other articles that were regularly published or made a weekly feature. The Singleton Salon was a fictional series devoted to singletons. It chronicled the life of a fictional singleton (modeled very much after “Bridget Jones,” which was originally a fictional column in *The Independent*). The Singleton Salon, which first appeared in 2002 in issue #50, typically gave advice to real single women. The series was intended to speak to the average singleton and single readers were always invited to write in and share their own experiences—some of which shaped future stories or the advice given. In 2003, issue 16 even mentioned the creation of a Singles Club (“Szingli Klub”), for men and women, organized by the magazine, with contact information about meeting other singles.

In the fictional series, the female protagonist, Petra, chronicles her trials and tribulations as a singleton, from navigating the dating world to spending the Christmas holidays uncoupled. She spends much of her time looking for the right man and she adamantly does not want to be single—it distresses her greatly. In fact, finding a serious

boyfriend—ideally husband—is her primary concern. In her New Year’s resolutions she lists finding a “decent” spouse as the first of her resolutions—above improving her career and work habits, and improving her own health through fitness (issue 1, p. 15). Finding a husband is more important to this particular singleton than personal growth. In a piece entitled, “I’m seeking a new job!” (“Új állást keresek!”), Petra is looking for a new job because she is tired of her responsibilities (issue 10, p. 45). Her career is not important to her—it is simply a means to an end. She focuses more energy on dating than she does on other aspects of her life, including her work.

The undesirability of singlehood is a recurring theme for the “Singleton Salon” series. In a story about celebrating the holidays alone, entitled “Solo holidays” (“Ünnepszólóban,” 2002a, issue 50, p. 49), it is made clear that being along is something few people choose voluntarily. Without a partner, the article explains, Christmas is not real. The authors assume all other singletons were similarly miserable about not having a partner during the holidays. The story concludes with tips for singletons to feel better about being alone. They are advised to not watch romantic movies, encouraged to turn on some music, text girlfriends, and then read an advice book (p. 49). In this series, we see the offering of tips for single women, which involve how to make a man happy. The majority of these tips pertain to the pursuit of finding and keeping a desirable boyfriend or husband, which is deemed preferable to dealing with the allegedly unhappy circumstance of being alone.

Singlehood as Problematic

As discussed, singlehood is largely depicted as a temporary condition for women who, hopefully with the right advice, can find a suitable partner and form a family. Indeed, although the magazine seeks to redefine being single as something not necessarily fatal,

other articles see singlehood as truly problematic. For example, in 2003, the magazine printed an article entitled, “Princesses half asleep” (“Királylányok félálomban,” issue 5, pp. 16-18)—subtitled “The singletons desire love also” (“A szinglik is szeretni vágnak”). The article’s first caption reads, “How old are you? Thirties?! And still no partner, no children? Then you too have some problems” (p. 16). We are introduced to Enikő, a Hungarian woman who is unmarried and childless. She is described as having expensive lingerie, leather purses and ten suits for her corporate job. She eats at fine restaurants, takes language lessons and relaxes in her two bedroom apartment. Indeed, she has nice, expensive possessions which are enviable in a depressed Hungarian economy. Still, the authors go to great lengths to explain that between her orange walls and attractive “snow white furniture” she usually cries at night, three times a week at least, especially if a movie she watched ended with a happy couple, or if she has received an invitation to a wedding (p. 16). To the outside world she is confident and successful, but the author wants to make it clear that she comes across as unsure, conflicted and frightened. The only reason she buys herself such nice things is because there is no one else to buy them for her. A partner and children are “painfully” missing from her life and these material goods are her consolation, the author surmises. Psychologist Annamária Csák is interviewed for the article and she argues that everyone desires security and that there are not a lot of advantages to being alone and most people wish for a partner, she argues (p. 17).

Singletons are Not Feminists

Interestingly, although singletons defied certain ideas of fulfillment through motherhood the magazine was careful not to associate the singleton with feminism. In a 2003 article entitled, “Orange purple/scarlet sunset waits for brown summer twilight”

(Narancsbíbor naplemente várja barna nyári alkonyt,” issue 5, pp. 18-19), in which one of the creators of the Singleton Salon is interviewed, like the character, Petra, author Edina Balogh is also waiting to find the right man. She explains that people misunderstand the singleton, and assume she is a spinster or feminist, but she emphasizes that the singleton is ardently looking for a partner. Thus Balogh actively works to redefine any connections of singletons to emancipation for women and reassures readers that the singleton prioritizes family life. Further, although she explains that her own life as a single woman has advantages over motherhood—she reads ten times as much as a mother of three, for example—she also reassures the reader that sooner, rather than later, she wants to be that woman with three children. She has a full life, but admits that on weekends she returns to her parents’ home to avoid her loneliness. She is not like other singletons, she explains, because she will not settle for an insincere man or an imperfect love because she is not as frightened of being alone as are these other women. Still, she is unhappy as a singleton although she admits that the word is better than being called a spinster. Thus Balogh, while challenging some assumptions about singletons, also supports key themes in contemporary politics, including the demonization of feminism for Hungarian society and the connection made between women reclaiming their proper role as mothers. Balogh is unhappy as a single woman and motherhood is the remedy. The current joys she has as a single woman cannot be matched by the joy of becoming a mother, echoing post-communist discourses that claim women will be happiest when they return to home and family, and abandon the unnatural roles that communism had forced upon them.

The focus on singletons revealed a lot about how women in Hungary are expected to behave according to the magazine. In the article above, once again Annamaria Csák is called on for her expertise as a psychologist. She expressly outlines for readers how a

single woman should behave. She considers what a singleton can do to change her situation but is disappointed with imported methods from American culture—such as bold women who approach a man, instead of waiting to be asked out on a date. She claims European culture is different and while she admires these women for their initiative, she argues that European men are often frightened of this behavior, and when they cannot assert their role within the relationship, they retreat. Csák's advice is for women to act accordingly, and wait to be courted. Indeed, Petra's advice for readers is also to wait until the man calls after a date (2003, issue 13, p. 49).

Once again, we see a rejection of a Western or an American (as opposed to some overly generalized and unverified pan-European) gender order which allegedly suggests that women act submissively toward male suitors. This suggestion supports post-communist claims of “real” Hungarian women allowing men to resume dominant positions within the gender order. Further, this advice works to ensure that Hungarian women are focused on biologically reproducing a cultural order, as Yuval-Davis has explained.

The discussion of singletons first caught my attention because many are depicted as childless in the magazine. Within this theme, I again saw both support and resistance to women's prescribed roles as wives and mothers. Further, what is sayable about the singleton complements what is sayable about women and their procreative and family desires in general. In some ways, the magazine challenged conceptions of single women as unhappy or lonely. However, the predominant representation of the singleton emphasizes that women have to find a husband and start a family. Singletons are thought to be always in search of a heteronormative pairing. They are miserable—and, in the case of Pamcsi—clumsy and useless, until they find someone who will marry them and rescue them from their misery. Singletons, while they can claim they are happy, as demonstrated by Balogh,

are not permitted to say that being single forever is desirable. Instead, like the fictional Petra and Pamcsi, the singleton must be unhappy with perpetual singlehood, no matter how happy she might be at present. Ultimately, she must desire marriage and motherhood as her life goals, and, like Petra, even sacrifice her career and well-being in the pursuit. These representations thus overlap with and support the discourse that naturalizes and normalizes women's desire to become mothers and be subordinate to men.

