

Editors' Introduction: Gender and Nation in Hungary since 1919

The articles of the present volume investigate the intersections of gender and nation in Hungary since the end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. They reflect on the political, social, and cultural developments of the last hundred years in Hungary that resulted in a wide range of definitions and discourses concerning the content and boundaries of the nation. The seven contributions occupy a broad range of disciplines, from political, cultural, and gender history to literary studies and political science. They explore the ways in which gender has been used — and abused — in the construction of the nation under the various regimes that governed Hungary since 1919. Through an intersectional analysis that takes into account the interplay of gender, class, and ethnicity, the articles address the following questions: How were notions and specific definitions of femininity and masculinity mobilized through various political ideologies in Hungarian history? Who was included in the nation and who, when and why was left out or excluded from it?

Few terms have generated more studies and debates in the last few decades in the humanities than nation/nationalism and gender. This introduction is not the place to provide even a cursory overview of the vast scholarship prompted by the renewed interest in nationalism during the last couple of decades, especially pertinent in post-Communist East-Central Europe that has seen a shocking revival of ethnic nationalisms. Similarly, we cannot possibly do justice to gender studies and women's history as they relate to Hungarian studies. Here we can merely point to some of the main influences and lacunae that inspired the editors and authors of this volume in their own work.

Benedict Anderson's analysis of the nation as "an imagined political community" has transformed the study of nationalism.¹ It cast a critical eye on the nation-building process of modern nations, and on the discourses that determine the place of individuals and groups within the nation as well as the roles attributed to them along the lines of gender, class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality. Anderson and others' emphasis on the

role of cultural developments, in particular the intellectual movements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism as well as print culture, in the nation-building process offered a highly fruitful vantage point in the East-Central European context, whose nationalisms, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were grounded in these cultural and intellectual movements. The connection Ernest Gellner made between emerging nationalisms and modernization has been equally important, and helped to draw out the common threads in the region's contested national narratives, traditionally pitted — and articulated — against one another.² This transnational perspective offered the frameworks of the Enlightenment and Romanticism for the study of emerging nationalisms of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and those of modernization and anti-modernity for an interpretation of the radical nationalisms of the early twentieth century and the interwar period, respectively. The influence of these foundational works can be clearly detected in the, to date, perhaps most important contribution to East-Central European nationalism studies, the four-volume reader aptly titled *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)*.³

Coinciding with the rise of new scholarship on nationalism, in the last two decades women's and gender history have gained prominence and uncovered "the relationships between gender and nationalism. Studies of women's participation in national movements and of women's history writing have considerably enriched our knowledge of the role of women in national pasts."⁴ Hungarian scholars were largely cut off from women's and gender history and studies until the late 1980s but have made great strides since 1989. As a result, we can now refer to a sizeable body of scholarship, mapping out the history of the Hungarian women's movements and women's increasing participation in higher education and the professions, rediscovering female artists, and re-evaluating the literary canon by including "forgotten" woman writers. We can also rely on a small number of studies exploring sexualities and masculinities in the last two hundred years of Hungarian history and culture.⁵ Women's and gender studies, however, have failed to breach the walls of mainstream Hungarian scholarship and academia and, not unlike in other parts of the region, remained "quarantined." Likewise, such well-studied topics, pertinent to the history of Hungarian national consciousness and nationalism, as the history of Hungarian nationalist and racial ideologies and movements, the Jewish question, and the right-wing and racist movements and ideologies of the interwar period, have rarely been studied from a gender perspective. This is a phenomenon not unique to Hungary: as a Czech historian of gen-

der and nationalism remarks, “women/gender history throughout Europe largely has been developing parallel to mainstream national history, rather than as its integral part.”⁶ Not even the rise of nationalism in Eastern Europe after 1989 resulted in the incorporation of women in mainstream national histories.⁷

Such pessimistic assessment is not universally accepted: no lesser authority than Benedict Anderson questions it while pointing to signs of progress. In his introduction to a 1995 collection of essays surveying the field of nationalities studies, Anderson states that while “[u]p until recently theoretical writing on nationalism ignored, overlooked, or marginalized the issue of gender (...) this ‘silence’ has been irreversibly ended by a vast corpus of feminist scholarship and theorizing.”⁸ He adds that most of this scholarship has focused on Western/European societies and the ambiguous role women played in various nationalist projects, the way increasing access to the suffrage and citizenship has transformed (undermined but also strengthened in new ways) patriarchal gender relations, including the nation state’s control or attempted control over women’s fertility.⁹

Writing in the same volume, Sylvia Walby reiterates that “most texts on nationalism do not take gender as a significant issue”¹⁰ yet she cites the highly influential volume of Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias as an exception.¹¹ Since its publication in 1989 the volume has inspired countless studies in a wide range of geographical and historical contexts, exploring the ways in which gender and gender relations influence national/ethnic practices and projects.

