

Hungarian Motherhood and *Nők Lapja Café*

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In post-socialist Hungarian society there has been an intensified, largely politically driven, emphasis on defining and ensuring women assume their “proper” social roles — typically limited to maternal and nurturing duties. These roles are often entwined with nationalist sentiments as Hungarian women’s social roles are imbued with social responsibility and defined in a context of what is “Hungarian”. In what follows, I first briefly discuss the development of the emphasis on women’s maternal roles in Hungarian society. I then focus on the Hungarian women’s website *Nők Lapja Café*, unpacking the ways in which this website plays a role in shaping and defining women’s roles and what characteristics “good mothers” should embody. I argue that the popular women’s website serves to position Hungarian motherhood as a means by which “Hungarianess” can be defined and compared to other nations.¹

Social Roles Prescribed for Women in Hungary from the 1990s

Beginning in the 1990s — following the fall of communism — dominant discourses promulgated by politicians and the media claimed that “real” Hungarian women want to have large families and make motherhood their main objective.² For example, Lynne Haney describes some of the posters during the first democratic elections post-socialism, and points to the highly pro-natal theme of pregnant women, smiling women with babies, or women tending happily to domestic duties.³ More than just presenting images of women happy to be mothers and homemakers, a poster by the Magyar Demokrata Fórum (Hungarian Democratic Forum, MDF), the leading centre-right party, featured a woman and a baby with the text, “We

are so happy that we can finally go home.”⁴ Importantly, it was not just one party concerned with women returning to the hearth, so to speak. Haney writes of the “excessive” talk of the first democratic leaders of the 1990s, who focused on “the sanctity of the family and the need for women to go home and guard it”.⁵ She explains how, on March 18, 1990 a televised discussion among party representatives featured the topic: “Future Roles for Women”.⁶ 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. Although Hungarian women were obviously, not rejected from the workforce en masse and made to stay at home in the years that followed, many of the women who have been active in the workforce in the post-socialist period have experienced difficulty achieving a desirable work/life balance because women who work continue to experience a double burden — expected to assume the primary care-giving role in addition to working outside the home.⁷

The discouragement of women’s workforce participation was, and is, importantly shaped by the country’s political and social history. Specifically, dominant ideas of women’s roles have been strongly influenced by a desire to slough off foreign influence and return to a more “Hungarian” society. For example, Brigid Fowler explains that Hungarian nationhood is importantly shaped and defined by an intense desire to shed any aspects of life under socialism.⁸ Post-1989 then, the “emancipation” of Hungarian women, thought to have been achieved largely by the employment of women in industrial settings under socialism, has been framed as unnatural and “alien” to Hungarian culture and tradition.⁹ Public policy has been shaped in concert with discourses encouraging motherhood and discouraging women’s employment. For example, 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.¹⁰ This policy was changed only in 2004 when, anxious to join the European Union, Hungarian parliament enacted a law forbidding discrimination based on gender, motherhood or family.¹¹ 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” and making redundant such positions during the woman’s maternity leave.¹² As Éva Fodor explains, a study of the literature concerning Hungarian women and 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".¹³ Éva Fodor and Christy Glass contextualize this policy trend, explaining that

... 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.¹⁴

Complementing a social climate unsupportive of women's employment and concerned with "real" Hungarian women — carried through from the 1990s to contemporary Hungarian culture — is an emphasis on whose procreation is important and desirable. Continuing a long-existing stream in Hungarian political thought, there is in the 21st century an intense concern among some Hungarians that Hungarian ethnicity may disappear.¹⁵ Concurrently, in the last ten years, "there has been a sharp rise in racism and hate crimes".¹⁶ As a result, some Hungarian citizens — it has been approximated that about 50% of the population of Hungary is *overtly* racist¹⁷ — and even acts of legislation are antagonistic to people deemed "un-Hungarian". It is important to note that antiracist activists have been working in Hungary, since the 1990s and currently, to eradicate racism and "hate speech" from Hungarian culture.¹⁸ Roma citizens, however, are particularly targeted; the European Commission has found, overall, that legislation enacted to alleviate racism and discrimination in Hungary has been ineffective and, worse, parliamentary debates have been the site of many racist comments.¹⁹ Indeed, the Roma in Hungary face prejudice and segregation.²⁰ Further, the children of Roma in Hungary are often treated as less important — and less desirable — than ethnically Hungarian children. This is demonstrated by the low academic achievement of many Roma children, which Anna Kende and Mária Neményi argue is a result of the segregation of many Roma children who are placed in insufficient institutions, originally intended for children with mental disabilities, which contribute to their segregation and prevent or limit further education.²¹ As Michelle Behr et al. explain, who is deemed "Hungarian" has become a question of importance in Hungary,²² and the obligation to reproduce and raise more ethnic Hungarians, while maintaining the family's home life, has increasingly fallen on the shoulders of women, held responsible for maintaining the private domain.²³