Work/Life Balance for Hungarian Mothers

Similarly, *Nők Lapja* also challenged—and supported—dominant conceptions of “good mothering”. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated the intensifying focus on the contribution of women as reproducers to the success of the nation. Indeed, as discussed, parenting is still primarily considered “women’s work” (Tóth, 2005) and Hungarian politicians, particularly in the current political climate, have gone to great lengths to encourage women to become stay-at-home mothers. Women’s employment—perceived as “emancipation”—has been deemed a communist threat to Hungarian society. Although employment rights are supposedly in place, in practice mothers find themselves discriminated against during the interview process with no legal recourse and little governmental support. The political climate is antagonistic to many working mothers and yet *Nők Lapja* has, since the beginning of my research period, consistently addressed the “work/life” balance for many working mothers, providing suggestions and advice, calling for change and ultimately contesting dominant discourses that seek to push women out of the workforce and back into stay-at-home mothering.

Women Pushed out of the Workforce

To paint a clearer picture, and to elaborate on this discussion from Chapter Two, in 1993, Einhorn cited Hungarian journalist Zsuzsa Béres, who believed that “sheer physical exhaustion and a deeply ingrained sense of guilt explains Hungarian women’s lack of resistance to ‘awesome challenges to their human rights, dignity and self respect’” (p. 46). Tired of simultaneously being labeled as unreliable employees and absent mothers and wives, women were hesitant to fight for the right to work (Einhorn, 1993, p. 51). Further, many women accepted motherhood as a fulfilling social role. The sentiment that children were the greatest joy increased from the 1980s to 1990s; by 1994 women were more likely to agree with such a statement than were men (Tóth, 1999, p. 141). Einhorn (1993) describes that in the early 1990s, women all over communist Europe eschewed the image of the overalls-clad woman driving a tractor, because they believed that this hard, physical labor had aged women prematurely and made them unattractive and unfeminine.

The transition period and post-communism in general has been immensely difficult for many women, yet little research has been done regarding the work-life balance in Hungary (Tóth, 2005, p. 362). Tóth succinctly summarizes: “at the organizational level there has been little attempt to promote work-life balance programmes and childcare is now assumed to be the main responsibility for women” (Tóth, 2005, p. 362). That many women accept the role of mother and worker without demanding assistance in balancing them is reportedly a holdover from communism and the environment it created in which women were expected to carry the double burden of childrearing and working (Tóth, 2005, p. 363). Indeed, “most Hungarian women perceived their double or triple work overload as imposed by the former communist regime and a consequence of the failure of their economic system, not as a product of male domination” (Panayotova and Brayfield, 1997, p. 650).

Despite this supposed cause, work-family balance is still perceived as a woman's problem—not a societal one (Bencsik and Juhász, 2010).

In 2005, in dual income families in Hungary, women spent only slightly less time working than their male partners (3-10 percent) but spent 200 percent more time caring for children and shouldering other domestic duties. Even where the woman is in a higher ranking management position, she still faces this imbalance and even in families where women are single earners, they still do the majority of domestic chores, 60-65 percent (Tóth, 2005, pp. 363, 367). According to Bencsik and Juhász (2010), there is *increasingly* less balance between work and family, thus many women are forced to choose between the two. In their interviews with approximately 256 Hungarian women on maternity leave between 2007 and 2008, 70 percent of the women thought having a baby posed a disadvantage to them in the labor market (Bencsik and Juhász, 2010, p. 77). Thus, women are receiving *less* institutional support yet facing *more* of a struggle to balance motherhood with employment while the discussion in politics of a woman's place in the home consistently ignores their desire—and economic need—to work. That *Nők Lapja* took up the task of discussing these issues marks what I would classify as an extraordinary resistance to dominant ideas regarding women's place in Hungarian society.

I was struck by the sheer volume of articles that addressed the work-family balance in *Nők Lapja*. Partly it speaks to why women in Hungary are having fewer children, but it also marks another point of resistance from women, some of whom have refused to shoulder the responsibility in the domestic sphere—using *Nők Lapja* as a forum for this discontent. By proposing solutions for the work-family balance, the magazine rejects ideas of mothers necessarily returning to the hearth, as has been encouraged in political debates. The discussion of working mothers would be an interesting project for further development,

as the dozens of articles I made note of or translated are just a few of the hundreds of articles that increasingly addressed this concern for women during my research period.

In 1989, the family or child debate was already on women's minds—and present in the magazine. For example, in “Work matters” (“Munka ügyek”), a concern addressed is “Family or career” (“Család vagy karrier?”) (Halami and Szilágyi, 1989, issue 17, pp. 22-23). The difficulty balancing both is outlined, although the section is brief. Throughout my entire research period, however, this was an issue that was increasingly foregrounded. A 1996 article, “When the woman is the boss” (“A nő, ha főnök”), included a section entitled “family and/or career” (“család és/vagy karrier,” Árvai et al., issue 6, pp. 8-11), pointing to the difficulty of balancing high powered employment positions, especially, with having a family. In 1998, an article entitled “Family or career?” (“Család vagy karrier?”, Árvai et al., issue 28, pp. 5-9), caught my eye because in the original Hungarian title, the word “or” is repeated *nine* times, signaling a difficult decision as well as two choices that are mutually exclusive. The original copy reads: “family or or or or or or or or or or career”—the “or” is emphasized hyperbolically, pointing to the inability for women to have both. In 2000, an article entitled “Women on a constrained path” (“Nők kényszerpályán,” Hulej and Rist, issue 8, pp. 28-31), subtitled “Work or family? Is part-time work the solution?” (“Munka vagy család? Megoldás-e a részmunkaidő?”), addressed the difficulties the Hungarian economy—which is structured around full-time work—poses for mothers. In 2005, an article entitled “Choose: child or job!” (“Válassz: gyerek vagy munkahely!” Fejős, issue 16, p. 88) once again framed the two choices as mutually exclusive in the Hungarian context. Moreover, the tone of the title, which uses the imperative, signals that the woman *must* make a choice because it is impossible to combine both. Elsewhere, Lilla Rist et al., in an article entitled “Has choosing to have children become a question of

money?” (Pénzkérdés lett a gyerekvállalás?, 2012, issue 29, pp. 20-23), explain that, in the developed world at least, childbirth rates are the highest where women can work and be mothers and that the two are not mutually exclusive. In Hungary, part-time work is rare, childcare is overcrowded and women are forced to choose between work and family. She argues that the workforce in Hungary must change to reduce the double burden on women.

Some articles explicitly challenged the idea of women having to choose, literally asking “Why should we choose?” (“Miért kellene választani?” Árvai, et al., 1998, issue 28, p. 6). In 2007, in an article entitled “We work for the women, not against the employers” (A nőkért dolgozunk, nem a munkaadó ellen,” issue 30, pp. 26-27), Balázs Kövér interviewed women from Federation for the Advancement of Hungarian Women’s Careers (*A Magyar Női Karrierfejlesztési Szövetség*). Using the magazine as a public forum, the interviewees argued that it is crucial to get help in the household, especially from their partners, and that workplaces must adapt as well. Although they claimed they were not talking about feminism, they were working to help build women’s careers. They further argued that women should not need to choose between a career and family. In 2008 an article entitled, “Must you decide between career and motherhood” (“Kell-e választani karrier és anyaság között?” Fejős, issue 16, pp. 15-17) developed this discussion further. It disputed the inevitability of choosing between a career and motherhood, shedding light on some of the issues women face, and questioning this dichotomy in the process.

