

Gendered Exclusions and Inclusions in Hungary's Right-Radical Arrow Cross Party (1939-1945): A Case Study of Three Female Party Members

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World War II is not exactly known as a time when many women broke through the glass ceiling to become visible in public life.¹ In interwar Hungary political citizenship was determined by growing restrictions on women's suffrage. These restrictions were opposed by social democrats and communists, but also by the increasingly powerful far right.² In this paper I look at four women on the far right who managed to break through the glass ceiling. In doing so, I seek to determine how they represented the far right's image of women.³ How was political citizenship defined by the far right and how did the individual women involved in politics fit this definition? Who were the women on the extreme right and what can we learn from their life stories? These questions are poignant if our aim is to analyze female mobilization on the far right in terms of women's agency. In line with Saba Mahmood, I understand agency to mean the ability of the social agent to question existing social norms.⁴ It was, in part, this factor that mobilized the far-right women under investigation, for, in addition to promoting the general far-right political agenda, the women were also seeking to gain acceptance for their own goals. In my paper I firstly examine what we know about these women and the sources available for studying their lives. I then analyze how historical role-models were used by the far right to define political citizenship. Finally, in an analysis of three life stories, I show how far-right women maneuvered themselves in the face of conflicting political pressures.

Women on the far right: sources and facts

Before addressing the facts, we should clarify the extent to which the three stories under consideration are representative. In Hungary, gendered

analysis of the history of the far right is still in its infancy.⁵ The records of the People's Tribunal (that were set up immediately after the war) represent a point of departure for a systematic examination of the subject.⁶ This material can be used to reconstruct the types of women that were attracted to the far right and the reasons for their attraction.

The following question should be asked: Who were the women tried by the People's Tribunal as war criminals? Ildikó Barna and I undertook an analysis of the social backgrounds of women defendants at the trials.⁷ In our paper, which appeared in the magazine *Élet és Irodalom* [Life and Literature], we showed, based on the database of the Budapest City Archives, that women accounted for 10 percent of all of war crime prosecutions.⁸ This percentage roughly corresponds to the current female-male ratio in Hungarian public life and politics. Prior to 1945, however, women were rarely active in public life, and so the 10 percent figure seems rather high.⁹ One should note, however, that in the aftermath of World War II the reinvigorated Communist Party used the juridical process both to stigmatize the Horthy regime and to suppress the "matriarchy born in need."¹⁰ On the other hand, we also know that in some party branch organizations as many as 30 percent of members were women, which suggests that the figure of 10 percent was less than women's overall share of party membership.

In 1939, when a number of Hungary's right-radical movements coalesced into the Arrow Cross Party,¹¹ the official discourse of the Horthy regime was hostile to women. In higher education, the rights of women to university study (granted in 1895) were severely restricted in the immediate aftermath of World War I.¹² These restrictions seem to have been made in reaction to the increased political presence of women,¹³ which threatened the positions of the pre-1918 political elite. Around this time, the National Association of Hungarian Women [*Magyar Asszonyok Nemzeti Szövetsége*, MANSZ] — founded by Cécile Tormay in 1918 — became the umbrella women's organization. It mobilized middle and upper-middle class women and it also functioned to limit the spread of left-wing and right-wing radicalism.¹⁴

During the parliamentary debate of the electoral law in 1938, it became clear that far-right groups — who shared with the left wing a desire to extend suffrage — were gaining ground.¹⁵ Among Hungary's politicians, Gyula Gömbös — who drew many of his organizational ideas from the Italian fascist state — paid special attention to women's political mobilization: he even set up a separate women's party.¹⁶ Subsequently, the far right also gave increased attention to the mobilization of women. The

Arrow Cross Party itself was formed from many divided and marginalized small groups and parties under the leadership of Ferenc Szálasi. The Arrow Cross Party first ran in the 1939 elections.

The Arrow Cross Party organization was based on a sexually divided and hierarchical order. Its women's organization was at the same level as the youth section. Its function was to promote mass membership. However, the Arrow Cross leadership recognized the political value of its female members. Various types of membership were made available to women: they could be members, supportive members or even secret supporters. The all-male party leadership wanted female party members to be active primarily in the social field. We know from press articles that the party's women members were not satisfied with this status: they too wanted to play an active role in politics.¹⁷ However, if the Arrow Cross Party's female members "had taken themselves seriously" — that is, if they had behaved as men's political equals — they would have been immediately dismissed from party headquarters. In the party's top leadership and decision-making bodies there was no place for women. The case of Mrs. Dücső, the leader of the women's section of the Arrow Cross Party, demonstrates this form of treatment. At the same time, in the official Arrow Cross rhetoric, women were defined as strong and active. The Arrow Cross movement was a so-called counter-movement; under the Horthy regime it was denied official recognition and many of its members were imprisoned as the Horthy regime tried to navigate between the extreme left (the communists) and the extreme right (the Arrow Cross Party and its predecessor groups). The movement may also be seen as a socialization movement as it prepared its members for a series of events that were to take place sometime in the future. This moment came on October 15, 1944, when, in the aftermath of Regent Horthy's failed attempt to pull out of the war, the Arrow Cross came to power in Hungary, forming a Quisling-like government.

The women associated with the Arrow Cross Party formed four separate yet heterogeneous groups.¹⁸ The first group consisted of women who had joined other far-right parties already in the 1920s. They were disillusioned white-collar women (such as typists and bookkeepers). Many of them had come to "truncated Hungary" (as the country was referred to following the Treaty of Trianon according to which Hungary lost two thirds of its pre-WWI territories) as ethnic Hungarian refugees from areas ceded to the successor states of Austria-Hungary after 1919. For these women, the newly-founded Arrow Cross Party offered a framework for their social integration in their chosen country. Often single, these working

women believed that their professional and social mobility had been hindered by a conservative political regime with its emphasis on a woman's place in the home. For this reason, they supported radical political solutions, in particular those offered by the far right.