Tasked with forgoing employment and instead reproducing "Hungarian" children, Hungarian women have been assigned a role in nation building. Nationalism as a concept is hotly debated and defined

inconclusively²⁴ but that is not to say that there is not much to be written about the way in which the identity of a nation is shaped and who is expected to play a role. Fowler explains how Hungarian political elites have, since the early 1990s, struggled to define the Hungarian nation, its relationship to the Hungarian state, non-ethnic Hungarians within the country's geographical borders (although Hungary is fairly homogenous) and also its relationship to other nations.²⁵ In 1999, a program of national "revival" was announced by the then — and current — Prime Minister Viktor Orbán for the 21st century, and he remarked (in an effort to ensure "concerned" Hungarians that joining the European Union would not dilute Hungarian culture) that worrying about one's culture and language was an important — and positive — concern.²⁶

Nira Yuval-Davis argues that much theorizing about the nation, state and citizenship is too often limited to discussion of bureaucrats, policy makers and the intelligentsia, and that not enough attention is paid to the role of women. She argues that women contribute to nation building significantly by reproducing nations both culturally and symbolically.²⁷ In this essay I am concerned with the expectations for the roles Hungarian women are demanded to play in Hungarian nation-building through their reproduction — both in their roles as reproducers, generally, and also in the specific expectations demanded of them as mothers — and the ways of framing Hungarian motherhood as different (and, as I shall demonstrate, "better") than the parenting of other countries by the website *Nők Lapja Café*.

An Introduction to *Nők Lapja Café*

Discourses concerning who is Hungarian, what it means to be Hungarian and what women's roles should be in nation building are spread by many media sources, including media with a targeted female audience. It is important to examine these discourses because in post-socialist Hungary, as Éva Thun explains, women's identities are greatly shaped by popular media.²⁸ Further, the current Prime Minister Orbán and his government (dominated by Fidesz) created an unsettling Media Law Package, which came into effect July 2010 and ensured that the National Media and Info Communications Authority and its Media Council "has oversight over all forms of media" in Hungary, and their rule even extends to the ability to block internet service providers.²⁹ Given the limited freedom the media currently experience in Hungary, it is even more important to examine the

kinds of messages and representations that are disseminated by a website like *Nők Lapja Café*, to contribute to analysis of the ways in which messages of nation, nationhood and women's social roles are relayed in Hungarian society by the media (which are increasingly limited by the government), specifically to an audience of women.

Nők Lapja [Women's Journal] is a weekly Hungarian women's magazine that was launched in 1949, and originally funded by the ruling Hungarian Workers' Party.³⁰ After the fall of communism, the publication was renamed "*Magyar Nők Lapja*" and remained popular — it has become the nation's most read women's weekly magazine.³¹ Currently, the magazine is known simply as *Nők Lapja*. Gabriella Molnár, the magazine's editor-in-chief, explains in a blurb on the website of the magazine's media representative, Sanoma Media, 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.³²

The magazine purports to offer Hungarian women traditional, yet stylish and contemporary content. 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.³³ In 2010, the magazine was read by 5,851,000 readers.³⁴ Importantly, of all of the Hungarian weekly women's magazines, *Nők Lapja* has the highest circulation and most subscribers. Indeed, as Sanoma Media explains (in English on its website), the magazine has the "strongest brand among weekly female magazines,"³⁵ as well as many 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, more like a book), [Nők Lapja Ezotéria](#) (astrology), and [Nők Lapja Egészség](#) (focused on mental and physical health).

Nők Lapja Café is the website of this print magazine. Much like the magazine, the website dominates the market and, according to Sanoma Media, has been the largest and most popular website for women in Hungary for the past ten years. In 2012, the website reached 1.2 million readers per month and had more than 45,000 unique visitors per day. Sanoma Media describes the content of the magazine as "feminine," and

“of high quality,” like the magazine, but explains that the website content differs from the magazine, because the online content “is more dynamic, creative and bolder than the weekly print magazine”. As a result, the target audience for the website is slightly different than that of the magazine, as the website is geared toward urban women who are between the ages of 18 and 39. However, like the print magazine, the target reader has a high school, or higher, education and is also family oriented (defined as in a heterosexual relationship, with a family or wishing to have one). Approximately 60 new articles are published online each day on the website, and are categorized thematically into one of fourteen sections: “stars, gastronomy, fashion, beauty care, family, health, lifestyle, relationships, home, free time, [and] esoterism”.³⁶ The popularity of this website and its connection to such a popular print magazine suggest it to be an excellent illustrative example of contemporary representations and definitions of Hungarian womanhood and motherhood.

Analysis of *Nők Lapja Café*

In the following, I will present the results of an analysis of the website *Nők Lapja Café* over the course of a month.³⁷ For the purpose of this essay, I studied only the “family” section of the website for the month of March 2012, and examined the thematic content of the typically anonymous articles.³⁸ I argue that *Nők Lapja Café* does ideological work,³⁹ promoting nationalism and contributing to definitions of what it means to be Hungarian — as well as making clear the obligations Hungarian women have in maintaining this national character. I argue that *Nők Lapja Café* accomplishes this ideological work by outlining parameters of “good” mothering, favorably comparing Hungarian parenting practices to those of other nations, promoting the advice of Hungarian nationals, and endorsing heteronormative ideals and large families. In the following, I will attempt to explore these narratives, discussing the significance of each.

