

Abstract

The people of Szeged, Hungary, see their nation as a nation under siege; they feel that the forces that guarded their security until the end of the socialist era in 1990 have been overpowered by a deluge of foreign crime and criminals accompanying the new economic and political systems of the post-socialist era. One of the most common ways that Hungarians in Szeged speak about these criminal threats is with the idea that the body of the nation is being attacked through the bodies of its women. While all members of the Szeged community feel besieged and use security as a primary discursive feature in their personal narratives, because it is their bodies that are used in metonymic reference to the nation, it is the women of Szeged who have been left feeling as if their right to personal security has been stripped from them. This paper argues that these different, gendered experiences at the personal and local levels create different kinds of members of the nation.

About the Author

Barbara A. West received her Ph.D. in sociocultural anthropology from the University of Rochester in May 1995 and has been an Assistant Professor of Anthropology and International Studies at the University of the Pacific since September 1995. The research upon which her dissertation and this paper are based was conducted during seventeen months of residence in the southern Hungarian border city of Szeged. The focus of this research was the construction of Hungarian national identity in a marginalized region during the post-socialist era.

Women and International Development

Michigan State University
202 International Center, East Lansing, MI 48824-1035
Phone: 517/353-5040, Fax: 517/432-4845
Email: wid@msu.edu Web: <http://www.isp.msu.edu/wid>

NATION UNDER SIEGE, BODIES UNDER SIEGE: SECURITY AS A GENDERED CATEGORY IN HUNGARIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

by

Barbara A. West,
Ph.D.
University of the
Pacific

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Nation Under Siege, Bodies Under Siege: Security as a Gendered Category in Hungarian National Identity

Introduction

I propose that national cultures are not produced by political and cultural elites for consumption by other members of the nation, but are the result of a dialectic of national ideological production between political, economic, and cultural centers and their margins. I borrow the idea from Richard Fox (1990:3) that nations exhibit a “fuzziness or malleability” because, as Benedict Anderson (1983) writes, they are only “imagined communities.” Rather than “things” separate from and outside their members, national cultures are no more than the sum of the processes through which their members come to imagine them. These processes involve different communities in the nation competing to have their nationalist ideologies--their “consciousness or perception of what the nation is or should be” (Fox 1990:4)--accepted by other communities within the nation. Where I differ from other authors who have written about these ideological struggles¹ is in my proposition that it is not only individuals in political, economic, and cultural centers who engage in them, but also members of more marginal communities.

I do not offer a specific statement of what I mean by “centers” and “margins.” I argue that these loci are shifting and contextual, and only have meaning in relation to each other. For example, in relation to national leaders, members of local city councils are fairly marginal politically, while in relation to most residents, these city council members occupy positions in a locally defined political center. No center is able categorically to define reality for those who occupy its margins; there are always processes of negotiation through which public imagination is created. The example I explore in this paper is that of gender marginality in post-socialist Hungary: Hungarian women in relation to men. This, of course, is not to say that on an individual basis women are always marginal to men, but rather that, as a social category in Hungary, “woman” is marginal to “man” and this categorization has ramifications for individual members of these gendered communities.

In this paper I present some of the gender-specific experiences of Hungarian women in Szeged that are used by these women to talk about the Hungarian nation as a whole and their membership in it. In exploring the differences in national imaginings between women and men, I draw upon the work of Carole Pateman (1988), Mary Louise Pratt (1990), the special issue on Gender and Nation by East European Politics and Societies (1994), and others who argue that women and the ways in which nations are gendered have been largely ignored in much of the literature on national identity and culture. Rather than just inserting women into the national picture, I follow these authors in exploring the ways in which naturalized gender categories and naturalized national categories intersect and inform one another (Verdery 1994). I conclude that gendered experience gained as members of more immediate communities provides some of the concepts with which gendered national members can imagine, and thus publicly construct, the abstract national community.