The second group comprised women from lower-middle class or working class backgrounds who had committed criminal acts during the war. These women formed the largest group of defendants at the People's Tribunal. Specific (financial or personal) motives seem to have been behind their actions. They exploited the Shoah to take revenge and to "redistribute" social goods. Such women included the mentally ill as well as others who clearly suffered from psychological problems.

The third group consisted of rebellious and revolutionary women from middle-class or upper-middle class backgrounds. They were educated, wore men's clothing, and rode horses — just like men. Although these women had gained access to areas formerly closed to them, appeared emancipated and rejected patriarchy as the primary markers of their identity, they were marked by anti-modernism as their identity had been formed against European modernity and the enlightened interpretation of progress.

The fourth group is the best known and most visible in the public discourse. Here, we find family members of Arrow Cross leaders. Most of these women were from middle-class or upper-middle class backgrounds, but unlike the third group, they had no professional aspirations. They were the wives or relatives of men (husbands, brothers, and fathers) who had joined the Arrow Cross Party. Such relationships explained their actions. The public identity was that of "wife" or "supporter" to the husband or relative. Further below, I will present live stories of women that belonged to one of these groups; however, not all four groups will be represented.

The Arrow Cross Party had been formed in the misogynistic political milieu of interwar Hungary, in which "women" (especially the "new women" — i.e., working independent single women) were regarded as a threat and as unreliable by the male economic, political and cultural hegemony. A noticeable trend was the squeezing out of women from public life, achieved in part by restricting women's suffrage. In the aftermath of World War I, attempts were also made to restrict women from taking part in higher education.¹⁹ The reformulation of political citizenship also meant determining which women belonged to the nation and which did not. It was against this backdrop that the Arrow Cross Party broke onto the scene. In spite of its anti-modernist rhetoric, the party nevertheless provided space for the realization of female autonomy. The reconstructed

stories present women who corresponded with (or adapted in line with their own needs) the normative far-right image of femininity, an image based on motherhood.

Defining role models and femininity

Before we examine — based on the life stories revealed in the courtroom — the normative definition of gender on the far right, it is worth looking at the manner in which the Arrow Cross Party made use of historical role models to define normative femininity. We can do so by comparing the Hungarian far-right movement with other major rightist movements in Europe at the time. If we look at countries other than Nazi Germany, we find some very interesting parallels.

Similarly to the women's organization of the Spanish Falangists, the women's section of the Arrow Cross Party strove to redefine femininity at a time when an increasing number of women were in paid employment.²⁰ Whereas the Falangists provided women, by means of education, with opportunities to integrate into Francoist public life (universities in Spain would only open to women in 1940), the same was not true for women who were employees or members of the Arrow Cross Party.²¹ Just like the Arrow Cross, the Falangist women's organization defined the new female role with the help of historical female figures. However, whereas the Falangists propagated the cult of Isabella I (unifier of Spain) and the cult of St. Teresa of Avila (founder of the Discalced Carmelites), thereby demonstrating that religious beliefs and an active public role are not contradictory aims and aspirations, the Arrow Cross Party considered the women's ideal to be the charity work of St. Elizabeth of Hungary. And whereas the Falangists respected Nobel-prize winner Marie Curie for being an outstanding scientist, the Arrow Cross press praised her for being both an excellent scientist and a good mother:

If a woman wishes to achieve something in the intellectual field that is of real worth in absolute terms, she must have a rich and unimpaired emotional life. That is to say, she must be fully a woman. An excellent example of this is Marie Curie who was both a caring mother and an outstanding wife. By recognizing this, one will see the error of those who strove for women's emancipation in the bygone era. Women were made to compete with men in the intellectual field. This distorted their souls and diminished their emotions, thereby causing great harm to their intellectual abilities. It drove them into a purposeless and fruitless struggle in which they

were constantly made to feel the exhausting character of competition.²²

The goal of the Falangists was the inclusion of women in public life. This led women to believe that the organization would assist them if they decided to discard the housewife's role that belonged to old-fashioned and conservative Spain. Now that the Spanish Civil War was over, the Falangists were required to respond to the Republican side's successes in the field of women's emancipation.²³

On the issue of women's employment, views similar to those of the Falangists were held by women members of Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF). Mosley promised equality particularly in the field of employment, and he planned to eliminate gender-based discrimination.²⁴ As a consequence, a fair number of former suffragettes joined the British Union of Fascists, and this led the party to claim that feminism and fascism were not antagonistic.²⁵ The Croatian pro-Nazi Ustasha — irrespective of the movement's nature and the combat situation — chose historical and mythical bellicose queens as historical role models. Still, the role models featured in their press included the first female conductress as well as female artists and sometimes even university students. Indeed, even the life of a warlike Amazonian was portrayed as a potential pathway for women; in this way the Ustasha movement could set as its ultimate goal the turning of its female members into men. This was considered to resolve once and for all the political and rhetorical problem arising from women's difference.²⁶

This type of approach to gender inequality was quite alien to the ideology of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party. One of the Arrow Cross movement's greatest internal debates (a debate nevertheless played out in public) concerned the very issue of the role of Arrow Cross women in politics. The official policy defined citizenship through motherhood: "The object of the women's movement is to make women conscious of the maternal heart and its inherent power and to encourage them to put it to the service of the family and thus of our nation."²⁷

At the same time, women political activists formulated their goals rather differently:

In this one aspect we, Hungarian women, may seem to be feminists. We demand for ourselves equal rights with men in the field of honour. We are aware that this means equal obligations and duties. May we refuse to accept a separation between male honour and

female honour! We protest when people say that a woman's lies can be forgiven and are 'endearing', [...] and we protest when the word 'lady-speech' is pronounced with a wave of the hand.²⁸

In the Arrow Cross women's educational material, we can read that consciousness-raising groups were set up in the women's organization, a move related to attempts to define some kind of equality.