Interestingly, the content of *Nők Lapja Café* is not concerned exclusively with the experience of Hungarian families, as I had initially assumed it to be. Instead, in the month under study, each week there were many international articles, drawn largely from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Australia, summarized in Hungarian for *Nők Lapja Café* readers. The content of these articles is telling, revealing what kinds of international news stories are deemed significant enough to the website’s editors and authors to translate and publish on the site,

suggesting these topics are thought to be of interest — or important to convey — to the website’s Hungarian readers.

Among these international news stories, a distinct theme is impossible to ignore: the typically favorable comparison of Hungarian policies and parenting practices with those of other countries. Each week, there were articles that critiqued some aspect of parenting in another country, clearly delineating between another country’s poor parenting practices and the supposedly better, safer, healthier practices of Hungarian parents — although normally mothers were the focus. Importantly, this comparison was generally supported by a Hungarian expert in the field.

For example, an article credited only to *Nők Lapja Café*, titled “They Ban Crying Children from Restaurants” addresses the alleged practice of some American restaurants asking patrons with crying children to leave the premises, even if they are mid-meal.⁴⁰ The article’s anonymous author denounces this practice as shocking and ridiculous. Although the author concedes that there are restaurants in Hungary, as elsewhere in the world, that do not allow children, the author is adamant that to banish only *crying* children is an unheard of practice in Hungary. In fact, the author mocks this restaurant policy, asking how a parent can possibly be expected to reason with a three year old — to ask the child to refrain from crying until the meal is consumed. Indeed, the author is outwardly critical of this practice and, by comparing Hungary and the United States on this point, implicitly suggests that Hungarian restaurants, and by extension the nation’s cultural norms, are more sympathetic to parents and children. The author frames the Hungarian dining experience — and by extension, the culture and nation — as more sensible and reasonable.

In another article, titled “Babyccino — Should a Two-Year Old Drink Coffee?” author Erika Szalma criticizes the “babyccino,” a supposedly popular Australian, and now American, beverage for toddlers, made of decaffeinated coffee, lots of sugar and frothy milk or whipped cream.⁴¹ Szalma discusses the practice of acclimatizing young children to such a sweetened, frothy beverage. The tone of the article is disapproving and Szalma clearly distinguishes between the internationally trendy babyccino and Hungarian views on appropriate children’s beverages. In addition to simply describing, or even criticizing the practice in other countries, Szalma compares this trend with Hungarian children’s beverages. Specifically, she explains that this trendy beverage is not popular in Hungary, where mothers avoid plying their children with heavily sweetened, creamy beverages, because experts advise parents to avoid giving toddlers sweetened beverages or whipped cream. Szalma thus suggests that

Hungarian mothers, because they are acting on the advice of Hungarian experts and have not succumbed to the trendiness of this practice, are more vigilant in regards to providing their children healthy beverages. In this way, Hungarian parenting practices are framed as superior and more informed, and of more benefit to children's well-being, while international practices of the "babyccino" are presented as unhealthy, trendy and ridiculous.

Importantly, the advice of Hungarian experts is often cited in the context of analyzing international news stories. A baby yoga exercise that involves "spinning" a baby, advocated by Russian yoga teacher Lena Fokina, is the focus of an article titled "Yoga Teacher Spins Baby Head over Heels".⁴² Fokina is paraphrased as having argued that the technique benefits the baby's health — she is also supported by a Russian obstetrician — but, upon consultation with a Hungarian expert, Edit Szabadi, a massage therapist with *Nők Lapja Café*, the practice is denounced because Szabadi claims it can potentially cause trauma and physical damage to the baby. Instead, she recommends a gentler yoga exercise for babies, contradicting the benefits and safeness Fokina promises. Regardless of whether the yoga practice is sound or not, what is interesting is that the author explains the technique, outlines the purported benefits but ultimately seeks the advice of a Hungarian expert, whose recommendation is deemed more sound and reason enough to denounce the practice. Once again, *Nők Lapja Café* does not just report on an international story, but compares Hungarian thoughts on parenting to an international practice, only to affirm that the Hungarian way is much more sensible. As with the views on babyccino, the website frames Hungarian parenting as more in tune with maintaining a child's health and wellbeing, while also implying motherhood as best practiced by following the advice of Hungarian experts.

The theme of relying on a Hungarian expert repeated itself many times throughout the month. An anonymously written article titled "Children on a Street Corner — Improved by Public Humiliation?" explains the story of an American father who made his son publicly wear a sandwich board that announced his poor grades and behavior.⁴³ The author chastises this man, but, once again, instead of simply reporting the story, cites a Hungarian psychologist who further denounces the parenting decision as one that is not only ineffective, but may potentially harm the child's psyche and cause depression or aggression. The inclusion of the Hungarian expert's testimony to examine an international case suggests that this kind of parental treatment is foreign to Hungarian parents.

In another article, titled “The Child Has the Right to Keep Silent Up to 3 Years of Age,” the author cites an American study that outlines what twenty-five words toddlers should understand, know and use.⁴⁴ The *Nők Lapja Café* author cites Éva Tóth, a Hungarian speech therapist, who criticizes the American study and says it is a mistake to measure the development of children in this way. Instead, she argues parents should watch for speech development to ensure a child does not suffer from hearing problems but, other than this concern, they should not worry too much about ensuring that their child knows a certain number of words.