This paper is based on seventeen months of fieldwork (1993-94) in the Hungarian border city of Szeged, a city of almost 200,000 people, located approximately fifteen kilometers from both the Yugoslavian border and Romanian frontier. I employed a variety of qualitative research methods in this study, including informal interviews and participant observation. I held single-issue interviews on topics that ranged from family, friends, and holidays, to work, politics, and religion. I collected life histories

from thirty-two women and men chosen from amongst my acquaintances and their acquaintances to represent a variety of age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. These life histories in no way represent a random sampling of Hungarians, or even Szeged residents; their importance lies in the way they opened my eyes to the topics and themes I needed to explore in my interviews. The most significant aspect of my research methods was participant observation. While living in Szeged, I worked several jobs and worried about my finances, read newspapers, listened to the radio, occasionally visited an acquaintance to watch television, traveled both inside and outside of Hungary on Hungarian tour buses, celebrated holidays, and went to weddings. Where I differed from most of my Hungarian acquaintances is that I tried to get to know, speak and socialize with, and visit as many people as possible. While I was trying to expand my network of acquaintances, most Hungarians were trying to limit these networks because of the financial and temporal burdens they present. Living in Szeged as much like a native as possible afforded me the unique possibility of seeing the ways in which Hungarians are experiencing the transition from socialism and subsequently using these experiences to construct national ideologies.

Feelings of insecurity emerged as a common theme in my research with Szeged residents. When I asked about family life, they told me they no longer visit or include distant family members in their social circles because today they are too tired or lack the finances to engage with people beyond their household members. Questions about friendships either elicited similar responses or ones that pointed to a loss of trust in the competitive post-socialist era. Discussions centered around politics and economics almost always elicited answers that focused on the loss of material, physical, and cultural security that Hungarians in Szeged feel they have been experiencing since the end of the socialist era in 1990. Crime, a common theme drawn upon by my Hungarian informants, symbolizes and encompasses all of their perceived insecurities of living in the post-socialist world. I claim that, in their discussions, Hungarians in Szeged are not only talking about their fears of crime, unemployment, and physical harm, but are also using the concept of security to define who they are as individuals and who they are as a nation in the current post-socialist period. This was true in 1993-94, despite Hungary's political stability and relative peace and prosperity.

Much of the private discourse connecting insecurity and crime with the Hungarian nation focuses specifically on criminal threats against Hungarian women as representative of the insecurity of the nation as a whole. Both women and men use examples of violence against women to illustrate the insecurity of the Hungarian nation, despite the fact that women, men, and children have all experienced crime. At the same time, Hungarian women describe their own experiences of day-to-day life in terms of their insecurity; they have been made to feel insecure, both as Hungarians and as women, in ways that Hungarian men have not. I argue that Hungarians in the current post-socialist period have constructed a gendered political discourse that makes women different kinds of members of the nation than men and defines women's daily lives in terms of their risk of bodily harm.

Near the end of the socialist period and extending into the early stages of the transition, the early 1980s through the early 1990s, Joanna Goven (1993) notes that women in Hungary were the victims of an "antifeminist discourse" that constructed women as the enemies of the Hungarian nation, in part because of the gains women made in political and social life under socialism. This trend became particularly acute in the immediate post-socialist era, as Susan Gal (1994:276) argues, because women were seen by many Hungarians as the "corrupted beneficiaries of the Communist state." During this

period in Hungary, when everything socialist was equated with threats to the Hungarian nation, women were discursively aligned with socialism. In other words, women were used to describe the relationship between the Hungarian nation and its greatest enemy at that time. I argue that the present discourse in Hungary, which allies Hungarian women and the Hungarian nation in terms of their insecurities, is a continuation of this gendered political discourse. Hungarian women are once again being seen as the point of entry for forces that are dangerous to the nation as a whole. I conclude this paper with the proposition that throughout the twentieth century Hungarians have used the category “woman” to talk about the primary threat to their nation.

Security Defines the Hungarian Nation in the Post-Socialist Era

Discourse on crime in Hungary embraces all the areas in which Hungarians feel they have lost security in the post-socialist era. I was told by Hungarians of the need for vicious guard dogs, and, in fact, saw a newly opened school in Szeged where dogs are trained to attack intruders and to bark and snarl at strangers passing by on the street. My landlady came home almost daily with tales of robbery or attempted robbery that others told to her while they waited for a bus or while she tended the flowers on her husband’s grave. The explanation always given to my queries about the gates and fences that surround every individual house in Szeged was a need for protection against criminals, particularly foreign criminals. When I asked if this had always been true, I was told that in the past these fences were required to keep chickens, pigs, dogs, and other animals within the courtyards; it is only in the past five or six years that they have been required to keep criminals out.