By contrast, the Falangists determined the spaces in which women could abandon the so-called feminine, biologically determined roles: military affairs (at the time of the Civil War), government, religion and education.²⁹ In the case of the Ustasha, the areas were medicine, writing and education.³⁰ These were spaces where there was a possibility of giving recognition to women in a manner that did not compel them to abandon their "feminine attributes." For their part the Arrow Cross leaders remained unaffected by the gender dilemma, and they could not resolve the paradox. For them a woman who failed to conduct herself in accordance with her biologically determined "feminine" attributes, had lost her "femininity" — defined in a hegemonic and normative way. There was only one objection: the historical roles played by women. In this frame, they supported the cult of "ancient Hungarian mothers"³¹ emphasizing that "it is characteristic of our ancient culture that our women live at the side of their men as equal partners."³² They placed the demands of modernization in an anti-modernist evaluation framework, claiming that the loss of this "ancient Hungarian value" was the source of all problems.³³ This definition of womanhood corresponds to Karen Offen's definition of relational feminism, which — unlike individualist feminism (which emphasizes individual autonomy and human rights) — seeks to equalize power relations between women and men yet without questioning existing gender divisions and women's role as part of a heterosexual couple and as mothers.³⁴

In the far-right press of the period, we find only a few articles relating to female role models, which is indicative of the Arrow Cross Party's rhetorical difficulty to define the role of women. The Arrow Cross struggled to cope with the fact that its mainstream gender policy was rejected by many women who otherwise sympathized with party ideology.³⁵ The rhetorical difficulties were, however, overcome in a report by Ica Ruszin, who had gone to the Russian front as a volunteer nurse and SS member. Ruszin returned from the front with a military decoration, but having lost her legs and with a shrapnel in her belly. On the train, she gave a soldier who was teasing her "such a healthy punch with her young war-

trained hand [...] that, in the future, the man will think twice before making jokes about the self-sacrifices of nurses at the height of their profession.”³⁶ This story also served to show how a woman could use physical force, which was later an important requirement of mobilizing far-right women and also a means of extending militarized citizenship to women.

The three stories

In the following three life stories, I show how three women, selected on the basis of the aforementioned typology although not in the same order, were mobilized into supporting the far-right movement. More broadly, I examine how these women could enter the social space and what factors determined their political citizenship in this period. Through the life stories of such prominent figures as Gizella Lutz, Mrs. Dücső, Mrs. Gönczi (Erzsébet Madarász), and Mária Kozma, we can gain insights into the dilemmas faced by Arrow Cross women in the process of exclusion and inclusion by which political citizenship was established.

1. The wives of Arrow Cross leaders: Gizella Lutz (wife of Ferenc Szálasi)

An important aspect of my research is to look at the wives of Arrow Cross leaders as well as female party members.³⁷ In the aftermath of World War II, historians of Nazism and fascism were quick to write down the life stories of the wives and lovers of prominent Nazi and fascist leaders, often portraying them as foolish puppets. In recent decades, more nuanced analyses of these women have been published, and we now also know more about the activities of the many women who became members or supporters of the Nazi and fascist movements.³⁸

In the Arrow Cross, the wives of party leaders ran an important network, which played a significant role in the distribution of jobs. Women in this group were the best known and visible in the public discourse: they were family members of the Arrow Cross leaders. They came from middle-class or upper-middle class backgrounds and lacked professional aspirations. They were the wives or relatives of men (husbands, brothers or fathers) who had joined the Arrow Cross Party. Family relations influenced their decisions and behaviour. Their public identity was that of “wife” or “supporter” to a husband or male relative.

On February 7, 1946, Ferenc Szálasi, on the third day of his trial before the People's Tribunal, told the court about the roles he assigned to women in his movement and to Gizella Lutz. When the prosecutor, László Frank, asked — in a manner replete with misogyny — whether women active in politics (and particularly in the Arrow Cross) were necessarily of loose morals, Szálasi replied that the women had been knitting stockings and woollens, and when a “real situation” had arisen — a sudden snowfall — they had helped clear snow. Through this statement Szálasi sought once more to make the female Arrow Cross activists invisible (those that had participated in the movement, but had not been wives or lovers). Many of the women had suffered because of their commitment to the movement. For instance, the English teacher Mária Hunyadi had been interned in 1939 as a punishment for supporting the Arrow Cross; Szálasi had subsequently awarded her a medal for her activities.³⁹

In his private life Ferenc Szálasi very much followed Hitler's model.⁴⁰ After the collapse of Austria-Hungary, he moved from Kassa (today Košice, Slovakia) to Budapest in 1919. The man for whom military life was a vocation and mission formed a relationship with the public servant Gizella Lutz in 1927. From 1936 onwards, he spent much time at her apartment, but he only married her after the couple's flight to Austria in 1945. They were married in Mattsee on April 29, 1945 and taken into American captivity on May 5, 1945. Lutz, who was Szálasi's wife for such a short time, paid a high price for the relationship. The wives of other Arrow Cross leaders captured by the Americans and returned to the Hungarian authorities — the wife of Zoltán Bagossy (who prepared the ground for the Arrow Cross takeover and was assigned by the party to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) or the wife of Péter Hain (a police inspector who became head of the Hungarian Gestapo) — were “merely” sent to internment camps.