In each of the aforementioned illustrative examples, the validity of the experts’ opinions is not in question. What is relevant is the frequent measuring of Hungarian “truths” against those of other nations’ experts and practices. Consistently in these articles, an international parenting practice or study is reported, and each time it is not only discussed, but also criticized and compared to the ways these things are and ought to be done in Hungary. Importantly, the critique is often accompanied by a Hungarian expert’s testimonial or advice. Each time Hungarian and international parenting practices are unambiguously compared, the Hungarian practice is painted in a favorable light, and the Hungarian parenting wisdom framed as far superior and morally correct, when compared to those of other countries.

Because nations and nationhood are socially constructed, Yuval-Davis argues that any sign can be interpreted and used as a boundary signifier, used to divide groups into “us” and “them”.⁴⁵ Barbara Einhorn further argues that nations “tend to be imagined as communities of insiders defined less in terms of their distinctive identity than in contrast to putative “others” who do not share that identity”.⁴⁶ I argue that by comparing and contrasting parenting practices and policies, routinely measuring international stories against Hungarian ways, the authors of *Nők Lapja Café* contribute to discourses that define what it means to be Hungarian and how parenthood is deemed integral to illustrating and representing “Hungarianness”. Importantly, it is motherhood that is typically the focus of the stories and in cases where photos accompany the text, it is also motherhood that is visually represented in the aforementioned articles on parenting, which demonstrates how women, as mothers, are positioned as essential to constructing understandings of what it means to be Hungarian.

Complementing and overlapping the weighting of international experiences of parenthood against those of Hungarian parents, is the articulation and framing of motherhood and mothering practices perceived as superior. As Yuval-Davis argues, women often face the burden of

representation, tasked with representing and distributing the nation's identity, which can be expressed through "proper" attire, behavior, etc.⁴⁷ As mentioned above, the subject of most articles in the "family" section are mothers. In the website's articles, not only are Hungarian culture and practices compared to other countries, mothering — examples of "good" mothers and "bad" mothers — is also represented. Good mothers, the reader is told, do not give their children babyccinos and certainly do not practice certain kinds of baby yoga. With the use of these illustrative examples, the reader is informed that good mothers heed the advice of *Hungarian* experts and do not abandon Hungarian traditions or practices for trendy, i.e. international, parenting practices.

Even when not explicitly comparing Hungarian and international family practices, the website's authors openly express disappointment or disapproval of certain parenting decisions made by mothers around the world, further defining what a good or bad mother looks like for Hungarian readers. For example, Australian millionaire Gina Rinehart is criticized in the article, "Richest Mom Sends Children to Work," for convincing her children to sign legal documents that prevent them from accessing their trusts, keeping her in charge of the family money.⁴⁸ She explains she had done so to prevent them from leading a life of leisure, spoiled with luxuries and unmotivated to work. But *Nők Lapja Café* criticizes Rinehart's mothering and decision by asking, "has she not raised her children properly, that they cannot be trusted with their shares?"⁴⁹ The author implies that were Rinehart a good mother, she would not fear that her children will lack motivation if provided generous trust funds — her children's goodness as people is framed exclusively as her responsibility and it is assumed that any flaws in their character are due to her faults as a mother. This attitude recalls the aforementioned contemporary discourses of motherhood that suggest the nation's failings are the fault of working women.

In contrast, British mother Sophia Cahill, pregnant with her second child, found herself in the spotlight of many media outlets because of her decision to model nude late in her pregnancy. She was featured in a second story on *Nők Lapja Café*, in March, 2012, that clarifies her motives: she models not because she wants to show off, but because she is a single mother with a family to support and this is how she makes her income.⁵⁰ That she models because she has children to care for is of such central importance that this second article was written expressly to clarify her motivations and demonstrate the devotion she has to her children, while the first article had a much more incredulous tone. That she is

modeling for her children, and not for her own selfish reasons, is deemed acceptable to the *Nők Lapja Café* author, and she receives no criticism in the second story. Her selflessness and devotion as a mother are praised by the authors.

Indeed, commitment and sacrifice to children is framed as the predominant characteristic of mothers as each story that applauds a mother's actions is hinged on what she has given up or done for her children, such as the aforementioned model, Cahill, or the mothers I will discuss later in this paper, who have set aside their own dreams and ambitions to raise large families. However, too much devotion is discouraged, as an article titled "Mother, Understand This: I've Grown Up," written by Ágnes Csízi offers adult children coping strategies for dealing with mothers who smother their children.⁵¹ The article explicitly defines what it means to be a good parent, with the first header of the article reading, "What Makes a Parent a Parent?" Although the article mentions "parents," the title and content refer almost exclusively to mothers who are unwilling to accept that their children have become adults. In fact, the article explains that women more often tend to have an inability to let their adult children move on from childhood than men, who are typically more distant as parents.⁵² In this same vein, Angelina Jolie is likewise criticized for not allowing her children to watch her appearance at the Oscars, a show the website claims is a tame television program, not necessitating censorship, implying she, too, is too cautious and overbearing as a parent.⁵³ Thus, *Nők Lapja Café* narrowly constricts the definition of a good mother, providing boundaries around the concept: demanding devotion but warning against excessive attachment. In short, the implied message conveyed is that women can never be perfect mothers and should never stop trying to perfect their mothering skills.