In 2003, V. Kulcsár wrote an article entitled “Women at the top of their careers, with children” (“Nők a csúcson—családdal,” issue 36, pp. 16-20) and explicitly challenged not only the idea that women should choose motherhood over their career but also the assumption that they cannot manage both. Women interviewed included a minister in parliament, a model and a lawyer. This article took on politically charged debates

concerning the proper roles of Hungarian women. Arguably the women interviewed were those with the means to make motherhood and work more compatible, by paying for childcare. In 2004, a more vehement call to action was printed. In the article “Flexibility will be better” (“Jobb lesz rugalmasan,” Hulek and Szalóczy, issue 7, p. 16), the authors reported that women in middle management work an average of 15 hours per day—including childcare. They argued that there needs to be a push to create more opportunities for Hungarian women to work part time, from home, or have the opportunity for flex time, which, although prevalent in Western Europe, is not common in Hungary (p. 16). They asked employers to make work more compatible with motherhood. These articles astutely point out concerns raised in scholarly texts: implementing policies and societal changes which help reconcile family and work is more constructive for the entire society than blaming women who fail to reproduce enough children (Mishtal, 2012).

The aforementioned article, “I would have children if . . .” (Koronczay, issue 44, pp. 24-26) echoes the contestation of women’s prescribed roles, insisting that the responsibility for maintaining a household is unequally shared by men and women. In the article, a Hungarian doctor and psychologist, Dr. Mária Kopp, is interviewed and she makes the bold claim that things must change in Hungary, especially in regard to childcare. She argues that motherhood and employment should not be an either-or situation (p. 25). Kopp argues that Hungarian women should be free to pursue their careers and have the support in place to have children as well, no matter how many they desire (p. 25). These articles, certainly repetitive in many of their themes and concerns, together present a powerful challenge to ideas about the naturalness of women’s role as stay-at-home mothers. They also demonstrate that the magazine was not a mouthpiece only for dominant discourses.

In other cases, gender roles and the actions of men were a target of criticism by *Nők Lapja*. For example, the article, “Would more children be born if men helped with the housework?” (“Több gyerek születne, ha a házimunkában segítenének a férfiak?” 2011, issue 24, pp. 8-9) illuminates the unequal burden on women to do housework, maintain the home and care for children. Like Kopp, the author, Rist, challenges this unequal distribution of labor and points to a study which suggests that there is more desire for women to have children in partnerships where men contribute to the housework.¹⁴³ *Nők Lapja* thus criticizes the unequal distribution of domestic chores in the private sphere. Articles like “Why is the husband not at home?” (“Miért nincs otthon a férj?”) (R.L., 2001, issue 14, p. 50-51) spoke directly to the absence of men when it comes to household chores. In a 2009 article, entitled “The super dad can still buy baby clothes” (“A szuperpapa mégis tud venni gyerekruhát”), author Éva Fejős asks “what is a good father like”? (issue 7, pp. 58-60). She distinguishes between “traditional” men, who control what happens in the family, and “modern” men, who participate in household chores equally (p. 59). She praises men who play an active role in fathering, even positively regarding men who go on GYES.

The reality of maternity leave was also explored. A 2005 article, “Mom, you look like a woman!” (“Anya, úgy nézel ki mint egy nő!” issue 10, pp. 46-47), shone a light on the isolation and exclusion women on GYES can experience. The article medicalizes a social problem: a GYES-induced neurosis is described as a condition akin to post-partum depression. Discussion of this condition contradicts dominant discourses that see the home and childrearing as women’s natural role, one that they are supposed to enjoy

¹⁴³ Again, articles in the magazine fail to reference non-heteronormative pairings unless the discussion is solely and explicitly about same sex couples.

unconditionally.¹⁴⁴ The value of women trying to become super moms, particularly at the expense of their mental and physical health, is questioned and women who have had children but are lonely, unfulfilled, or eager to return to work are interviewed (Hegedűs, issue 10, pp. 46-47). These women are portrayed as average Hungarian women—not unnatural, irrational, dangers to the nation. The final interviewee makes an impassioned call for society to view motherhood differently and suggests that Hungarian women work together to discover how to be mothers without choosing between childcare and a sense of self (p. 47).

These and other articles simultaneously do different kinds of ideological work. First, they suggest that motherhood as a central concern for *Nők Lapja* readers, because they dominate the magazine's content and speak to readers as if balancing work and family were issues all women faced. Many of the women interviewed were women with middle or upper management jobs and so much of the discussions made certain class assumptions about readers and what kinds of options were available to them. However, the articles also work to denaturalize assumptions of women prioritizing motherhood above all else and to question policies and practices that discriminate against women in the workforce, thereby placing the burden of domestic duties on women's shoulders.

In some ways, *Nők Lapja* has *had* to take up the issue of negotiating the work-life balance for women because for women in Hungary who would like to be mothers and maintain their place in the workforce, institutional practices are actually making it very difficult. Becsik and Juhász (2010) report that Hungarian women have a tendency to be family-centred, but must work even when they would like to remain at home with children,

¹⁴⁴ GYES neurosis is said to include symptoms like depression, unhappiness, frustration, guilt or loss of interest (p. 46).

because of the poor state of the economy (p. 71). However, as in the case of Serbia, Bracewell (1996) points out that although women are at the centre of debates about motherhood and nationalism, “it is not their needs and desires that are central” (p. 31). Indeed, other than the maintenance of GYES, little has been done to make the work-family balance easier for women. Joanna Mishtal (2012), in her study of makes the same point. Instead of implementing policies that would help address the reality of the work-family balance for women and men, which has actually proven successful in other countries with previously declining fertility rates, the nation’s leaders simply blame women for their “‘irrational’ non-reproduction” (p. 153) and continue to deem motherhood as the only role of value to women. *Nők Lapja* thus acts as a site of resistance and implies social and political criticism by challenging the demands on women and working actively to improve the experience of working mothers in Hungary.

Women as Mothers First

Problematically, *Nők Lapja* also supported ideas of the unnaturalness of women’s work and suggested it was a distraction from women’s rightful place in the home. Although this theme was not as common as the work-family balance chronicled by the magazine, it is important to address it. For example, a 2006 article that explicitly articulated the primary importance of motherhood to women is entitled “How does our life change after the birth of a child?” (“Hogyan változik az életünk szülés után?” issue 37, pp. 48-49). The caption of the article reads: “A child creates many unexpected situations, those who cannot accept this will live with failure. This is why many women turn towards their work and build careers instead. They build alibis for themselves so they do not have to

care so much for their children” (Hulej, p. 48). Experts interviewed for the article, psychologist husband and wife team, Kata Medveczky and Tamás Maróti, argue that sacrifice is no longer popular among Hungarian mothers but that it is necessary. Specifically, they criticize mothers who bring their newborns with them in public and maintain that the best place for a baby is in the home. They advocate that women must give up their freedom to ensure the baby’s development, expecting women to be subservient to a newborn child.

A more recent article, from 2011, entitled “I had a baby, just because I did not have a job” (“Azért szültem, mert éppen nem volt munkám,” Koronczay, issue 21, pp. 22-24) speaks to the fact that despite women’s biological clocks women’s lives are no longer solely concerned with the domestic sphere. Subsidies offered to women with children are suggested as one reason among many for having children. Children are not simply a biological urge. This article sheds light on the difficulties mothers face. Such an article is part of the resistance I see as present in the magazine. However, the expert interviewed for the article, economist Dr. Katalin Botos, argues that Hungarians should give birth for the sake of society. She claims children are typically seen as a private concern, particularly because women see their own bodies as their own business. She claims that children are not just the concern of parents, but of the Hungarian society at large because children generate the capital from which future retirees will draw their pensions. She also contends that the upbringing of these future citizens is also the business of societies—not just the parents who raise them. Specifically, she insists that parents cannot raise children any way they wish because it would impact Hungary negatively (Koronczay, 2011, issue 21, p. 23).