I propose that these discourses reveal an economic insecurity that is expressed through Hungarians’ fears that the few material possessions they feel they have and all they have worked for could be taken from them at any time. Personal security is also often coupled with crime. I was frequently warned not to be too trusting, to find out what people want from me when they offer kindness, and not to invite people to my flat but to only meet in public places. National discourse² is also addressed in this discourse on crime, since the common belief in Szeged is that a majority of foreigners who come into Hungary from the South and East are criminals, ready to take advantage of Hungary’s open borders and demographic vulnerabilities.

This fear for the nation has intensified since the wars in the former Yugoslavia began and wealthy and entrepreneurial Yugoslavs began flocking into Szeged to shop. Just before Christmas in 1993, Szeged’s daily newspaper stated that 175,000 people per day were entering the city. Instead of being grateful for this influx of foreign tourists, their hard currency, and the overall positive effects of this commerce for Szeged’s economy, the people of Szeged felt overwhelmed and threatened. Because of their numbers, their relative wealth compared with many Hungarians, perceived cultural differences in terms of propriety and demeanor, and collective Hungarian memories of invasion, occupation, and territorial loss following World War I, visitors from Yugoslavia and Romania are spoken of and treated as invaders rather than tourists by many of Szeged’s residents. The proliferation of advertisements and notices in Serbo-Croatian are spoken of as signs of accommodation to a foreign invasion rather than as entrepreneurial acumen. The people of Szeged fear that the presence of these foreigners foreshadows the loss of their secure identity as a Hungarian city. Even after the rump Yugoslavian government imposed large, hard currency exit duties, which drastically cut the number of foreigners entering the South to approximately 42,500 daily (Délmagyarország 1994d:3), the people of Szeged continued to

fear that large numbers of legal and illegal visitors were threatening to overrun Hungary's security capabilities.

When the residents of Szeged turn away from their city to address the nation as a whole, it is these discourses and the local experiences they describe that provide the categories through which they are able to imagine the national community. Szeged, a city on the border of the nation, becomes a metonym for the nation itself as its residents construct an imagined Hungarian nation, a nation on the border of Europe. The end result is an imagined national community that is felt to be in danger of being overrun by foreign criminals.

This type of discourse, which equates Hungary and Hungarians with crime and insecurity, was a matter for private discussion throughout my entire stay in Szeged. I had innumerable conversations with Hungarians about the rise in crime rates since 1990 and their own fears of being robbed, mugged, or worse. In January 1994, following the murder of a prominent Szeged businessman and his wife and children, political leaders and the news media also jumped on the security bandwagon. Not only did these murders publicize people's fears of crime, but all aspects of their fears became part of public discourse. Fear for themselves, their property, and their nation all made the transition from private to public discourse. The kinds of conversations I had with my landlady, acquaintances, and others with whom I had an even more casual relationship, about crime, foreigners, and other fears, became the subjects of numerous newspaper articles and columns, radio newscasts, and television programs. Articles began appearing regularly in the *Délmagyarország*, Szeged's largest daily newspaper, with titles like "The People's Feeling of Security has Disappeared" (1994e) and "What Do the Statistics Say: 'Crime' Cities and Counties" (1994c). These examples from the print media in Szeged are representative of the general trend in public expression of individual and community fears.

Of particular interest to me in this public outpouring is the way the murder of the businessman's family brought private concerns about Szeged's identity as a Hungarian city and about the security of the Hungarian nation into the public arena, and even created a public discussion on the security of the Hungarian state, with very little regard for the relevance of this discourse to the specific crime. On the first day of the murders' coverage, before anyone had been taken into custody or was even suspected, a Szeged council representative commented in the *Délmagyarország* (1994a:7), "on the indignation of the . . . [murders]-- 'It comes to mind that the young soldiers of the Serbian army, as civilians, came to Szeged by bus to shop with their 50 [German] mark allowance. Who could have predicted what they were up to in the meanwhile?'" The mayor of Szeged made a statement in the same paper two days later that supported the conclusion of the councilperson that Hungary, and Szeged in particular, was at risk: "We need to acknowledge that Szeged has become a transit city of a transit country, which is subjecting us to increased danger" (1994b:7).