Connected to themes of nationhood and socially constructed ideas of "good" or appropriate mothering is the fascination with "large families" demonstrated by *Nők Lapja Café*. Concerning international stories, celebrity stories and articles featuring Hungarian women, the website focuses intensely on large families, always striving to paint large families in a positive light. Importantly, the authors of articles concerning large families admit that having a large family can be difficult, but the reader is informed that a large family is worth the trouble and ultimately manageable.

For example, in an article titled "She Adopted her Deceased Friend's Five Children," the author chronicles the story of a British woman, Julie Jones, who adopted her friend's five children although, as a single mother, she already had three children of her own.⁵⁴ The woman

must work fulltime, although she also receives some government assistance, to support her large family. However, despite the difficulty in providing for such a large family on her own, the article affirms that her life with this large family is manageable. Further, the article expresses admiration for the woman's decision to raise a large family.

Katalin Dénes Szabó, a Hungarian mother of seven children of her own, was interviewed in a three-page story for the website, an unusually long article for the month, titled "It is Difficult to Bring All of My Children to the Movies at Once".⁵⁵ The author is clearly fascinated with Szabó's voluntarily large family and asks many personal questions. Specifically, the mother of seven is asked if her husband willingly agreed to such a large family, how she divides her attention between her children, how she keeps them in line, how much groceries her family consumes in a week, what limitations such a large family creates, how her body has fared after so many pregnancies, and what she has sacrificed for her large family. She admits to many sacrifices, such as not having enough time for her husband, finding it difficult to go out and still keep an eye on her large family and also giving up her dreams of graduating from university and becoming an economist — although she is currently pursuing her studies in another field. Despite the limitations, she confirms that as a mother of seven, she is very happy and having such a large family has always been her dream. Her story is represented in a positive light — not as something strange or deviant — but as an interesting and laudable life choice. Importantly, her career ambitions — only briefly mentioned — are framed as a secondary concern to her devotion to her family, recalling the emphasis on home life above employment for women that dominates contemporary discourses. That Szabó had to abandon her original career plans is barely addressed, signaling to the reader the unimportance of employment outside of the home for women and echoing popular ideas concerning Hungarian women's contemporary roles in the workforce as less important than preserving home life, addressed earlier in this essay.⁵⁶

Of the celebrity families and mothers highlighted (mostly American film stars and famous musicians) those with larger families seem to garner the most attention. For example, Uma Thurman's fourth pregnancy is reported⁵⁷ and Jennifer Garner's third pregnancy — her first boy — is also deemed newsworthy. Angelina Jolie (with a family of seven) is a staple of the "celebrity" family features and in an article concerning her Oscar appearance, titled "Angelina Jolie Flashed Her Thigh—Maybe She is Pregnant?" the author joyously speculates she might be pregnant again because of her Oscar dress' revealingly sexy side slit and the supposed

tendency for women in their first trimester to feel sexier and more confident.⁵⁸ Additionally, Reese Witherspoon's third pregnancy, but the first one with husband Jim Toth — who is of Hungarian ancestry — is speculated about as well.⁵⁹ Rarely are celebrities with first pregnancies or small families — with one or two children — mentioned in the family section of *Nők Lapja Café*.⁶⁰

I do not believe that the focus on large families is any way coincidental or unintended because, when Hungarian legislation affecting families is discussed, the *Nők Lapja Café* authors demonstrate a keen understanding of the nation's demographic and political concerns. The nation's decreasing population — it is reported that the birth rate decreased by 2.5% in 2011⁶¹ — and problems with prematurely born babies⁶² are both discussed by the website's authors, suggesting trepidation about the nation's declining population and concern over falling birth rates. Although *Nők Lapja Café* authors seem, at times, curious whether a large family is manageable, large families are a major focus of this part in the website's family section and each story affirms, as its conclusion, the manageability of a large family and also the central importance of children to one's life. Importantly, by only featuring the families of supposedly "ideal" — white, able bodied, working or middle class, heterosexual — women, the website provides a visual representation of who should have a large family, whose family is desirable and socially acceptable — precluding families who fail to meet these characteristics, such as Roma families or same-sex couples.

Not all of the articles and stories featured photographs but those that did featured only white, able-bodied, heterosexual women and families. Even among international stories and discussion of the "stars," only one woman of colour was mentioned: Beyoncé, the American singer and actress. Further, many stories discussed marriage, perpetuating conservative — but dominant — conceptions of motherhood as most suitable for married women and framing marriage as the norm.⁶³ Divorce was treated as a fact of life,⁶⁴ but an undesirable one. In fact, one article deemed of interest to *Nők Lapja Café* authors was a Swedish study that reported the discovery of a supposed "divorce gene" that apparently makes some women less able to form attachments and thus less able to maintain a relationship within a marriage or even remain committed to children.⁶⁵ In the article, aptly titled "They Discovered a Gene: Is Divorce Genetic?" women who get divorced are presented as somehow flawed, lacking a gene that would enable them to sustain a marriage or relationship.⁶⁶ Related to this article, Hungarian marriage statistics were of interest to *Nők Lapja*

Café and it was reported that in 2011 the number of marriages increased, albeit only by 0.5%, interpreted as an important and promising change by *Nők Lapja Café* authors nonetheless.