Examples pertinent to the East-Central European context include the edited volumes and studies by Maria Bucur, Nancy Wingfield, Karen Hagemann, Pieter Judson, Marsha Rozenblit, and Melissa Feinberg, among others.¹² A recent volume edited by Agatha Schwartz connects modernity, one of the key concepts shown to spur on the emergence of the nation state, to notions and definitions of gender roles.¹³ A handful of recent studies explore aspects of Hungarian history and culture under the lens of gender and nation — and come from scholars working outside of Hungary, highlighting the reluctance of Hungarian scholars to engage with gender and theory in general.¹⁴

By setting the chronological limits of this volume, we intended to highlight the break between the liberal prewar period and the anti-liberal post-1919 period in Hungarian history. The liberal achievements of the 1848-49 revolution and War of Independence and the 1867 Compromise had brought Hungary into the European mainstream and guaranteed Jewish emancipation as well as linguistic and cultural rights for the ethnic

minorities. By the end of the 19th century women's education rights were enshrined in legislation. But these developments were also contested: in the last decades of the 19th century growing intolerance against the cultural and political rights of the nationalities and emerging anti-liberal political parties brought the principles — and practice — of liberal citizenship into question. By the first decade of the twentieth century the limitations of citizenship/electoral rights were vehemently contested by the Social Democratic Party and its trade unions, a strong women's rights movement, and the political movements of the nationalities; and at the end of the WWI the last of these brought down the Monarchy.

In the aftermath of the revolutions and the Trianon Treaty, the conservative regime of the interwar period articulated a new definition of citizenship and indeed the Hungarian nation by rejecting the liberal principles of the prewar period. The dominant Christian-nationalist ideology of the interwar era, especially in its radical representatives, came to rely on an openly racist and exclusionary rhetoric and political practices. Universal suffrage, including women, was granted in 1918 and practiced for the first time in 1920 but would be gradually limited during the interwar period. The dominant conservative discourse also reversed the liberal model of women's emancipation and reinforced women's traditional roles of women in both public and private life. A series of anti-Semitic legislation, from the 1920 *numerus clausus* law to the so-called Jewish laws between 1938 and 1941, gradually limited the educational, civil, professional and economic rights of Hungarian Jews, and eventually stripped Hungarian Jews of their citizenship on racial grounds.

After 1945 racial and gender discrimination was outlawed and women finally achieved full citizenship — however, during the Stalinist period, citizenship would be restricted on social grounds, and members of the old elite excluded from the nation. Although during the state socialist period — commonly known as the Kádár regime — these restrictions would cease to apply, the lack of political democracy and the limits placed on civil society made a mockery of citizenship rights. The governing ideology declared discrimination against women and ethnic and racial minorities (in and outside Hungary) solved, and any form of nationalism obsolete and superseded by a fictitious, homogenous “socialist nation.”

One of the unexpected and most disappointing developments of the post-Communist period in Hungary has been the downward turn in gender equality; the token political representation of women during the state socialist era was replaced not by genuine political participation but, quite the opposite, women's unprecedented under-representation in poli-

tical life. Despite the commitments for gender parity, undertaken by recent Hungarian governments and underwritten by the European Union, Hungary lags far behind not only Western European but other post-Communist countries when it comes to women representatives and leadership positions in political and economic life. In addition, patriarchal gender discourses with a decidedly anti-feminist bent have become an accepted part of public life, including the media. Expressions of racism, sexism, and homophobia, often by officials of parties represented in parliament, have become tolerated elements of public discourse. In official celebrations and rhetoric, highly conservative and Christian gender hierarchies are promoted as the carriers of traditional Hungarian values, reviving a definition of national identity reminiscent of the dominant discourses of the interwar period.

It is particularly fitting then that the interwar years are the setting for four contributions in this volume. In “Nationality, Sexuality, and Gender in Literary Representations of Ilona Zrínyi” Tímea Jablonczay explores the interplay between gender and nation-building in Hungary of the 1920s based on the figure of Ilona Zrínyi. Jablonczay demonstrates how this 17th-century historical female figure became a captive of the web of nationalist narratives of the Horthy-era and its homogenizing discourses about gender identities for the sake of the “imagined community” of the Hungarian nation, discourses that reinforced patriarchal constructions of femininity and masculinity.

Fiona Stewart in “‘The Parting of Ways:’ The Shifting Relationship between Anna Lesznai and Emma Ritoók, and the Restructuring of Hungarian Cultural and Political Life in the Early 1920s,” narrates the friendship between the two Hungarian women writers. She describes the breakdown of their personal relationship caused by Emma Ritoók’s engagement with a racially grounded anti-Semitism. Through this case study, Stewart offers a picture of the political and cultural atmosphere of post-Trianon Hungary, an atmosphere increasingly characterized by a narrow definition of who belonged to the Hungarian nation and who was to be excluded from it.