This linking of the private decision to have or not to have children with the interests of the nation reflects the focus on nation-building. The dominant discourse of motherhood

in *Nők Lapja* is resisted at times. On the other hand, other articles relied on the advice of “experts” who suggested that women’s roles as reproducers must be filled in accordance with the needs of the state. A message that was consistent, however, was the connection between motherhood and nation—the ways in which women’s reproductive choices impact the nation.

Motherhood and the Nation

In many ways, *Nők Lapja* acts as what Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992), citing John Armstrong, refer to as a “border guard”. Border guards help maintain the boundaries between “us” and “them”—in this case, ethnic Hungarians and other groups. Notably, “these border guards can identify people as members or non-members of a specific collectivity. They are closely linked to specific cultural codes of style and dress and behaviour as well as to more elaborate bodies of customs, literary and artistic modes of production, and, of course, language” (p. 23). *Nők Lapja* consistently acts as a border guard, showing readers how they should look, dress, cook, celebrate, and parent, as Hungarians. I’ve already pointed to the magazine’s exclusion of certain groups, and the maintenance of certain ideas concerning the motherliness of Hungarian women. In what follows, however, I pinpoint the explicit ways in which the magazine partook in nation-building projects, supporting the post-communist fears of de-population.

Defining “Hungarianness” for Readers

Nők Lapja contributes to nationalist projects by reminding Hungarians what it means to be Hungarian and who is considered Hungarian in exclusion of certain groups,

most notably the Roma. Drawing on Mills (2004), this exclusion needs to be highlighted because it contributes toward what *is*, and what is not, sayable. The exclusion of the Roma or the Jews reinforces ideas that these groups are not members of the Hungarian community—that they do not embody Hungarian ideals or characteristics and, therefore, that their offspring are not required for the Hungarian nation. The magazine’s participation in nation-building is also demonstrated through an emphasis on Christian events and celebrations, illustrating for readers how to be Hungarian. It is further manifested in the continued emphasis on home-made recipes, thus implying that “real” Hungarian women should cook for their families (West, 1994).

In 2007, an interview with American actor Drew Barrymore (whose grandparents fled Hungary after the Second World War) entitled, “Drew Barrymore, the lost Hungarian little girl comes around” (“Drew Barrymore, megkerült az elveszett magyar kislány,” issue 29, pp. 20-21) was published. The author, Návai, pointedly asks Barrymore why she does not speak Hungarian (and if she regrets it), and notes that they have a common characteristic between them—Hungarian roots—but she specifically points out that Barrymore is less than half Hungarian, so the commonality is only partly there (p. 20). Návai defines for Barrymore and readers the grounds for inclusion into Hungary—ethnic Hungarian ancestry—which is deemed more important than citizenship, recalling the understandings of nationalism developed during the 1848-49 revolution and reinvigorated with intensity in the post-communist period. The hundreds of thousands of Roma who have lived and worked in Hungary for generations and have acquired citizenship, are spoken about infrequently and positioned as an “other” by the magazine. However, an American-born actress with Hungarian ancestry is made to feel included. The longstanding ideas of belonging that have re-surfaced in the post-communist period, inspired by 19th

century thinking and the building of Hungarianness at the exclusion of others, are thus echoed on the pages of *Nők Lapja*.

As discussed throughout this dissertation, there has been intense pressure on women to have children. Post-communist political debates emphasize that real Hungarian women have children and that the home is the natural place for them. These sentiments have been used in conjunction with threats of the death of the nation and de-population, should women not fulfill their obligation to have large families. Although *Nők Lapja* did much to construct motherhood as natural and inevitable, it also maintained a careful distance from engaging in certain aspects of these debates concerning the waning Hungarian population, particularly the blame placed on women (especially childless women). However, the magazine's writers were certainly aware of debates, and the concerns over demographics unfolding in the country were often referenced by the magazine. While women who did not have children were not blamed by the magazine, the positive impact of motherhood on the country was underscored repeatedly.

I will illustrate the inclusion of the theme of the declining Hungarian population through a 2005 article that focused on single parenting. The article begins with the following apocalyptic vision for the future of the Hungarian nation: "The country clangs: too few children are born, the Hungarians are disappearing, if things continue like this, in a few centuries we will disappear from the map of Europe" (V. Kulcsár, 2005, issue 36, p. 38). The article unenthusiastically considers single parenting, torn between conflicting concerns: a preference for traditional unions and families, but recognition that the nation needs as many Hungarian babies as possible. In a 2006 article, "What will happen to you, beautiful world?" ("Mi lesz veled, szép világunk?" issue 2, pp. 16-17), author Gábor Kertész addresses some of what he considered global population fears. He wonders what

will happen to the planet and what world children and grandchildren will live in, considering issues like water consumption, ailments and the breakdown of the family. He makes a case for the importance of the family by claiming that families contribute to a stronger and healthier society. It has supposedly been proven that alcoholism, crime and mental health problems plague people living alone more than families and that families provide the necessary support for people living in an increasingly isolated world (p. 17). In addressing demographics, he makes connections between the nation and the role of the family in its success, drawing on research to back up the same claims made by the government, and reminding readers that families are of utmost importance because they contribute not just to an individual's health and wellbeing but also the nation's success.

Hungarian Women Really *Want* to Have Children

Articles concerning demographics were often coupled with a discussion of the reasons why women are not having enough babies—and the reasons were exclusively treated as external to women's desires. In other words, institutional and historical problems were blamed—women were never portrayed as simply not *wanting* children. For example, the 1998 article “Why aren't we having children,” discussed above, points to Hungarian politicians' concerns over the waning Hungarian population. The article reports that Hungarians are told, “The Hungarians are waning! We'll disappear from the map” (Mörk et al., issue 24, p. 5). The magazine expresses concern for this problem and turns to Hungarian women who speak about motherhood and childlessness. The mothers point to concerns over losing employment with extended maternity leave, slashed childcare benefits and a current generation of women without the skills or means to be successful mothers and wives (p. 24) as important reasons for low fertility rates. No mention is made of women

simply not desiring children. Rather, reasons are based only on social factors that act as barriers to women's supposed natural inclination to have children. The same pattern unfolded in a 2004 article entitled "How much does a baby cost?" ("Mennyibe kerül egy kisbaba?" issue 22, pp. 24-25). The authors bemoan the dramatically low number of Hungarian babies (V. Kulcsár and Mészöly, p. 24) and explained that some experts point to the cost of living and raising children as a barrier to larger families for many Hungarians. Others, however, point to uncertainty—uncertainty about the country's future, job security, and the economy, etc.

A more recent article, entitled "Are the Hungarians dwindling?" ("Fogy a magyar?" Papp, 2012, issue 19, p.8) also chronicles the population decline the nation is experiencing. Papp tries to help readers best visualize this decline and claims that Hungary loses a small city's worth of people every year because of the negative birth rate. She emphasizes that this decrease has been consistent since the 1980s, highlighting the long-standing nature of such a loss. Papp also argues that women in Hungary would have more children if there were more support, namely, if they could balance work and employment better, suggesting that having children is natural but extenuating circumstances prevent some women from becoming mothers. Once again, we see the magazine challenging the expectation that women forgo employment for motherhood, but this article still affirms that motherhood is a desire of all women. This assumption that women are somehow prevented from having the children they desire supports the notion of the biological clock discussed previously.