Women who deviate from “traditional” life choices, such as the 29-year old British woman married five times, or the 100-year old bride marrying for the fourth time, are positioned as spectacle on the website. Marriage is a choice taken for granted, demonstrated also by an article featuring the British actor Rob Pattinson, titled “Who Would We Most Like to Trade our Husbands For,”⁶⁷ a title that assumed that any woman who reads the site — especially the family section — is married or values marriage. The site is thus actively shaping appropriate roles for women, especially mothers, dictating heterosexual marriage as the norm.

The purpose of this essay is to complicate theorizing about nationalism, particularly the source of nationalistic sentiments. As Yuval-Davis argues, it is unhelpful to limit theorizing about the nation to bureaucrats and policy makers. I cannot speak to the objectives or goals of this website but, as I have demonstrated, *Nők Lapja Café* is also invested in the process: it defines what it means to be Hungarian by comparing Hungarian and international parenting practices to clearly illustrate Hungarianness, describes how “good” Hungarian mothers should parent, and supports dominant, nationalistic discourses by speaking positively about large families and de-prioritizing workforce participation in discussions of Hungarian motherhood and mothering. Additionally, the website serves to echo discourses that encourage women to have children by pointing out the manageability of large families, made easier by the more parent-friendly climate of Hungary, demonstrated by Hungarian restaurants that do not ban crying children and by an example of a Hungarian woman who has chosen, and been able to manage, a large family.

I do not purport to understand the intentions or the ambitions of the authors behind the articles on *Nők Lapja Café*, although it does seem evident that the website’s content is in keeping with the political objectives of reinforcing women’s social roles as mothers. However, the motivation can hardly be gleaned given the restrictions of media in Hungary. In any case, what is most important is to examine the results of their work: the representations of women and motherhood in what is Hungary’s most popular women’s website. In this essay, I aimed to examine and discuss the social constructions of parenthood, particularly motherhood, framed by *Nők Lapja Café*, and point out that certain characteristics and practices are considered to be embodied by “good” mothers — especially an adherence to guidelines and suggestions made by Hungarian experts — and how

these qualities are enforced and policed by *Nők Lapja Café*. It was further my goal to point out that the website does more than simply prioritize motherhood or outline parameters for good parenting. *Nők Lapja Café* consistently frames Hungarian motherhood as different, often if not always better, than the motherhood demonstrated by women internationally. In this way, the magazine positions motherhood as a way in which “Hungarianness” can be defined and compared. In addressing family oriented women, the website, instead of providing the bold and creative content it promises, supplies readers with discourses that support dominant post-socialist ideals of women as [good] mothers, bolstering their nation through their motherhood. A study of such a popular website helps to further illuminate the current expectations of Hungarian women and suggests the need for further study.

NOTES

¹ Although I aim to provide an overview, for the purposes of this paper the contextualization is very brief and, obviously, neglects to describe in detail the nuances and complexities of the experience of Hungarian women.

² Chris Corrin, *Magyar Women: Hungarian Women's Lives, 1960s-1990s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 102.

³ Lynne Haney, “From Proud Worker to Good Mother: Women, the State, and Regime Change in Hungary,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 14 (3): 113-150, 122.

⁴ Haney, *From Proud Worker to Good Mother*, 137.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷ Herta Toth, “Gendered Dilemmas of Work-Life Balance in Hungary,” *Women in Management Review* 20 (2005): 361-375, 366-367.

⁸ Brigid Fowler, “Nation, State, Europe and National Revival in Hungarian Party Politics: The Case of the Millennial Commemorations,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 56 (2004): 57-83, 5.

⁹ Krisztina Morvai, “Women and the Rule of Law in Hungary,” *Feminist Review* 76 (2004): 100-109, 100-101.

¹⁰ Corrin, *Magyar Women*, 226.

¹¹ Christy Glass and Éva Fodor, “Public Maternalism Goes to Market,” *Gender and Society* 25 (2011): 5-26, 10.

¹² Glass and Fodor, “Public Maternalism,” 16.

¹³ Éva Fodor, *Working Difference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 133.