Gábor Péter, the Communists' first secret service chief — who was notoriously sensitive to publicity and who played a key role in securing the return to Hungary of people suspected of war crimes — , arranged for the interrogation of Gizella Lutz and of Sári Fedák to be documented.⁴¹ Fedák had returned to Hungary wearing a worn wolf-skin coat. Lutz, a slim middle-aged woman who wore her hair in the style of the famous film star Katalin Karády, was unable to reveal much information about the Arrow Cross movement to her secret police interrogators, for Szálasi had intentionally kept her away from politics. While Lutz had regularly invited the wives of other Arrow Cross leaders to her home for tea, the women were unlikely to have made ground-breaking policy

decisions. When asked by the People's Tribunal about these tea parties, the wife of Ferenc Kassai — the minister without portfolio responsible for national defense and propaganda in Szálasi's government — stated: "We women gathered at the invitation of Gizella Lutz. We discussed a variety of problems, also addressing political topics. We spoke in particular about the coming victory of the Arrow Cross Party."⁴² This group of women — the wives and lovers' group — recruited many female members for the party. One of them was Mária Januj who became the wife and accomplice of the head of the House of Loyalty — an elite Arrow Cross body comprising party members who had been imprisoned or interned for their views — because she was living in the same house as László Baký's⁴³ mother-in-law and, as a single seamstress, hoped to gain social status and a husband by joining the party.⁴⁴ We know from documentary material produced in the course of the People's Tribunal trials that this social network was used to distribute well-paid and secure jobs to people working in the party apparatus. Amid the wartime uncertainty, finding a "good partner" was important; even the aging Jenő Andreánszky, who later became minister of foreign affairs in the Arrow Cross administration, managed to attract a much younger woman as his partner.⁴⁵ But against the backdrop of a Horthy regime obsessed with social differences and hierarchies, these groups of women were light years away from the other female Arrow Cross members who will be analyzed below. This was not a moral problem for Lutz, as she was playing the role of invisible background assistant. It was defeat in war that made her dream come true when she finally married Ferenc Szálasi.

Szálasi and seven of his accomplices were sentenced to death and executed on March 12, 1946. After her return to Hungary, Lutz received sentences from the People's Tribunal on two occasions: November 22, 1945 and June 19, 1946. The People's Prosecutor interpreted various items found in her apartment (such as her husband's photo) as Arrow Cross symbols, and so she was found guilty of disseminating Arrow Cross propaganda. She was then held at an internment camp in South Buda. She spent many years in prison, sharing a cell with Júlia Rajk for a while.⁴⁶ She was freed at the time of the 1956 revolution, thereafter living a quiet life in her apartment on Mester Street, Budapest, until her death in 1992. There was no place for Lutz at Szálasi's public hearth before the war, as she did not fit into the Arrow Cross canon; she was single and childless and, in addition, a public servant. Accordingly, it was only after 1945 that she was included in the far-right canon. Today, on the Internet, she is the object of

a vibrant cult, whereby she is remembered as the wife of Szálasi rather than as the woman who was his unmarried partner for decades.⁴⁷

2. The female physician who “only wanted to heal the body of the nation”⁴⁸

The role played by intellectual women in the far-right movements should not be underestimated, and yet the list of individuals convicted by the People’s Tribunal does not include the Arrow Cross women who published in such party newspapers as *Egyedül vagyunk* [We Are Alone] and *Magyarság* [Hungarians] from the 1930s onwards. With the approach of the Red Army, these women fled to the West. As they were not considered important, the Hungarian authorities never requested their extradition, and so they have been left out of history. Apart from the head of the national Arrow Cross women’s organization, the only other woman in this category to be found on the list is an Arrow Cross district leader. Also absent from the list of defendants are members of the women’s branch of the National Association of Hungarian Physicians [*Magyar Orvosnők Országos Szövetsége*], a body that played a crucial role in preparing the ground intellectually for the far-right movement. However, the chairwoman of the women’s branch, Dr. Erzsébet Madarász (Mrs. Gönczi), is included on the list. In what follows, I seek to give context to her life story.

The Arrow Cross women who had graduated from university at great individual cost had been confronted — as the first generation of women intellectuals — with discrimination in the workplace. They, along with single women who, in search of work, had migrated to Hungary from areas ceded under the Treaty of Trianon and now belonging to other nation states, were profoundly hostile to the patronage and nepotism of the Arrow Cross Party and to the acquiescence of wives and lovers to the “patriarchal bargain,” to use Deniz Kandiyoti’s term.⁴⁹ These women believed in an anti-modernist emancipation, which excluded, in a moral sense, the option of a woman depending financially on her male partner.

Hungary as a nation state was a result of the Treaty of Trianon. People in Hungary regarded their country as a truncated national body. This was an opportunity for women to redefine themselves as healers. The Horthy regime did not establish “a new canon of knowledge”⁵⁰ but rather invoked the metaphor of disease to explain events. According to its rhetoric, while the limbs of the national body had been severed, the trunk had remained.⁵¹ This rhetorical framework represented a particular

opportunity for female physicians. The interwar period saw the first generation of practicing women physicians. Despite the officially granted educational rights prior to World War I, they had to face social prejudice on a daily basis. Faced with such problems, some of the women turned to new disciplines, such as psychoanalysis, or became involved in the radical social movements. Others, however, chose a different path. The example of Erzsébet Madarász shows that employment and a traditional definition of femininity are incompatible in a rhetorical sense or are compatible only at the cost of a compromise with racism.