In short, since January 1994, both public and private discursive events in Szeged have constructed a post-socialist identity for Hungarians and their nation around the idea of security. While Western observers and investors speak of privatization and global markets, Hungarians in Szeged speak of economic insecurity, including unemployment and inflation; while the Hungarian government speaks largely of open borders and joining Europe, these people speak of national insecurity, their fear of crimes committed by foreigners, and of the foreigners themselves. It is increasingly difficult to speak with a resident of Szeged without the concept of security being introduced. Holidays are no longer as

joyous as in the past, friends are no longer reliable or enjoyable, it is difficult to appreciate the beauty of their city and country--all because these things are experienced as they are described, that is, with regard to increasing insecurity.

Women are Insecure: Gendered Political Discourse

In conjunction with this contemporary discourse on crime, threats to Hungarian women are likewise being used to illustrate the insecurity of the Hungarian nation. While all members of the Hungarian national community are assumed to be at risk, it is crimes against the bodies of Hungarian women, both real and potential, that are used more often by women and men alike to illustrate the insecurity of the nation. Following the murder of the Szeged businessman and his family, I found that the greatest shock and horror was expressed over the fact that the businessman's wife was murdered along with him. When I spoke with people about these events, I was immediately asked if I realized that his wife had been murdered. With the exception of one young acquaintance who attended school with the man's son, no one focused on the murder of the two children. While newspapers and radio reports expressed equal indignation over all the murders, the local, private response pointed to the murder of the wife, the woman, to illustrate the insecurity of the current period. These murders had made it obvious that everyone in Hungary was equally at risk of violent crime, but only the murder of the businessman's wife was chosen time and again to point to the risks of being Hungarian in the current era.

This woman's murder also reopened the discourse on crimes committed, presumably by foreigners, against three other Hungarian women: a young woman who had been kidnapped from a town north of Szeged two and a half years earlier, a Hungarian woman who was forced to have sexual relations with a Yugoslavian border guard so that the shopping bus on which she was traveling could pass through on its way to Istanbul, and a Hungarian woman who died of a heart attack on one of these buses after allegedly Turkish criminals had stolen all of the goods she was bringing back to Hungary to sell.³

The kidnapping case was particularly interesting to me, since everyone who spoke of it did so using only present tense verbs. I was very confused about the whole affair; I could not find mention of a kidnapping in the newspaper, yet everyone seemed to know about it and wanted to talk about it. One day, when my landlady again began talking about the murder and the kidnapping as if they were the same case, I finally asked about the specifics of the crime, including when the woman had been snatched. Much to my amazement, she told me that she could not remember exactly when it happened, but that it was probably sometime in 1991 or 1992! It wasn't until later that I realized that for my landlady, as well as for many other Hungarians in Szeged, this kidnapping and the murder of the businessman's wife were the same case; they were both details of the larger problem, the insecurity of the Hungarian nation.

In early June 1994, yet another woman became the victim of a crime in Szeged, which again brought the murdered wife of the Szeged businessman, the kidnapping victim, and many other female crime victims to the fore of private discourse. The crime precipitating this reemergence involved someone planting a bomb wrapped in a brown paper package on the steps of one of Szeged's Roman Catholic churches during the night. The following morning a retired woman found the package and

placed it in a nearby garbage can. Later in the morning the bomb exploded, destroying the garbage can and injuring a younger female passerby. No one was killed and no serious property damage was incurred.

Interestingly, approximately a week later a second bomb went off, this time in Budapest at the entranceway to the Hungarian Parliament building, for which a group of neo-nazi, right wing nationalists took responsibility. In the letter claiming responsibility, the Hungarian group stated that they were protesting the Parliamentary elections and would continue to protest the election of the Hungarian Socialist Party by killing every representative who wanted to lead the nation away from traditional Hungarian values. At the same time, the church bombings (a church in Subotica, Yugoslavia, was bombed on the same morning as the Szeged church) remained unsolved. Despite the rhetoric of hate and the threats to continue the violence made by the Hungarian neo-nazi group, the church bombings and the female victim, rather than the bombing of the Parliament and threats to its members, became evidence in the discourse of many Szeged residents to illustrate how bad things had become for Hungary and Hungarians since the beginning of the transition from socialism.