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- ¹⁴ Glass and Fodor, "Public Maternalism," 9
- ¹⁵ Marida Hollos and Regina Yando, "Social Strata Differences in Mothers' Conceptions of Children in Postsocialist Hungary: An Explanation of Fertility Decisions," *Ethos*, 34 (2006): 488-520, 490
- ¹⁶ Ellen Hinsey, "The New Opposition in Hungary," *New England Review*, 33 (2):126-142, 131.
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- ¹⁸ David Boromisza-Habashi, "Dismantling the Antiracist "hate speech" Agenda in Hungary: an Ethno-rhetorical Analysis," *Text & Talk* 1 (2011): 1-19.
- ¹⁹ István Kemény and Béla Janky, "Roma Population of Hungary 1971-2003," in *Roma of Hungary*, ed. István Kemény (New York, Columbia University Press, 2005): 70-225, 294, 295.
- ²⁰ Katalin Halasz, *The Rise of the Radical Right in Europe*, 492.
- ²¹ Anna Kende and Mária Neményi, "Selection in Education: The Case of Roma Children in Hungary," *Equal Opportunities International* 25 (2006): 506-522, 510.
- ²² Michelle Behr et al., "Who is Hungarian? Attitudes Toward Immigration, Ethnicity and Nationality in Rural Hungary," *Eastern European Quarterly* 36 (2002): 281-299, 292.
- ²³ Corrin, *Magyar Women*; Joanna Goven, "Gender Politics in Hungary: Autonomy and Antifeminism," in Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (ed.), *Gender Politics and Post Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 224-240; Haney, *From Proud Worker to Good Mother*.
- ²⁴ Stefan Auer, "Nationalism in Central Europe — A Chance or a Threat for the Emerging Liberal Democratic Order?" *East European Politics and Societies* 14 (2000): 213-245, 213.
- ²⁵ Brigid Fowler, *Nation, State, Europe and National Revival*, 57, 58
- ²⁶ Fowler, *Nation, State, Europe and National Revival*, 76.
- ²⁷ Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 2.
- ²⁸ Éva Thun, "Women in Hungary in Times of Social and Cultural Transition," *Hungarian Studies Review* 26 (1999): 39-58, 50.
- ²⁹ Ellen Hinsey, *The New Opposition*, 127-128.
- ³⁰ Katalin Medvedev, "The Cold War, Fashion and Resistance in 1950s Hungary," in Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Louise O. Vasvári (ed.), *Comparative Hungarian Cultural Studies*, (West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 2011), 209-219, 209.
- ³¹ Unless otherwise specified, all of the following information concerning the readership and content of *Nők Lapja* magazine and the accompanying website, *Nők Lapja Café*, has been sourced from the media representative for the magazine and website, Sanoma Media (Sanomamedia.hu).

³² http://www.sanomamedia.hu/products/nok_lapja/6002/?fid=537, accessed September 30, 2012.

³³ Anecdotal evidence suggests that women 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.

³⁴ Sanomamedia.hu. <http://www.sanomamedia.hu/sajtohirdetes/index.php?action=termek&site=3>, accessed September 30, 2012.

³⁵ Sanomamedia.hu, accessed September 30, 2012.

³⁶ All of the information about *Nők Lapja Café* came from <http://www.sanomamedia.hu/onlinehirdetes/products/9/>, accessed September 30, 2012.

³⁷ The website did not change content daily and so stories typically were left for a few days or weeks on the website, before being filed in the archives where they could not be accessed directly on the family section. This study thus includes some articles technically written in the last days of February 2012 that were featured on the site for the month of March.

³⁸ Titles have been translated, approximately, into English by the author.

³⁹ Patrice DiQuinzio, *The Impossibility of Motherhood. Feminism, Individualism and the Problem of Mothering* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 4.

⁴⁰ "Kitiltják a síro gyerekeket az étteremből" [They ban crying children from restaurants], *Nők Lapja Café*, February 23, 2012, accessed March 1, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/gasztro/20120223/kitiltjak_a_siro_gyerekeket_az_etterembo1/.

⁴¹ Erika Szalma, "Babyccino — kávézzon egy 2 éves gyerek?" [Babyccino - should a two-year old drink coffee], *Nők Lapja Café*, Feb. 25, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/baba/20120225/babyccino_kavezzon_egy_2_eves_gyerek/.

⁴² "Feje felett pörgeti a csecsemőket a jógaoktató" [Yoga teacher spins babies above her head], *Nők Lapja Café*, February 27, 2012, accessed 5/3/2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/baba/20120227/feje_felett_porgeti_a_csecsemoket_a_jogao ktato/.

⁴³ "Gyerek az utcasarikon — megjavul a nyilvános megszégyenítéstől?" [Children on street corner — improved by public humiliation?], *Nők Lapja Café*, March 14, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120314/gyerek_az_utcasarikon_megjavul_a_nyilvanos_megszegenitestol/

⁴⁴ "3 évig joga van hallgatni a gyerekeknek" [The child has the right to keep silent up to 3 years of age], *Nők Lapja Café*, February 20, 2012, accessed March 5, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120220/3_evig_joga_van_hallgatni/.

⁴⁵ Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 47.

⁴⁶ Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East Central Europe* (New York: Verso, 1993), 52.

⁴⁷ Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 45-46.

⁴⁸ “Dolgozni küldi gyerekeit a leggazdagabb édesanya” [Richest mother sends her children to work], *Nők Lapja Café*, 13 March 2012, accessed 15/3/2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120313/dolgozni_kuldi_gyerekeit_a_dusgazdag_e_desanya/.

⁴⁹ “Dolgozni küldi,” 1.

⁵⁰ “Családjáért pucérkodik a várandós modell” [For her family the pregnant model nudes], *Nők Lapja Café*, March 1, 2012, accessed March 3, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120302/csaladjaert_vetkozik_a_varandos_modell/.

⁵¹ Ágnes Csízi, “Anya, értsd meg: felnőttem!” [Mother, understand this: I have grown up!], *Nők Lapja Café*, March 1, 2012, accessed March 5, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120301/anya_ertsd_meg_felnottem/.

⁵² Csízi, “Anya, értsd meg,” 1.

⁵³ “Nem nézhettek meg az Oscart a Jolie-Pitt gyerekek” [The Jolie-Pitt children could not watch the Oscars], *Nők Lapja Café*, February 27, 2012, accessed March 2, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120228/a_jolie-pitt_gyerekek_nem_nezettek_az_oscar-galat/.