Reinhart Koselleck has shown how “linguistic communities are organized around specific concepts ... and they also have a temporal aspect.”⁵² Within this framework, the women physicians were those who could be at the forefront of healing the national body in those exceptional or peculiar times. The “peculiarity” was the temporal aspect, as women physicians strove to resolve the conflict between a woman’s traditional role and employment as a physician.⁵³ By 1942 there were as many as 679 women physicians in Budapest, out of a total of 1,207 physicians. 54 percent of these women were married, while this was true for 61.7 percent of male physicians.⁵⁴ The female physician’s work was considered a “noble” profession, which women practiced until they got married. To resolve this situation, in 1927 Eszter Kokas founded the National Association of Hungarian Women Physicians, a body organized on the Italian fascist model but which did not exclude Jewish members.⁵⁵ In their rhetoric they made no mention of the exceptional times and the demands of the nation. The women’s branch of the National Association of Hungarian Physicians, on the other hand, was founded in 1929 and headed by Erzsébet Madarász (Mrs. Gönczi, born in 1898), an experienced female politician. Their rhetoric was very different in that Jews were excluded from membership and support was given to the state-run eugenics program.⁵⁶ With World War II, an increasing number of women physicians was given a professional chance but only because of the “exceptional circumstances.” The concept of citizenship was coupled with usefulness to the nation; moreover, it was a citizenship based on race. During her trial by the People’s Tribunal, Madarász (Mrs. Gönczi), who was one of the few women physicians to have adopted the name of her husband, stated: “Because by profession I am a physician but I am also sensitive to social questions ... I was convinced that I could only realize my social ideas through politics.”⁵⁷

Sensitivity to social issues was on the rise. In 1938, for instance, a survey conducted by the National Association of Women University

Graduates [*Diplomás Nők Országos Egyesülete*] found that 60 percent of respondents reported that they had suffered discrimination in the workplace.⁵⁸ In many cases, such statements concerning discrimination experienced by professional women often led to membership in the Arrow Cross Party as it, as mentioned above, opposed discrimination.

On July 28, 1945, the People's Tribunal sentenced the best-known Arrow Cross woman, Mrs. János Dücső, to ten years imprisonment. This woman had been a member of various far-right groups since the 1920s and had quite a reputation for punching people rather than arguing with them. She suffered from cervical cancer and died as a prisoner on November 27, 1948.⁵⁹ But this did not stop her from maligning Erzsébet Madarász (Mrs. Gönczi) who had been chair of the women's section of previous extreme right wing formations such as the United Women's Camp, and a member of the Meskó political party. The prosecution did not spend much time on compiling an indictment; it was thought that an unusually detailed statement would suffice.⁶⁰ On June 27, 1945, after a fruitless defense, Mrs. Gönczi received a six-month prison term because "she had been persuaded to join the party by an influential male relative."⁶¹ Mrs. Dücső claimed that Mrs. Gönczi "served all the far-right parties throughout the period."⁶² Indeed, Mrs. Gönczi had been a member of the Awakening Hungarians [*Ébredő Magyarok*], of the Race Defense Party [*Fajvédők*],⁶³ and finally of the Arrow Cross Party. It did not matter that Mrs. Dücső had stated that Mrs. Gönczi was an "excellent and experienced voice of the people, who with her actor's voice and passionate performances seized the attention of her listeners and threw them into ecstasy, whereby some of the women were inclined to weep as she spoke."⁶⁴ Concerning her life, one should note that she received a certificate of good conduct on July 20, 1971. Unlike German and Austrian female war criminals, who — if they were jailed at all — were freed in the early 1950s, it was not until the 1970s that most of the Hungarian female war criminals were released. After her release, Mrs. Gönczi became supervising chief physician at the Central Child Dentistry Clinic in Budapest and qualified for a pension at the age of seventy-three.

3. The life of Mária Kozma

The women belonging to the third group (as explained above) were often ignored when it came to speaking about war criminals. These women were activists in the Arrow Cross Party without, however, ever occupying

leading roles. In a 1938 article, Ferenc Bécsi formulated what was expected of women: “The National Socialist Hungarist social movement respects in women the idea of motherhood. Their vocation is fulfilled within the family and at the hearth rather than in taking away men’s bread and butter as men are supposed to found families by becoming public servants or workers.”⁶⁵ Of course, the female ideologues and fanatics within the Arrow Cross Party envisaged a rather different role for women, which resulted in a conflict between the party’s male and female members. The leading Arrow Cross women who had earlier been interned on account of their views and who had become members of the House of Loyalty did not take part in the exercise of power after the Arrow Cross’s takeover on October 15, 1944. There were two reasons for this: first, the limited perspectives of the Arrow Cross party leadership, which did not consider women to be the intellectual or political partners of men; and second, the approach of the Red Army and the chaos this soon generated. At the People’s Tribunal, the fact that leading Arrow Cross women were not included in the leadership of the Hungarian Quisling government was portrayed, in almost all cases, as having been their own decision. This is hardly surprising given that such a stance was likely to result in a much lighter sentence. Given the lack of other sources, we must draw our conclusions from the trial data.