The theme of external reasons why women do not have children, coupled with statistics aimed at demonstrating how problematic it was, was common. For example, a 2010 article "I would have children, if . . ." (Koroncay, "Szülnék én gyereket, ha . . .," issue 44, pp. 24-26) lists some external factors that prevented women from having children,

claiming that these women could actually be persuaded to have children in different circumstances. The article lists the following reasons: the lack of financial support, children interfering with a woman's career progression, women's lack of trust that they can handle it all, and the lack of a child-centred environment. Indeed, the author is convinced that all Hungarian women do have the desire for children, but this desire becomes stifled when they are forced to make other decisions. Additionally, the author includes a table that reflects the shrinking Hungarian population, from 10.0 million in 1960 to 9.98 million at the time of writing, supplemented by another table charting the births and deaths since the 1950s. Statistics highlight for readers the population loss—perhaps suggesting that women should not allow extenuating circumstances to shape their decision to have children, because the country needs more babies. Similarly, in another article entitled “How many children do we want? More!” (“Hány gyereket akarunk? Többet!” Hulej, 2010, issue 8, p. 6-7), the author makes a point of explaining that although at the time of writing, Hungary has one of the lowest birth rates in Europe, it would improve dramatically if all Hungarian women who expressed a desire to have children actually did. She argues that low fertility rates have nothing to do with the motherliness of Hungarian women but are instead a result of external factors.

What I have emphasized with these articles is the frequency and consistency with which the magazine sought to point out *why* women are not having children, and that this reason has nothing to do with women's true desires. Although the magazine naturalizes motherhood in this way, suggesting that all women want to have children but sometimes their circumstances prevent it from happening, it never considered that some women simply did not want to have more or any children. However, readers did not always agree with this assessment of women's procreative desires. In the aforementioned article, “I would have

children if . . .” the introduction to the article contends that statistically in Hungary, at the time of writing, if 20 youth planned to have 24 children, from these plans, only 13 children are actually born. The author asked, “what can be the reason for this?” (Koronczay, issue 44, pp. 24-26, p. 24) and turned to a forum on the website (nlcafe.hu) to ask readers. The reader responses were printed in the magazine. Some readers confirmed that reasons like the economy impacted their procreative decisions. One woman admitted she likes to travel and have a nice car and clothes, and that having children means giving these things up. She thus points to the economy and increased consumerism—the “kicsi vs. kocsi” conundrum mentioned before—as motivating factors in her decision-making process. However, other readers contested this idea of women wanting children but feeling pressed by factors like the economy or uncertainty. One woman suggested that people either want children or not and she, a woman of 30, simply does not—no matter the circumstances (p. 24). Other readers chimed in, denouncing the suggestion that work plays a role. Finally, perhaps the most interesting point of all, a reader argued that other countries do not even have the extensive maternity leave Hungarians have with GYES, yet more children are born, drawing the conclusion that external factors alone cannot be blamed for the low fertility rates in the country.

Although working mothers were not targeted for the nation’s failings by the magazine, more families and mothers, especially stay-at-home mothers, were said to contribute to a better, happier, healthier nation. Although difficulties associated with parenting and motherhood were discussed in the magazine, they were largely limited to external factors: shrinking maternity leave, no job security, expensive goods, etc. To say that motherhood was undesirable because of *children* remains unsayable. Instead, in a 2012 article, “Why is it good to be a woman?” (“Miért jó nőnek lenni?”) motherhood is

considered one of the greatest aspects of womanhood. Concerning motherhood, staff writer Emese Hulej is interviewed and she states, “it’s no question: this [motherhood] is the best in the whole thing” (issue 7, p. 9).

Hungary is “Family-friendly”

Paradoxically, further buoying political debates pressuring women to have children, some articles emphasized that having children in Hungary can be *better* than having children elsewhere, negating any concerns women might have about public support or other social factors outlined in the articles above. For example, a 2011 article entitled “Why is it good to raise children here?” (“Miért jó nálunk gyereket nevelni?” issue 4, p. 40-41) shares exclusively positive things recent immigrants to Hungary have to say about raising their children there, such as a more peaceful and less stressful lifestyle, plus better playgrounds than in their countries of origin (Oravecz et al., 2011, p. 40-41). A couple formerly from Canada and Iran praised Hungarians for valuing tradition, citing it as a reason why they chose to remain in Hungary longer than intended (p. 40). Thus, the magazine contributes to the construction of an image of Hungary as child-friendly and suitable for families, at least more so than in other countries where, readers are led to believe, life is not as agreeable for mothers.

In the same vein, in 2008 the magazine published an article geared toward newcomers to the country, entitled “Preparing for Hungary? Then it is important to know . . . the Hungarians have no self-confidence whatsoever!” (Magyarországra készül? Akkor fontos tudnia . . . a magyaroknak semmi önbizalmuk!” issue 47, pp. 24-26). Author Gábor Kertész is curious about how Hungarians are presented in intercultural training programs and interviews an intercultural training expert, Miguel Sarabia, to find out. That Sarabia

foregrounds the Hungarian passion for family is emphasized and applauded by the magazine. Sarabia's quote concerning the importance of family to Hungarians—and why for them it is more important than to people living in the West—is repeated as a caption on the first page of the article. Specifically, he contends: “For the Hungarians family is very important, much more important than for those living in the West” (pp. 24, 25). From his discussion of what he views as Hungarian, the emphasis on family is stressed and his belief that Hungary is an excellent place to raise a family is central to the story.

Children are Worth the Cost

Though family issues were often featured in the magazine (the cost of a family, the barriers to workplace entry as a mother, cooking meals everyone will love, children misbehaving at school, trouble with in-laws, etc.), the family was treated as most valuable. I believe these articles were intended to combat the external factors, like the economy, which supposedly keeps droves of Hungarian women from fulfilling their procreative intentions and desires. For example, in 2010, amidst a flurry of articles concerning the price of motherhood and difficulties women experience balancing work/life, the magazine printed an article by Fejős, entitled “How much does a child cost?” (“Mennyibe kerül a gyerek?” issue 35, pp. 22-25). Although some of the financial limitations of parenthood were discussed, the article focused primarily on not caring about the expense because children are worth the cost. In fact, in the very first lines of the article, Fejős argues “fortunately the child and love are not valued in Hungarian currency and cannot be measured in numbers” (p. 22). To underscore this point, the stories of self-sacrificing mothers are shared—women who have had difficulty affording children and have given up a lot, but who have done so anyway and love their children so much that the sacrifice does

not matter.¹⁴⁵ Women reportedly have twice the joy because of their children. This was a common theme: the devoted mother who reaps the rewards of her sacrifice.