⁵⁴ “Örökbe fogadta halott barátnője öt gyerekeit” [She adopted her deceased friend’s five children], *Nők Lapja Café*, 5 March 2012, accessed 7/3/2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120306/halott_baratnoje_ot_gyermeket_fogadta_orokbe/.

⁵⁵ Ágnes Csízi, “Nehéz egyszerre moziba vinni az összes gyerekeket” [It is difficult to bring all of my children to the movies at once], *Nők Lapja Café*, March 5, 2012, accessed March 7, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120305/nehez_egyszerre_moziba_vinni_az_osszes_gyerekeket/.

⁵⁶ In an article concerning proposed legislation to make parental leave (GYES, *gyermekgondozási segély*) mandatory for fathers, the author argues that it is a helpful idea to get Hungarian women to give birth to more and more children. “Menjenek gyesre az apák is” [Fathers should also take parental leave], *Nők Lapja Café*, March 12, 2012, accessed March 13, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120312/menjenek_gyes-re_az_apak_is/.

Interestingly, the author suggests that if fathers were more involved, perhaps Hungarian women would be more inclined to have larger families. The article is uncritical of new legislation, citing benefits such as men’s improved performance at work after maternity leave and also the bond strengthened between father and child, demonstrating an egalitarian view of parenthood that is overshadowed by the brevity of the article, which is much shorter than the article focused on the babyccino. However, it does suggest that perhaps some content of the website might be shifting toward a more critical view of contemporary social and gender roles in Hungary, although this remains to be seen.

⁵⁷ “Megvan az első terhesfotó Uma Thurmanról” [First photo of pregnant Uma Thurman], *Nők Lapja Café*, February 29, 2012, accessed March 1, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/baba/20120229/megvan_az_elso_terhesfoto_uma_thurmanrol/.

⁵⁸ “Angelina Jolie combot villantott, tehát terhes?” [Angelina Jolie flashed her thigh — maybe she is pregnant?], *Nők Lapja Café*, February 28, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120229/angelina_jolie_leleplezte_terhesseget_a_dijatadon/.

⁵⁹ “Magyar férjétől vár gyermeket Dr. Szöszi” [Dr. Szöszi expects child from her Hungarian husband], *Nők Lapja Café*, March 21, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/sztarok/20120321/magyar_ferjetol_var_gyermeket_dr_szoszi/.

⁶⁰ Jennifer Aniston is the exception and, although a childless woman, she is featured on the website. Her rumored pregnancy captivates *Nők Lapja Café* authors, just as her prolonged childlessness has been the focus of many women’s publications and tabloids in English-speaking countries.

⁶¹ “Kicsivel többen szánjuk el magunkat a házasságra” [A little more people decide to marry], *Nők Lapja Café*, February 22, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120222/kicsivel_tobben_szanjuk_el_magunkat_a_hazassagra/.

⁶² “Kevesebb a koraszülött a dohánytilalom óta” [There are fewer prematurely born babies after tobacco ban], *Nők Lapja Café*, March 14, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/baba/20120314/kevesebb_a_koraszulott_a_dohanytilalom_ota/.

⁶³ Hungarian Parliament passed a new constitution in April, 2011, that includes distinctly pro-life language, even promising to guarantee the protection of a fetus from conception (see Raven Clabough, “Hungary’s Pro-Life Constitution Draws Ire of European Institutions,” *The New American*, June 14, 2011, accessed June 20, 2011, <http://www.thenewamerican.com/world-mainmenu-26/europe-mainmenu-35/7868-hungarys-pro-life-constitution-draws-ire-of-european-institutions>). The constitution also cements marriage as a union existing only between a man and a woman, because the heterosexual nuclear family unit is deemed crucial to the survival of the nation (see Margit Feher, “Hungary Passes New Constitution Amid Concerns” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 18, 2011, accessed June 20, 2011, <http://blogs.wsj.com/emerging europe/2011/04/18/hungary-passes-new-constitution-amid-concerns/>; Veronika Gulyas, “Hungary’s Government to Launch Anti-Abortion Campaign,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 5, 2011, <http://blogs.wsj.com/emerging europe/2011/05/05/hungary%e2%80%99s-government-to-launch-anti-abortion-campaign/>).

⁶⁴ “Új anyu többé nem tud ráülni as örökségre” [New mother can no longer delay inheritance], *Nők Lapja Café*, March 19, 2012, accessed 20/3/2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120313/uj_anyu_miatt_fogunk_mashogy_orokolni/.

⁶⁵ This article was reported in February, 2012 but still featured on the website at the beginning of March before being filed in the archives.

⁶⁶ “Felfedezték a válógént: Öröklődik a szakítás?” [They discovered a divorce gene: is divorce genetic?], *Nők Lapja Café*, February 27, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120227/felfedeztek_a_valogent_oroklodik_a_szakitas/.

⁶⁷ “Kire cserélnék le legtöbben férjüket?” [Who would we most like to trade our husbands for?], *Nők Lapja Café*, February 27, 2012, http://www.nlcafe.hu/csalad/20120225/pattinsonra_cserelne_a_legtobb_no_a_pasijat/.

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