In his analysis of the recent Karády renaissance, in “Mata Hari or the Body of the Nation? Interpretations of Katalin Karády” David S. Frey dissects the multitude of symbolic meanings that were cast upon the popular screen star of interwar Hungary. Frey is particularly interested in how the interwar discourses of gender and nation played out in the numerous images that Karády embodied in the eyes of many of her contemporaries and how these images have been re-evaluated and re-contextualized in post-communist Hungary.

Róbert Kerepeszki in “Nationalist Masculinity and Right-Wing Radical Student Movements in Interwar Hungary: The Case of the Turul Association” describes the development of the leading radical right-wing student association in interwar Hungary, paying special attention to its gender aspects. Kerepeszki analyzes the mixture of anti-modernism, anti-feminism, anti-Semitism, nationalism, and militarism that shaped Turul’s ideology. Although mentioned only in passing, it is significant that Katalin Karády and the femininity she represented (the independent, sensual “femme fatale,” the exact opposite of Turul’s domestic, motherly and subordinate feminine ideal) was seen by Turul as a threat to Hungarian youth and her films were boycotted by Turul’s leadership.

Andrea Pető in “Gendered Exclusions and Inclusions in Hungary’s Right-Radical Arrow Cross Party (1939-1945): A Case Study of Three Female Party Members” uses material from the so-called People’s Tribunals that took place in the immediate post-WWII period. She analyzes the perspective of three women who found a space for political agency either through membership in and work for the Arrow Cross Party or via association with high-ranking Arrow Cross officials. She demonstrates that, despite the party’s overall anti-modernist gender rhetoric, some women aligned themselves with its right-wing, anti-Semitic ideology and embraced an anti-modernist emancipation model so as to give their “feminine” contribution to what they had considered as the healing of the dismembered post-Trianon national body.

Katalin Fábíán and Tanya Watson both address the gender politics of the contemporary period. In “Naming Rights: Nation, Family, and Women’s Rights in the Debates on Domestic Violence in Contemporary Hungary,” Fábíán describes the reluctance to tackle the issue of domestic violence that pervades Hungarian politics to this day, thus making Hungary one of the last countries in the European Union without legislation against domestic violence. Through an intersectional analysis, she presents the various activists of the debate surrounding domestic violence and, more broadly, violence against women in Hungary against the background of the new wave of conservative nationalist rhetoric.

In “Hungarian Motherhood and *Nők Lapja Café*” Tanya Watson examines the representations of women and motherhood in contemporary Hungary based on the most popular, mainstream online women’s magazine. In her analysis of a selection of articles, she detects an emphasis on definitions of motherhood embedded in a strictly heterosexual model of motherhood, along with a rejection of “foreign” models of motherhood and parenting in favour of the “true” Hungarian ways of mothering.

With this special volume we intend to provide a forum for young and established researchers, from both Hungary and North America, to present their research and thus establish links of communication between scholars working within and outside Hungary. While the fields and themes covered in the volume are by no means exhaustive, we are hopeful that this forum will encourage young scholars to engage with or continue their work on these pertinent topics and that the studies published here will inspire further discussion.

NOTES

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition (London, New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalisms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

³ Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Gorny, Vangelis Kchriotis, Michal Kopeček, Boyan Manchev, Balázs Trencsényi, Marius Turda, eds., *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)*, vols. 1-3 (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006-2010). Incidentally, the series was edited and published under the aegis of Central European University in Budapest whose graduate programs, including its Nationalities and Gender Studies, underline the crucial importance of the study of these fields in the Central and Southeastern European region.

⁴ Jitka Malečková, "Where Are Women in National Histories?" in Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, eds., *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, 171.

⁵ For recent overviews of the achievements and lacunae of women's and gender studies in Hungary, see Andrea Pető and Judith Szapor, "The state of women's and gender studies in Eastern Europe – The case of Hungary," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Spring 2007), 160-166 and Éva Fodor and Eszter Varsa, "At the Crossroads of East and West: Gender Studies in Hungary" in Christine Bose and Minjeong Kim, eds., *Global Perspectives on Gender Research: Transnational Perspectives* (New York, London: Routledge, 2012).

⁶ Malečková, op. cit., 195.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gopal Balakrishnan, ed., with an introduction by Benedict Anderson, *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso, 1996), 12.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Sylvia Walby, "Woman and Nation," in Balakrishnan, *Mapping the Nation*, 235.

¹¹ Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds. *Woman-Nation-State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

¹² Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006), Pieter Judson and Marsha M. Rozenblit, eds., *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, Catherine Hall, eds., *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and Anna Clark, eds., *Representing Masculinity: Male Citizenship in Modern Western Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), K. Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert, eds., *Gendering Modern German History: Themes, Debates, Revisions* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), and Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive equality: gender, citizenship, and the limits of democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1950* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

¹³ Agatha Schwartz, ed., *Gender and Modernity in Central Europe: The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Its Legacy* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), Agatha Schwartz, *Shifting Voices: Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de-Siècle Austria and Hungary* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).