In 1945, eight percent of the defendants facing the People’s Tribunal were concierges or assistant concierges. They came from lower middle-class or working-class backgrounds and their crime had been that they sought to get hold of Jewish property. The authorities were relatively well acquainted with them. Those who did not escape in good time were the first to be reported to the authorities by the residents of their buildings. In this way, they were rapidly included in the justice process.⁶⁶ When questioned on April 5, 1945, Mária Kozma stated that she had been taken to court for verbal abuse and that she had been sentenced to three months’ detention for disruption of peace. She had served her sentence in the city of Győr. Other than that, she had been punished (fined) on just one other occasion for slander and libel. She had been released from Győr prison in April 1941, whereupon she returned to Budapest where she found work as a cashier at the Metropol Hotel. After her return to Budapest, she often went to the Arrow Cross offices and visited Arrow Cross families and attended lectures. Her main area of interest had been social work, and the party leadership supported this “feminine” interest. Her activities in the Party had been in this field. In 1943, she took part in a retraining course, as this was a requirement for becoming a party official. She stated that she

would have gladly played a leading role in the Party, as the Arrow Cross ideas appealed to her and she wanted to serve the Party. In 1941, she had been granted membership in the House of Loyalty, but the Horthy regime subsequently banned this body, although its operations were reauthorized in January 1944. At this time, Kozma had become leader of the District IV branch. In the summer of 1944, she submitted a request for a Jewish shop, but instead of being awarded a bookshop, she was chosen as director of the Arrow Cross Book and Newspaper Publishing Company [*Nyilas Könyv és Lapkiadó Rt*]. In the course of her activity in the party, she spoke to Szálasi on several occasions and she also wrote him a letter stating, according to the minutes of the interrogation: “I, the most diligent visitor to the District IV [Budapest A.P.] party offices.” She also met with Ödön Málnási, chief ideologue of the Arrow Cross Party, who, after her release from prison, asked her whether she wished to submit a compensation claim. On several occasions she contributed to the newspaper *Solidarity* [*Összetartás*]. In her articles she praised the Arrow Cross ideas and spread party propaganda. She concluded her statement as follows: “I acted as a convinced Arrow Cross supporter, I made the Arrow Cross ideas my own, and I still support them and where possible, disseminate them.”⁶⁷ It comes as no surprise that she was convicted. She might have been treated more leniently had she stated something similar to what another woman — one of the few district party heads to be tried by the People’s Tribunal — stated: “I visited the members, collected membership dues, and distributed tickets for cultural events. I did not do anything else. ... I know no more than the others because we women were not involved [in the decision-making process].”⁶⁸

Still, Kozma’s resume, attached to the trial papers for October 13, 1952, reveals something else, a typical turn of events at the time: not only had she been involved in politics, but at the end of the war she had occupied an apartment so as to “guard” it; however, she subsequently refused to return it to the rightful tenants once they reappeared. The latter reported her to the authorities and she was imprisoned. After her release, she offered her services to the State Protection Authority [*Államvédelmi Hatóság, ÁVH*], who gladly employed her as an informer as she was a member of the Trade Union for Concierges and of the Hungarian-Soviet Society.

Conclusions

Based on the typical life stories of these three far-right women, we can draw some conclusions about the gender policy of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party and its definition of political citizenship. The first conclusion

is about the great variety of the forms of women's political activity; such activity was not limited to party politics but was also manifest at informal gatherings, such as tea parties and "alternative public spaces."⁶⁹ The arenas in which political citizenship was exercised are also definable in terms of class: only exceptionally did women get close to the decision-making level. Other women were left with the "politics of motherhood" as a means of exercising pressure or a space for the expression of political power.

The second conclusion is about the ways in which political and economic motives merged. It is difficult to separate politics from economic motives when discussing how women managed to get into positions where they could contribute to definitions of citizenship. The statements made by far-right women at the People's Tribunal often reveal individual needs as a motive for stealing Jewish property.

Thirdly, the women's stories are often characterized by a political radicalism that was a reaction to society's rigidity and to discrimination. These women became supporters of the far right based on their professional experiences. This political force offered them a form of political citizenship that guaranteed their place in a political regime founded on exclusion. And, finally, politically active women on the far right sought forms of organization that corresponded to their own views, and it was during the post-war decades of communist rule that they finally found such forms of organization. The female concierges who had supported the Arrow Cross willingly became communists. In the post-World War II "new order" the forms of subordination remained the same as they had been under Arrow Cross rule.

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this paper was published as "Három háborús bűnös nő élettörténetének tanulsága" [What can we learn from the life stories of three female war criminals] in *Határonkon túl. Tanulmánykötet Mark Pittaway emlékére* [A book of studies in memory of Mark Pittaway] ed. Eszter Bartha and Zsuzsanna Varga (Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2012), 248-264.

² Andrea Pető and Judith Szapor, "Women and the 'Alternative Public Sphere': Towards a New Definition of Women's Activism and the Separate Spheres in East-Central Europe," *NORA The Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 12/4 (2004): 172-182.

³ Andrea Pető, *Women in Hungarian Politics, 1945-1951* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2003).

⁴ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 5.

⁵ For some of the reasons see Andrea Pető, “Who is Afraid of the ‘Ugly Women’? Problems of Writing Biographies of Nazi and Fascist Women in Countries of the Former Soviet Block?” *Journal of Women’s History* 21/4 (2009): 147–151.

⁶ I am considering the process of People’s Tribunals as a legal process and I am using their material accordingly. See more on this in Ildikó Barna and Andrea Pető, *A politikai igazságszolgáltatás a II. világháború utáni Budapesten* [Political justice in post-World War II Budapest] (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2012).

⁷ Ildikó Barna and Andrea Pető, “A csúnya asszonyok. Kik voltak a női háborús bűnösök Magyarországon” [Ugly women: Who were the female war criminals in Hungary], *Élet és irodalom*, October 26, 2007, 10.

⁸ A recent representative quantitative study found that 18 percent of the defendants were women. In Barna and Pető, *A politikai igazságszolgáltatás a II. világháború utáni Budapesten*, esp. pp. 101–116.