Because of the foreign connection evident in the simultaneous bombing in Yugoslavia, the bombing of the church was seen as much more threatening to the nation than the bombing of the Hungarian Parliament and subsequent threats to the representatives. These threats had been made by other Hungarians and seemed to indicate a threat more to the state, with which only politicians seemed concerned, than to the nation. The fact that this was a local event also heightened awareness in Szeged, although it does not explain the connections made between the church bombings and injuries to one woman and the insecurity of the nation as a whole. Certainly the bombing of the Parliament building and threats to many of its members would seem to make a stronger case for Hungarian insecurity than the Szeged events, despite its distance from the people in Szeged with whom I spoke. While my informants did often use the church bombing to illustrate the danger for everyone of residing in Szeged, the greatest concern they expressed was that it had injured a woman and had the potential of injuring or killing the elderly woman who had found the package. It was this detail that Szeged residents emphasized when they connected this bombing to the insecurities of the Hungarian nation. Therefore, I argue that because of the discursive connection between the insecurity of Hungarian women and the insecurity of the nation, the threats to Hungary's predominantly male Members of Parliament did not threaten the body of the nation and thus were not spoken of with the same gravity and concern as the Szeged bomb. The injuries sustained by the female passerby, because of her being in the wrong place at the wrong time, were used as a metaphor by many in Szeged to speak of the injuries being sustained by the nation because of its location--also in the wrong place at the wrong time--in Europe.

In addition to these specific cases, both women and men in Szeged told me of the dangers women face when walking alone at night, visiting cemeteries and parks during the daytime, and living independently. I had been warned by many people of the risks I was taking by walking home after dark, even though I was rarely alone and was often escorted or received cab rides from concerned Hungarians. After the murder of the businessman's family in Szeged, the concern for me as a woman, and for women in general, multiplied. Once the subject of the murder was broached in conversation with my acquaintances, which was nearly every day from late January through mid March 1994, and frequently during the summer of 1994 following the church bombing, the women involved in the other incidences and the vague dangers for women in general were soon introduced as further proof of the

insecurity of the Hungarian nation at the hands of foreign criminals. At every opportunity the people of Szeged intimated that the body of their nation was being attacked through the bodies of their women.

This discourse has affected the ways in which Hungarian women in Szeged now live from day to day. Their experience of things that had once been done without a thought to their own safety, such as tending graves, riding buses, walking home from work, and shopping in the markets, now have security ramifications. Many members of the Szeged community use the concept of security to frame their personal narratives; however, only women feel that their own bodies are at risk. Men and women alike speak of economic insecurities, crime, and the threat to the Hungarian language and nation at the hands of foreigners, but only women speak of physical vulnerability and the loss of personal security in the post-socialist era.

One twenty-four year old woman told me how thankful she is that she, her husband, and their small child live in a large apartment complex surrounded by people in other apartments who could hear her scream for help, rather than in a private home where she would be alone with her child during the day. Another young woman has moved back into her parents' private home, from her own apartment that adjoins her parents' house, because of her fear of living alone. My retired landlady spoke of the anxiety caused by passing strangers on the paths at the local cemetery when others are not around to give assistance, and of riding the bus after dark back into the city from her daughter's village, which is half an hour away. Another woman, a seventy-three year old widow, mourned her inability to take walks in the evenings and, like most women, spoke often of the security of the past political system: "In the past we may have been able to travel to the West only once every three years, but we felt safe in our own home (*ház*), we could enjoy Szeged, things were better then." Like the women with whom Julianna Acheson (1994) spoke in Slovakia, most women in Szeged look back fondly on the socialist past as a time of security and relative ease. While men, too, feel that the transition from socialism has increased their insecurity, I found very few men who agreed with the women that "things were better then."