In a 2006 article, entitled “At our place mom is always at home!” (“Nálunk anyu mindig otthon van!” issue 3, pp. 14-17) written by Emese Hulej et al., the significance of a quote by one mother is emphasized and is turned into the title of her interview: “I give a lot, but I get more!” (p. 16). The title of the whole article, from a child’s point of view, emphasizes the importance to children if their mother devotes as much as possible to them, even forgoing a career or life outside the home. The stories of happy, devoted mothers reiterate the value of motherhood not just to children but to women themselves, for the joy they experience and the happiness and fulfillment they attain allegedly is immeasurable and cannot be acquired in any other way but through intensive mothering and sacrifice. Perhaps most tellingly, the first lines of the article claim that mothers used to stay at home and that this is less the case today in Hungary. The article goes on to imply that if more women stayed at home with their children, “the world could be homier” (p. 14). Women’s stay-at-home motherhood is thus associated with what Hungarian values *used* to dictate—implying that traditional values are better—but this article makes clearer the argument that if more women stayed at home with their children, the *world* (i.e. Hungary) would be a better place. This article, and others like it, echoed the pro-natalist sentiments of the immediate post-communist period that have lingered on. Specifically, the articles tether a woman’s worth and happiness to motherhood, and propose that mothers are responsible for the success and happiness of the nation.

¹⁴⁵ Although I only considered articles in my study, in her study of advertisements in the magazine (using 2010 as a sample), Hatházi notes recurring themes of “mothering, caring and housework” (2011, p. 24).

Interestingly, the mother who sacrifices everything is portrayed in direct contrast to singletons, like the fictional Petra, and the childless, who focus their energies on themselves and are therefore framed as irresponsible and selfish. Mothers, by contrast, particularly stay-at-home mothers, support the nation—not just themselves, we are told. Iveković and Mostov (2002) argue that mothers are celebrated for their pain, suffering and sacrifice *as* mothers, which is seen as part of the nation's sacrifice (p. 11). Thus, this emphasis on what women give up as mothers—and the celebration of this sacrifice—is also part of the nation-building project.

Although there were no articles that explicitly focused on the “death of the nation” in those words, or on blaming placed on working mothers for the destruction of the country, the magazine's writers were aware of such debates and kept their readership thinking about demographics. In discussions pertaining to the declined-population, women are represented as wanting children, but blame is placed on a lack of external supports. Although it is a brave political statement to blame a lack of external supports, once again, the magazine assumes and implies the naturalness of desiring children and wanting to be a mother—that some women may not want children, or want fewer children, is an idea given little space in the magazine.

Parenting as a Social Obligation

I was surprised that I did not find any articles that directly connected childlessness to the nation's shrinking population. The magazine, perhaps in an effort not to alienate readers, never made this connection explicit. Instead, as discussed, the choice to be childless was pathologized, questioned and framed as a peculiarity, while the decision to

mother was praised, naturalized and connected to personal happiness and the nation's success. However, a few articles pointed to the societal obligations of women without children that warrant analysis, for it also speaks to the negative ways in which childlessness, particularly the decision to remain childless, was treated as problematic and unnatural, unlike the desire to have children and to be a mother.

For example, in a rather unusual article, childlessness is interpreted from a new age perspective. In "Childlessness and the karma of suffering" ("A gyermektelenség és szenvedés karmája," 2009, issue 43, pp. 53) astrologer Klára Izing argues that women who choose not to have children are born with a karma of childlessness and they typically seek mates who have the same karma. This karma, she explains, serves a purpose in the world because these women and men will eventually be available to care for another's child. She includes the example of a childless woman, whose sister and brother-in-law died, leaving the childless sister as the guardian of their child. Thus, childless women, and men we can assume, are seen as existing to support the nation in other ways, by stepping in if a mother or father is unable to parent, for example. Interestingly, this "karma" of childlessness is linked to a so-called karma of suffering. Certainly an unusual article, but the explanation of childlessness further implies that all women ultimately, by nature, have an urge and obligation to mother, and that no woman will ever find herself in a situation where she is excused of this responsibility.

In an article discussed in Chapter Three, "The childless vs. [those] with children," (2010, issue 5, pp. 16-19) concerning the supposed "war" between the childless and mothers, an interviewee, Melinda, explains her disappointment with her twin sister when she herself had children whereas her sister maintained her single life. Instead of helping with the children, as she was expected to do, the childless sister enjoyed life, which hurt

Melinda. Melinda determined their lives had nothing in common anymore and the relationship suffered. Once her twin had children of her own, however, their relationship was restored and Melinda reported happily to *Nők Lapja* that now they help each other with everything (p. 17). In this interview, Melinda echoes the expectation that childless women are to assist other women with children, that it is unacceptable for them to shirk these responsibilities and that to do so threatens even the closest of relationships. Women without children are often praised for spending their time with other people's children. In an earlier, 1998 article, "My company is loneliness: Being alone by choice" ("Társaságom, a magány: választott egyedüllét," Deli et al., issue 30, pp. 5-8), a "spinster," Bó, is praised by the magazine, despite her spinsterhood, because although she is alone and childless, she has endeared herself to children around her with her cooking, baking, storytelling and "endless, selfless companionship" (p. 6). The authors contend this behaviour is noteworthy because being alone is something everyone fears. Thus, in a few instances, even the childless are bound into nation-building projects, expected to step in and care for children as part of their social responsibilities.

Stay-at-home Mothering: A Form of Resistance?

Einhorn (1993) argues that during communism, many women in Poland and Hungary saw their position in their families as mothers as a source of strength, influenced by traditional mothering roles. Lacking political presence in the pre and post-communist

eras, they could experience authority within the family structure.¹⁴⁶ Tóth (1993) further argues that communism infantilized Hungarians and having children marked a way in which Hungarians could reassert themselves as adults; parenthood signaled adulthood in a perceptible and tangible way. The married couple or family was seen as a line in the sand drawn against the interfering communist party and policies (Barát, 2005, p. 220). Indeed, “influenced by their cultural heritage, many women in Poland and to an extent Hungary see their position in the family as one of strength” (Einhorn 1993).

Drawing on Peggy Watson’s (1993) work, Evelina Panayotova and April Brayfield (1997) contend that because the public/private divide was strengthened by Hungarians wanting some distance from communism viewing the home as a site of resistance, the home has a high symbolic rank. Therefore, “in turn, a revitalization of traditional values occurs; women as homemakers and family caregivers receive more symbolic rewards and praise than women as workers” (Panayotova and Brayfield, 1997, p. 649). As a result, some Hungarian women felt guilt for not prioritizing their roles as mothers and wives during communism (Szalai, 1991). Interviewing women in the early 1990s, Gal (1994) noted the double burden working women, who were tasked primarily with childrearing and housework, continued to bear. Gal noted that “women in their thirties and forties feel a sense of guilt about their supposed lack of skills in child-rearing and housekeeping. They express a feeling of inadequacy because of their lack of training [as mothers and wives] (caused by their own labor force participation and their mothers’ wage work)” (Gal, 1994, p. 283).

¹⁴⁶ Andrei Simić (1999), based on the case of former Yugoslavia, labels "cryptomatriarchy" the strong influence of the mother and other older women on children within the family whereas the general social structure is strongly patriarchal.

As Bracewell (1996) points out, the policies that push for motherhood without the institutional support to facilitate it negatively impact women's physical and emotional health, as well as their economic circumstances and control over their own bodies (p. 31). By ignoring these concerns—to which we could add immense feelings of guilt and inadequacy—public debates underscore the unimportance of the individual compared to the needs of the nation as a whole (p. 31). For example, abortion rights are threatened in Hungary with the new constitution, for the alleged good of the nation. Problematically, “women's rights to self-determination and full citizenship are being limited” (Bracewell, 1996, p. 31). Bracewell (1996) theorizes that this control over women's bodies in the post-communist period is a way in which political leaders can “demonstrate their anticommunist, nationalist credentials at little expense to themselves” (p. 31-32).

