

Introduction

When Hungarian refugee women arrived to Canada after the failed revolution of 1956 – either with their families or alone – they faced a warm welcome, lots of organizational help and extremely different social expectations regarding their gender roles than in the country they had left behind. In this paper, I would like to argue that despite the tremendous help that they received from the Canadian government and other relief organizations, Hungarian refugee women had a much more difficult task than their male counterparts when accommodating to their new lifestyle. They experienced a loss of authority within the family unit which was underscored and validated by social policies and popular values as well.

The Hungarian socialist regime’s paternalistic-authoritarian tendencies provided women through their allocation in the labour force with a stronger position within the family unit. Official policies expected and encouraged them to work and provided them with significant help regarding their family duties through various social benefits (free nurseries, paid leave, etc.). Moreover, official propaganda sought to eradicate traditional gender constructs by creating the concept of the ‘communist subject.’ Official communist ideology did not recognize any other identity – should it be national, ethnic or gender – than class.

When these women arrived to Canada, they found a very different social environment. The 1950s saw a decrease in women’s participation in the labour market, reaching a low of 23.6 percent in 1954 and government policies rather encouraged women to stay at home and fulfil their family duties. Tax policies and hiring rules after the war aimed to force married women out of the paid workforce. Popular thought depicted the ideal woman as the mainstay of a household operation characterized by thrift and sobriety. As domestic producers and administrators, women guaranteed, as no other arrangement would, that Canadian men and children were to be industrious and highly principled.

All this taken into account, I will try to argue that Hungarian refugee women faced a much bigger challenge to live up to the expectations of contemporary Canadian state and society than their husbands, even if there were no explicit or intended discriminatory policies targeting them as new immigrants.

The 1956 Revolution in Hungary and the Immigration Wave that Followed

Hungary finished the Second World War as a defeated nation, first occupied by Nazi Germany, then the Red Army. Under Soviet domination, an orthodox Stalinist regime was established in 1948 which introduced a strong dictatorship and personal cult, mass collectivization of agriculture and restriction of culture. However, the further development of these policies was interrupted by Stalin’s death in 1953. The unexpected death of the Soviet dictator caused a considerable turmoil in the whole communist bloc.

In Hungary, “the dismal social and economic consequences of Stalinist policies produced a very tense and serious political situation.”¹ In the midst of social unrest in the summer of 1953, the Hungarian leaders were summoned to Moscow and were harshly criticised for bringing the country on the verge of political and economic collapse. The Kremlin insisted on significant changes and as a consequence, the Stalinist leader Mátyás Rákosi was replaced by the more moderate and reformist Imre Nagy in the function of prime minister. Nagy soon announced the so called new-course policies, and from that moment, became the leading figure of the anti-Stalinist offensive. However, because Nagy failed to build a strong basis of followers within the party and the Stalinist groups consistently sabotaged the implementation of reformist policies, the situation of the population did not significantly improve in the immediate years after 1953. As historian Gregorz Ekiert notes, these policies “only served to initiate the period of protracted political crisis, internal struggle,

¹ Gregorz Ekiert, *The State Against Society. Political Crises and Their Aftermath in East Central Europe*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 45.

and paralysis, which was followed by Nagy’s ouster in April 1955 and finally culminated in the popular revolution.”²

The short lived uprising between 23 October and 7 November was violently repressed by the Soviet troops that helped János Kádár into power. But before the new regime could gain firm ground, a huge immigration wave started that was mostly pouring toward the non-communist West. Right after the revolution, about 200,000 people (2 per cent of the population) left Hungary and approximately 37,000 of them landed in Canada. Susan M. Papp summarized the main features of this immigration wave as a group of “young and single [people who]... came from urban areas in Hungary and were well-educated... Their immigration to Canada was assessed by the minister of Citizenship and Immigration as ‘an immigration minister’s dream-come-true.’ Tremendous public sympathy and support for the group was generated, so they had less difficulty than earlier immigrants in finding employment and adjusting to Canadian life”³

Prior to 1956, Canada’s preferred immigrant was English-speaking and white. Just a short decade earlier, the country refused to accept Jewish refugees trying to flee the horrors of the Holocaust. Central and eastern Europeans - including Hungarians - were near the bottom of the immigration hierarchy. This policy was completely reversed in 1956, when the Hungarian Revolution got an unprecedented media coverage and “became the subject of consideration in the highest councils of government.”⁴

After a brief period of hesitation and as a result of substantial public pressure, the Canadian government announced that it would open up the doors for the Hungarian refugees. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Jack Pickersgill stated in early 1957 that “our position is, as it has been throughout this matter, that we intend to take these people as long as

² Ibid, 47.