The quotation from the woman above, who stated that in the past Hungarians in Szeged felt safe in their own homes, is particularly interesting because of her word choice. Instead of *otthon* (home) or *lakás* (flat), which would have been more appropriate since she does live in an apartment rather than in a private home, this woman used the word *ház*. In Hungarian the word *ház* means both home, with regard to one's own private living space, and homeland or nation, the living space of all Hungarians. Like most Hungarian women, and many men as well, this woman considers herself unsafe both in her own home and in her nation. Criminals can break into any home, as the example of the murdered businessman and his family aptly shows, and foreigners can break into Hungary, as is evident from the number of foreigners in Szeged every day. Both of these institutions once provided security for women; neither is perceived as able to do so in the current era.

The different ways in which Hungarian women and men are experiencing the transition from socialism provide different concepts with which they, as gendered members of the nation, imagine their own membership in the national community. Both Hungarian women and men in Szeged have what they perceive as economic and national insecurities to draw upon in their imaginings of the national community; however, only Hungarian women feel physically threatened and only women have what all Hungarians feel are constant threats to their bodies to draw upon in their national imaginings. The

concepts available for the production of national ideologies by Hungarian women in Szeged differ from those of the men because of different gendered experiences of post-socialist life as members of different socially constructed, gender-specific categories.

Gender and the Death of the Nation

A short time into the transition from socialism, many Hungarians began reconsidering their socialist past. Gal (1994:280) states that “many Hungarians are increasingly nostalgic for the paternalistic relation to government that state socialism produced.” What I found, however, is not so much nostalgia, but a continuation of the same fear that has plagued Hungary and Hungarians since the 1920s, fear of “the imminent death of the nation” (Gal 1994:269). Following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, in which Hungary lost two-thirds of what Hungarians considered their land and a quarter of their population, Hungarians felt vulnerable and in danger of being swallowed up by hostile neighbors. Éva Huseby-Darvas (cited in Verdery 1994:248-9) cites references to Hungary in the post-Trianon period as “the beloved motherland’s ‘white and virginal but mutilated and bleeding body’” and “a ‘revered [national] body . . . torn asunder and ravaged by barbarians’” Gal (1994:270) writes that Hungary’s low birthrate following the Treaty was linked by Populist writers to “the figure of eternal ‘danger,’ ‘victimization,’ and ‘unpredictable fate’ . . . [as well as] national extinction.” In a series of lectures on the Treaty of Trianon presented in London, Count Stephen Bethlen (1934:3) refers to the Treaty as Afatal . . . to Hungary” and says that the post-Trianon period “is comparable only to the catastrophe of the battle of Mohács, in consequence of which Hungary for nearly 200 years became divided into three parts; when the whole of the Great Hungarian Plain, together with its thoroughly Magyar population, came under the Turkish yoke” (1934:145). In other words, the Treaty, like the Turkish occupation, threatened the very existence of the Hungarian nation.

Although Trianon has remained an important symbol of Hungary’s tragic past, and of the threats posed to the Hungarian nation by its neighbors, during the socialist era it was no longer seen as the most immediate and pressing concern of the nation. During this era, the Communist Party and the socialist system in general replaced Trianon and hostile neighbors as the primary threats to national continuity; however, while the locus of fear was different--the Communist Party and the socialist system as opposed to hostile neighbors--the object of fear, the survival of the Hungarian nation, remained the same. Similarly, during my fieldwork in 1993-94, Hungarians again feared for their nation at the hands of foreign enemies. Rather than nostalgia, I argue that Hungarians’ perceptions of the structural and material relations between themselves and their neighbors have precipitated reactions similar to those of the post-Trianon period. In the post-World War I period, military, ideological, and territorial loss, radical system change, and foreign invasion all resulted in great fear for the security and survival of the Hungarian nation. The transition from socialism in Hungary has created a political and economic climate that many Hungarians find similar to the one in which the nation found itself between 1918 and 1922. One woman who grew up in the interwar period and remembers the havoc of the early 1920s said that, “Today in Hungary is like after Trianon: Hungary was alone at the end of the Monarchy; we didn’t know what would happen to us. It’s the same today.” Other people who are much too young to remember this period of Hungarian history likewise point to their nation in the 1920s when searching for a reference point with which to compare the uncertainties of the current era. In response to these perceived similarities in structural and material relations, Hungarians have reacted in similar ways, by fearing for the security and survival of the Hungarian nation.