My point in this section is to recognize that the ways in which motherhood is represented and valued, particularly by mothers themselves, is steeped in the long-lasting effects on family that communism had. However, seeing motherhood as a source of strength or power is not a new concept in Hungary. As demonstrated in Chapter One, when women fought for rights, such as the right to education, they often presented their needs as especially important because of their roles in raising future citizens. Educated mothers meant better educated children and members of the Hungarian nation.

Conclusion

The issues addressed in this chapter presented themselves to me during my study of representations of childlessness in *Nők Lapja*. The sheer volume of articles that addressed these concerns—namely the singleton, the work/family balance, and the impact of

reproductive decisions on demographics—made it necessary that I take these up in this project. They are obviously important to the lived experiences of Hungarian women in the post-communist period and the ways in which the magazine echoes dominant discourses around gender, nation, and motherhood.

Further, the themes presented here supplement the discussion in Chapter Three, further demonstrating the process of naturalizing and normalizing motherhood and pathologizing childlessness—by implying that most singletons wish to have a family and children, that all women eventually struggle with a work-family balance, and that Hungarian women, as reproducers of a certain ethnicity, play an integral role in the nation's success. I have further demonstrated the exclusion of certain groups in the magazine and the ways in which the magazine has policed the borders of inclusion into the Hungarian community, by defining for readers who is, and who is not, considered Hungarian. These ideas all echo dominant post-communist discourses, which, in turn, are steeped in historical developments such as the definition of Hungarianness based on the exclusion of others, a long lasting concern about de-population, and the need to eschew the effects of communism on the “natural” gender order.

However, *Nők Lapja* does not reflect only these concerns. While they certainly are foregrounded, as is the assumption that “natural” and “normal” women pursue motherhood, the magazine presents a site of resistance. Instead of promoting stay-at-home motherhood, as political leaders do, the magazine proposes solutions for the work-family balance, calling for institutional and societal change, demanding that work places accommodate working mothers better and that husbands take on a more involved role in childrearing and household maintenance. Kádár (2002) argues that despite an undercurrent of frustrations women experience, *Nők Lapja* features women who are proud of their roles in the

workforce even though, problematically, we see the institution of the family framed very narrowly in these debates: heterosexual pairings, based on marriage and children. Kádár (2002) further argues that despite some feminist ideas she sees presented—like sexual freedom, examples of successful career women, and psychological advice—the magazine still represents the male-dominated family-centred model, which is based on the subordination of women in a patriarchal society. She refers to Károly Lyka, a Hungarian art critic, who argued back in 1900 that patriarchal society would remain more intact in Hungary than in other countries. Given the traditional roles women are expected to assume in Hungarian society, Kádár (2002) muses that it seems Lyka's prediction proved correct.

Nők Lapja demonstrates a struggle between the erasure of modernity and women's emancipation played out in contemporary discourses and policies, and also a resistance that sees women making their own decisions concerning their reproductive lives. To conclude with Yuval-Davis (1997), constructions of nationhood require clearly defined conceptions of "womanhood" and "manhood," and *Nők Lapja* unmistakably contributes to this conceptualizing, providing a script for Hungarian women that further serves to define for readers who is Hungarian and who is not.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, parting from some national myths and anxieties built up through Hungarian history, I used the popular women's magazine *Nők Lapja* as my key illustrative example to examine the constructions, maintenance, and resistance to dominant discourses concerning motherhood and childlessness in contemporary Hungary. Throughout this project I have argued that the dominant discourses regarding motherhood and childlessness include ideas about who should, or should not, have children, and why. With Yuval-Davis's (1997) contention in mind, that women "reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically" (p. 2), I have paid careful attention to how women in Hungary have been pulled into nation-building projects. Yuval-Davis (1997) points out that constructions of nationalism typically involve very specific constructions of manhood and womanhood—specific notions of what it means to be feminine or masculine. To understand this, the specific environment in which *Nők Lapja* is published has been crucial to study. As Gal (2013) notes in her study of abortion policies in Hungary, pro-natal policies are "embedded in a different set of meanings" in Hungary than in other countries (p. 48). Certainly, many of the themes in this dissertation—i.e. nationalism and the pressure placed on certain women to have children—do exist in other countries. However, these themes are shaped and influenced by different histories and cultures. Badinter (2010) illustrates this perfectly by describing the impact of a history of detached mothering in France on contemporary ideas of good mothering—as well as the subsequent impact of expectations of French mothers on fertility rates and French women's interest in motherhood. Thus a study of

Hungarian history was essential to understanding post-communist ideas of motherhood and childlessness.

As my research has demonstrated, ethnically Hungarian women are often constructed as both mothers of the nation—a key to the nation’s survival if they have the number of children prescribed by the state—and threats to the nation if they refuse to comply with demands placed on their reproductive bodies, which have been controlled in various ways in an effort to meet nation-building objectives. I have argued that the pressure placed upon women to act in accordance with the needs of the state is not new. Instead, women’s procreative choices have been curtailed and shaped for the greater good for centuries, in different ways and for different historically specific needs. I included examples of women challenging and resisting traditional social roles from multiple historical periods, and I also focused on pressures from the Soviet takeover and onward. Specifically, I isolated a dominant discourse of motherhood that took shape in the 1980s and gained ground in the post-communist period. This discourse negated the employment rights women in Hungary had fought for—and grown accustomed to under communism—while reshaping women’s “natural” place to exist only within the home as mothers and wives. As discussed, other scholars have deemed this the cult of motherhood.

Applying Merz and Leifbroer’s (2012) interpretations and applications of the Second Demographic Transition and New Home Economics was fruitful to understanding attitudes toward childlessness in Hungary. As Merz and Leifbroer explain, in societies that place a higher value on tradition, childlessness becomes less socially acceptable (p. 589). They also note that since the fall of communism across Europe, countries afflicted have faced economic uncertainty, which also influences procreative decisions people make (p. 597). Despite the economic uncertainty in Hungary, childlessness is still disbelieved and

the decision not to have children is undermined by *Nők Lapja*. In the pattern of small families in Hungary we see the conflicting impacts of the economic uncertainty plaguing many formerly communist European countries and the presence of conservative, traditional ideas and attitudes, particularly towards women's social roles.

In my research I have tried to find some answers to why the contemporary political and economic climate in Hungary favours traditionalist discourses of motherhood and childlessness. I have argued that contemporary political discourse in Hungary is replete with “historical signifiers” (Kramer, 2009, p. 88) that appeal to the country's past. Unpacking the historical moments in question was thus necessary for a better understanding of what motivates and shapes contemporary representations of women. Through my brief analysis of key moments in Hungarian history, I have traced certain inclinations that have continued to resurface in contemporary attitudes and policies, such as the building of the Hungarian nation at the exclusion of others, the emphasis on ethnicity—rather than geography—, the concern for “lost” land along with a declining population, and the scapegoating of various groups who are repeatedly blamed for the nation's alleged failings. Indeed, as I demonstrated, nationalism, real and perceived threats of invasion, racism and anti-Semitism have proven to be significant themes in Hungary. Past traumas, first and foremost the Treaty of Trianon, have been powerful motors in generating present day political discourses. In Hungary today, centre-right Prime Minister Orbán has reinvigorated, with more passion, concern over who is a real Hungarian, and the desired growth in the face of de-population of “real” Hungarians. Explicit discrimination and exclusion both fuel and enable these discussions. Contemporary discourses in Hungary with their concern for a waning population are, in many ways, anti-modernity, and harken back to old debates about who is and who is not Hungarian. Women have become

entrapped in these debates, expected to support the nation with the birth of the right kind of babies and return to traditional domestic roles in the home, regardless of the real, sometimes dire, economic situation of many Hungarian households.