⁹ See more: Andrea Pető, “Problems of Transitional Justice in Hungary: An Analysis of the People’s Tribunals in Post-War Hungary and the Treatment of Female Perpetrators” *Zeitgeschichte* 34/3–4 (2007): 335–349.

¹⁰ Andrea Pető, “Women’s Associations in Hungary: Mobilisation and Demobilisation, 1945–1951,” in *When the War Was Over: Women, War and Peace in Europe, 1940–1956*, ed. Claire Duchon and Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann (London: Leicester UP, 2000), 132–146.

¹¹ The Arrow Cross Party was formed from different far right groups in 1939. In 1942 its name was changed to Arrow Cross Party-Hungarist Movement. About the Arrow Cross Party see: Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others. The History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1970).

¹² Pető and Szapor, “Women and the ‘Alternative Public Sphere’.”

¹³ After the disintegration in the late autumn of 1918 of the Austro-

Hungarian Empire, the democratic Károlyi government introduced universal suffrage for men over the age of 21 and women over the age of 24. These efforts were then thwarted because of the political takeover by the communist Kun government. Hungarian women were given the right to vote in 1920 as a result of the pressure by the Allied powers. However, with Miklós Horthy’s conservative regime, this right was repeatedly restricted, first in 1921 and then in 1924, to women over the age of 30 who had to fulfil certain economic and educational conditions. With the emergence of a conservative women’s movement in the interwar years, women’s rights only become part of the political agenda again after 1945.

¹⁴ About the history of women’s political mobilisation before WWI see Pető and Szapor, “Women and the ‘Alternative Public Sphere’,” introducing the

colorful world of women's associations from professional, religious and charitable organisations to the progressive Feminist Association.

¹⁵ Andrea Pető, "Kontinuität und Wandel in der ungarischen Frauenbewegung der Zwischenkriegperiode" [Continuity and change in the Hungarian women's movement in the interwar years], in *Feminismus und Demokratie: Europäische Frauenbewegung der 1920er Jahre*, edited by Ute Gerhard (Königstein: Ulrike Helmer, 2001), 138–159.

¹⁶ József Vonyó, "Women in Hungary in the 1930s: The Role of Women in the Party of National Unity," in *Women and Power in East Central Europe—Medieval and Modern*, ed. Marianne Sághy, vol. 20–23/1 of *East Central Europe—L'Europe du centre-est* (1993–1996): 201–218.

¹⁷ *A Nép*, February 25, 1943, 4.

¹⁸ See more: Zonneke Matthée and Andrea Pető, "A 'kameraadskes' és a 'testvérnők': Nők a holland és a magyar nemzeti szocialista mozgalomban: motiváció és akarat" ["Kameraadskes" and "sisters": Women in the Dutch and Hungarian National Socialist movements: motivation and agency], in *Határtalan nők: Kizártak és befogadottak a női társadalomban*, edited by Eszter Zsófia Tóth and Boglárka Bakó (Budapest: Nyitott Műhely, 2008), 285–303.

¹⁹ Pető and Szapor, "Women and the 'Alternative Public Sphere'."

²⁰ Mary Nash, "Pronatalism and Motherhood in Franco's Spain," in *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States 1880s–1950s*, edited by Gisela Bock and Patricia Thane (London: Routledge, 1994), 160–177.

²¹ Inban Ofer, "Historical Models—Contemporary Identities: The Sección Fememina of the Spanish Falange and its Redefinition of the Term 'Femininity'," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40/4 (2005): 663–674.

²² "A nő a mozgalomban: Érzelem az értelemhez" [Women in the movement: emotions in rationality], *A Nép*, January 2, 1943, 4.

²³ See more: Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War 1936–1939* (London: Penguin, 1979); and Aurora G. Morcillo, *The Catholic Womanhood: Gender Ideology in Franco's Spain* (Illinois: Northern Illinois UP, 2000).

²⁴ Martin Durham, "The Home and the Homeland: Gender and the British Extreme Right," *Contemporary British History* 17/1 (2003): 69; Robert Benewick, *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 1969); Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (London: Papermal, 1975). On the Italian case see: Perry R. Willson, *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) and Perry R. Willson, "Cooking the Patriotic Omelette: Women and the Italian Fascist Ruralisation Campaign," *European History Quarterly* 27/4 (1997): 531–547.

²⁵ Durham, "The Home and the Homeland," 71.

²⁶ Rory Yeomans, "Militant Women, Warrior Men and Revolutionary Personae," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 83/4 (2005): 712–730.

²⁷ Budapesti és vidéki női főcsoport vezetője, “Köszöntjük a Nagyasszonyt!” [Greetings to the Great Lady!], *A Nép*, November 19, 1942.

²⁸ Józsefné Thoma, *A hungarista nő hármas feladatköre* [The three duties of Hungarist women] (Manuscript. Archives of the Institute for Political History, 685. f. 1/4.), 14.

²⁹ Ofer, “Historical Models—Contemporary Identities,” 673.

³⁰ Yeomans, “Militant Women, Warrior Men and Revolutionary Personae,” 718.

³¹ Mária Katona, “A nő a fegyveres nemzetben” [Woman in the armed nation], *A Nép*, September 14, 1944, 3.

³² “A turáni nő” [The woman of Turan], *A Nép*, April 8, 1943, 5.

³³ On its presence in contemporary Hungary see: Andrea Pető, “Anti-Modernist Utopia in ‘New Europe’: Protest, Gender and Well-Being,” in *Transforming Gendered Well-Being in Europe: The Impact of Social Movements*, edited by Alison Woodward, Jean-Michel Bovin and Mercé Renom (Ashgate, 2011), 83–96.

³⁴ Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs* 14/1 (1988): 136.