I argue that women in Hungary have been used throughout the twentieth century to talk about these actual or perceived threats to the nation. In the 1930s, Populist Hungarian writers attacked the Hungarian “one child system,” in which Hungarian peasants effectively limited their families to one child in order to prevent the division of small family land holdings (Gal 1994:269-70; Vasary 1989). The nation was seen to be at demographic risk, largely because of the “danger of rural ‘matriarchy’ --(old) women exercising too much power in the countryside” (Gal 1994:270). A few decades later, when state socialism was seen as the enemy of the nation, women again were linked to the primary threat to the nation. “Women [were] portrayed not as victims of a state-sponsored ‘emancipation’ that overburdened them but rather as powerful agents who...responded to state emancipation by becoming destructive to men and children” (Goven 1993:225). As Gal (1994:276) argues with regard to the abortion debate during the first years of the transition, “In much of this material an implicit equation is drawn between women allied with the former Communist state, as against men who are linked to a new, law-governed state and society.” In both cases, women are constructed as dangerous to men, children, and the nation.

During the seventeen months I lived in Hungary, socialism was no longer perceived as the primary threat to the survival of the Hungarian nation. This is not to say that the nation was perceived to be safe from harm, but that the source of the threat had changed from socialism to pervasive insecurities. One of the most commonly used tropes for addressing these insecurities is crime, specifically, crimes against women. Hungarian women today are seen as weak, vulnerable, and at risk of crime by foreigners; they are no longer viewed as the “powerful agents” of the antifeminist discourse analyzed by Goven (1993:225). At the same time, women continue to be associated with threats to the nation. Since the threat has changed, however, the construction of “woman” has changed to maintain the equation between women and threats to national survival. Throughout the twentieth century, Hungarians have constructed discursive links between women and that which they find threatening to the survival of the nation; women are used by both women and men in Szeged in gendered political discourse to talk about the enemy of the Hungarian nation.

Conclusion

In the post-socialist era, belonging to the Hungarian nation means being insecure; it means being afraid of unemployment, crime, and the loss of Hungarian culture and language. In addition to these general characteristics, national belonging for Hungarian women means the added burden of fearing for their physical security. Rather than focusing on crimes against Hungarians as Hungarians, discourse on security and the nation focuses on crimes against Hungarians as women. Essentialist gender constructs, such as woman as weak, woman as vulnerable, woman as dependent, are creating discursive bonds between the insecurity of women and the insecurity of the nation. Day-to-day living and experiencing the world as dangerous and insecure has made this discourse real.

As is evident from my work in Szeged, Hungary, national belonging cannot be seen as gender neutral, as meaning the same thing for women and men. During the period in Hungary’s immediate past when socialism was seen by Hungarians generally as the enemy of the Hungarian nation, Hungarian women were seen as the point of entry for socialism to bring about the destruction of the nation itself. Socialism attacked the Hungarian nation through Hungarian women. As Goven (1993) argues, women

and the socialist state were seen as pitted against men, the family, and the nation. Now, several years later, when the insecurities of market capitalism, of decreased police power, and of open borders are seen as the enemies of the Hungarian nation, women are again seen as the route to national destruction. In both eras, gendered political discourse has constructed Hungarian women as weak, either morally or physically, as vulnerable either to socialist promises or to foreign criminals, and, because of this weakness and vulnerability, as a threat to the nation as a whole.

Notes

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1. In addition to Anderson see also Katherine Verdery 1991, 1994. John Borneman's (1992) interesting work on the nation in the two Germanies comes closer to my own argument regarding the participation of non-elite members in the production of national ideologies.
2. I use "national security" to refer not to military strength or a concern with the Hungarian state but to a concern with the nation. I found that the Hungarian state is one of the few areas in which the people of Szeged feel relatively secure. As Barry Buzan argues, it is not the state and its sovereignty that is of primary concern in Eastern and Central Europe today; "the primary focus of the new insecurity is society [or nation] rather than the state" (1993:2).
3. I have never found confirmation that these last two events actually happened but it is the discourse itself rather than its veracity that interests me.

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