The dominant discourse of motherhood belies a very traditional attitude. Certainly, the statistics and studies I described in the introduction point to low instances of childlessness plus an emphasis on the importance of the family. However, the so-called natural inclination of Hungarian women to abandon all other pursuits in favor of motherhood is a myth that is being pushed with a political agenda in mind. Throughout Hungarian history there are many examples of women's activism, organization and resistance to traditional social roles—as well as the early origins of feminism in Hungary—which have recently been redefined as foreign to Hungarian culture. In the post-communist period, and particularly with the current Orbán government, political leaders have sought to distance themselves and the country from the influences of communism, Westernization, and feminism—often misrepresented as both a Western and Jewish scourge—deemed “alien” to Hungarian values, which I demonstrated is not the case. Hungarian women have a long-standing history of challenging traditional social roles and trying to reshape them to better suit their own needs. Concerned with how women's societal roles have been shaped, changed, accepted or fought against, I delved even deeper into a particular piece of Hungarian history, and chronicled the longtime concern over low fertility rates and more than a century's worth of pro-natal and family policies—from criminalizing abortion to offering a lengthy maternity leave—that, under various regimes, sought to encourage the right kind of Hungarian women to have more children. I connected these policies to the broader social context and demonstrated how they have been fuelled, at various times, by nationalism, discrimination and demographic and economic concerns, or all of the above.

The consistency with which women have been told to act in the best interest of the nation speaks volumes about the expectations of women in Hungary over the last century. I argued that women have been pushed and pulled in different directions, but the coercion of their procreative and mothering potential has consistently been treated as integral to the success of the nation.

The dominant discourse of motherhood implies another discourse that runs parallel and in opposition to it: the discourse of childlessness. My analysis of *Nők Lapja* has revealed that the magazine supports both these discourses. In the articles I examined, the magazine framed women without children as an oddity and as unnatural, and questioned, with a kind of incredulousness, the sense of happiness and wholeness that such women can have. In addition, the reasons and life experiences that have contributed to a woman's decision to remain childless were deconstructed and pathologized. In other words, women without children were expected to explain *why* they did not want children—a parallel question not asked of mothers and their choice to have children—and these answers were criticized, often with the aid of mental health professionals. Further, women without children were often disbelieved by the magazine's staff, and their actions or gestures reinterpreted as signs of maternal instinct.

The dominant discourse of childlessness works in concert with recurring themes in the magazine concerning the naturalness and inevitability of motherhood—particularly the desire for children treated as ever-present in women, symbolized by the oft-referenced biological clock. The way in which the magazine repeatedly positioned motherhood as natural and childlessness as unnatural worked to support the dominant discourse of motherhood by normalizing motherhood and marking as deviant the choice to not have children. Indeed, Badinter (2010) contends that the pathologizing of women's choices to

be childless—again, not a pattern unique to Hungary—serves to suggest that the decision is something negative, as it is treated as a decision which stems from a psychological problem. Further, accusations of the selfishness and irresponsibility of childless women provide support for nationalist arguments that it is the responsibility of women to act in accordance with the needs of the Hungarian nation and its dwindling population.

My focus on the study of the magazine's treatment of childlessness was expanded by my analysis of the ways in which the magazine both supported and challenged themes of nationalism, singletons, and exclusion of certain groups from definitions of "Hungarianness," as well as the social obligations expected of Hungarian mothers. The themes of singletons, working mothers, nationhood and Hungarianness accompanied the representation of women as mothers first and foremost. I argued that the magazine played an active role as a "border guard," defining for readers who is, and who is not, Hungarian and thus worthy of bearing Hungarian children. For example, while Roma were almost entirely excluded from the magazine—signaling to readers that they do not matter as equal Hungarian citizens—Drew Barrymore, an American actress with some Hungarian ancestry, was welcomed as a Hungarian. In this way, the magazine supported nationalist political discourses embracing the Hungarian diaspora while marginalizing the Roma, who have resided in Hungary for generations.

Additionally, while *Nők Lapja* sought to redefine singlehood as something different than the stereotypically sad and lonely spinster, ultimately the magazine represented single women as helpless and in desperate pursuit of a partner—supporting ideas of women as happier when coupled, or living in a family—and also supporting heteronormative ideals of the family unit as consisting of a wife, husband and their children. However, while this nuclear family unit is defined increasingly in political discourses as requiring a stay-at-

home mother for success, and while the magazine generally supported this idea, at other times it offered a resistance that reflected readers' attitudes as expressed in their letters. Dozens of articles were devoted to the topic of balancing work and home life, challenging policies that discriminate against working mothers and make the balance more difficult, in addition to offering women advice how to achieve success walking this fine line.

Drawing on Foucault's theorizing about power and resistance being everywhere, I argued that *Nők Lapja* both supported and resisted the dominant discourses of motherhood and childlessness, at times supporting claims of the naturalness of motherhood but then also contradicting such ideas with the inclusion of stories about happy childless women and unhappy stay-at-home mothers. I argued that by taking up discussion of childlessness, *Nők Lapja* worked to resist traditional ideas of women necessarily embracing and finding fulfillment in motherhood. Although I did note that this support was minimal, by publishing childless readers' letters and sometimes contending that more than one life path for women was possible, staff writers indirectly allowed for the possibility of normalizing the decision not to have children.

Although any resistance to the dominant discourse of motherhood was, in my view, ultimately trumped by the dominant argument about the naturalness of motherhood and women's biological clocks, that there *was* resistance in the magazine is a valuable point to make note of. Szirtes (2013) reports that the media are currently tightly controlled in Hungary—media are financially “starved” (p. 2) and dissenting voices are “purged” (p. 2). Given the pro-natal and nationalist environment, and the strictly nationalist discourse spouted by political leaders today, the fact that *Nők Lapja* would interview childless women, print their letters in the magazine and take up a discussion on childlessness marks both a resistance and journalistic bravery—and perhaps the fourteen articles on

childlessness I have found in the magazine represent a resistance much larger than I, as an outsider, can fathom.

Further Study

There are many avenues of research that could be furthered based on this dissertation. One area of interest would be to examine infertility or involuntary childlessness. I did not address this topic here because, although there is overlap between voluntarily and involuntarily childless women, infertility brings with it completely different discourses and reactions—women who cannot have children are often pitied, expected to endure expensive and uncomfortable treatments and their bodies are looked upon as failures. Further, in *Nők Lapja* specifically, there were only a few articles concerning infertility, and typically they offered advice on clinics and treatments, providing little opportunity to actually *speaking* about childlessness. Looking forward to my next, potential research project(s), I would be interested in examining contemporary Hungarian discourses concerning infertility, the treatments available and how these are shaped and funded. I strongly believe that such a project would do much to move forward the present study. Additionally, I would be interested in including the experiences of men without children—only briefly touched upon here. And, as mentioned, it would be interesting to devote time to finding other sources of representations of childlessness in Hungary, extending my study to other women's magazines and media. Concerning family formations, a study of what kinds of families are promoted by *Nők Lapja* would further illustrate the magazine's role in nation-building, as I noted a theme of interviewing women with large families and many children.

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