³⁵ Maria Fraddosio, “The Fallen Hero: The Myth of Mussolini and the Fascist Women in the Italian Social Republic 1943–45,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 31 (1996): 99–124.

³⁶ Lili Fabinyi, “Nagy idők, apró esetek” [Great times, small cases], *A Nép*, March 28, 1944, 4.

³⁷ About the wives of Arrow Cross Functionaries see Andrea Pető, “Who is Afraid of the Ugly Women,” 147–151, and Andrea Pető, “Arrow Cross Women and Female Informants,” *Baltic Worlds* 2/3–4 (2009): 48–52.

³⁸ On Nazi Germany see Karin Fontaine, *Nationalsozialistische Aktivistinnen (1933–1945): Hausfrauen, Mütter, Berufstätige, Akademikerinnen: so sahen sie sich und ihre Rolle im „tausendjährigen Reich“* [National-Socialist activists [1933–1945]: Housewives, mothers, employed and professional women: how they saw themselves and their role in the Third Reich] (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003).

³⁹ Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára [ÁBTL, Historical Archive of State Security Services], V 102649.

⁴⁰ See more: Andrea Pető, “A ‘rossz asszonyok’: Eva Braun, Carla Petacci, Lutz Gizella” [The ‘bad women’: Eva Braun, Carla Petacci, Gizella Lutz] *Rubicon* 8 (2007): 24–32.

⁴¹ Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Fotótára népbírói gyűjtemény [Photo collection on the People’s Tribunals at the Hungarian National Museum].

⁴² ÁBTL V 92849, 24.

⁴³ A prominent member of the Hungarian far right, László Bakó became state secretary in the Ministry of the Interior following the Nazi occupation of

Hungary in March 1944. He was one of the people directly responsible for the deportation of Hungarian Jews. He was tried and executed in 1946.

⁴⁴ ÁBTL V 88634, 5.

⁴⁵ ÁBTL, V 85316.

⁴⁶ Júlia Rajk (1914-1981), wife of the executed László Rajk (1909-1949) fiercely fought for the reburial of her husband in 1956. In 1948, after a decade's hiatus, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin resumed the show trials of prominent communists. Hungary's dictator Mátyás Rákosi was anxious to prove that he was a loyal follower of the Soviet model and decided on a show trial of an eminent Hungarian communist. His choice fell on Rajk who then was tricked into confessing to crimes against the new socialist order, was condemned to death, and was executed. See Andrea Pető, *Geschlecht, Politik und Stalinismus in Ungarn. Eine Biographie von Júlia Rajk* [Gender, politics and Stalinism: A biography of Júlia Rajk]. Studien zur Geschichte Ungarns, Bd. 12. (Herne, Gabriele Schäfer Verlag, 2007).

⁴⁷ See the interview with her in the film by Tamás Almási, *Ítéletlenül* [Without a verdict], 1991.

⁴⁸ See more: Andrea Pető, "The Rhetoric of Weaving and Healing: Women's Work in Interwar Hungary, a Failed Anti-Democratic Utopia," in *Rhetorics of Work*, edited by Yannis Yannitsiotis, Dimitra Lampropoulou and Carla Salvaterra (Pisa: University of Pisa Press, 2008), 63–83. The quote is from the testimony of Erzsébet Madarász (Mrs. Gönczi) at the People's Tribunal.

⁴⁹ Deniz Kandyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy" *Gender and Society*, 2 (1988): 274-290.

⁵⁰ Patrick Joyce, *The Historical Meanings of Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 19.

⁵¹ See more: Nóra Cselőtei, "Transformation in Body Politics in Interwar Hungary" (MA thesis, Central European University, 2000).

⁵² Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History," in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, written by Reinhart Koselleck (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), 74.

⁵³ More on this strategy of appropriation in Andrea Pető, *Napasszonyok és Holdkisaszonyok: A mai magyar konzervatív női politizálás alaktana* [Sun women and moon girls: The morphology of contemporary conservative female politics] (Budapest: Balassi, 2003).

⁵⁴ Barbara Papp, *A diplomás nők Magyarországon: A Magyar Női Szemle (1935–1941)* [Women with a university degree in Hungary] (PhD thesis, Eötvös Loránd University, 2004), 132.

⁵⁵ Eszter Kokas, "A nők szerepe Olaszország államépítő munkájában" [Women's role in the building of the Italian state], *MONE*, August 1, 1942, 88.

⁵⁶ Kovács, *Hungary*.

⁵⁷ BFL 416/45 Dr. Gönczi Aladárné testimony June 17, 1945, 11.

⁵⁸ Papp, *A diplomás nők*, 75.

⁵⁹ÁBTL, V 91169.

⁶⁰BFL 416/ 45.

⁶¹BFL 416 /45. p. 23.

⁶²BFL 416/ 45. p. 36.

⁶³Margit Szöllösi-Janze, *Die Pfeilkreuzler-Bewegung in Ungarn: Historischer Kontext, Entwicklung und Herrschaft* [The Arrow Cross movement in Hungary: Historical context, evolution and rule] (Munich: Oldenburg, 1989).

⁶⁴Budapest Főváros Levéltára [BFL, Budapest Municipal Archive], 416/45, 34.

⁶⁵Ferenc Bécsi, “A nő szerepe a nemzetiszocialista társadalomban” [The role of women in National-Socialist society), *Hungarista nép*, July 11, 1938, 3.

⁶⁶Barna and Pető, “A csúnya asszonyok,” 10.

⁶⁷ÁBTL V 87614, 79–80.

⁶⁸ÁBTL V 88364, Patal Ferencné, 10.

⁶⁹Pető and Szapor, “Women and the ‘Alternative Public Sphere’.”

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