³ Susan M. Papp, ‘Hungarians in Ontario.’ In: *Polyphony*, Vol.2 No.2-3, p.13.

⁴ N.F. Dreiszinger et al., *Struggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1982), 203.

they want to come here and it looks as though we can find accommodation for them and, in a reasonable time, find work for them.”⁵ Apart from humanitarian reasons, at least two other factors contributed to Ottawa's decision. First, the booming Canadian economy was in need of skilled workers and the Hungarian refugees could provide it with a pool of these to choose from. Second, 1957 was an election year, which meant that political actors tried to please public opinion to gain more votes. Because of the general positive predisposition of the public toward Hungarian ‘freedom fighters,’ the favourable turn in immigration policies was a logical consequence.

Along with the efforts of the government, various relief organizations, churches and Hungarian-Canadian civil societies mobilized their forces. Ottawa arranged the refugees' contemporary housing in Britain, France and the Netherlands and made arrangements for the transportation of thousands of people across the Atlantic by boat and plane. Civil organizations arranged demonstrations, rallies and later, fund-raising to help the newly arriving refugees' settlement. Dreiszinger et al note that “in this [fund-raising], Hungarian Canadians and Canadians of all backgrounds collaborated, more than in any of the earlier schemes.”⁶

The actual integration of the Hungarian refugees into Canadian society was a similarly joint effort on the part of the government, welfare agencies and the Hungarian-Canadian community. The cost of the whole operation was \$14 million⁷ for the country that, as Gerald E. Dirks notes, “behaved more magnanimously than during any previous refugee emergency.”⁸ In view of this concentrated and generous effort which obviously did not apply

⁵ Pickersgill in House of Commons *Debates*, 25 January 1957, 666.

⁶ N.F. Dreiszinger et al., *Struggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1982), 205.

⁷ Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic. A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 341.

⁸ Gerald E. Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism?* (Montreal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 200.

any discriminatory policies, it is surprising how women are missing from the story of the Hungarian refugee movement that followed the aborted revolution of 1956.

But where are the women?

The battle that ordinary Hungarians waged for certain democratic principles and civil rights and against the Soviet forces formed the basis of an emblematic Cold War story. The 1956 revolution, however limited it was for urban centres and their educated population, did include women who not infrequently fought alongside their male co-revolutionaries. For example, Anna Porter described her mother’s active political participation during the period of the revolution.

“My mother was in a serious organization that, among other things, asked for all sorts of diplomatic assistance from the English, which of course they did not get.’... After a two-year trial, she was condemned to seven years in the Kalocsa jail, when her son was a mere seven years old.”⁹

The immigration wave that followed the uprising had some distinguishing features and according to statistics, “the Hungarian refugees who came to Canada were mostly young people. Nearly half of them were under the age of twenty-nine. Only about 30 per cent of them were over forty-five years of age. There was an imbalance in their sex distribution as well: men outnumbered women almost three to two.”¹⁰ In other words, around forty percent of the newly arrived were women. Generosity and non-discrimination notwithstanding, if one takes a look at contemporary news coverage and official correspondence of Canadian official agencies, the absence of any kind of concern for them is particularly striking.

⁹ Andrew Princz, *Bridging the Divide. Canadian and Hungarian Stories of the 1956 Revolution*. (Montreal: Ontheglobe.com, 2006), 129.

¹⁰ N.F. Dreiszinger et al., *Struggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1982), 207.

The *Toronto Globe*’s general commentary on the average Hungarian refugee in early 1957 presented the situation as follows:

“The transient refugee flow goes largely through the Convent of the Good Shepherd centre at 14 West Lodge Ave... At the West Lodge centre, his settlement into the Canadian pattern as quickly as possible is the dictating force of each day.... The Department of Citizenship and Immigration has set up an immigration placement office at the convent where he is interviewed and advised for job possibilities. The Toronto Welfare Council maintains a committee for housing Hungarian refugees in Toronto.

The refugee centre is only a stopping off place. The day comes when he must set up his own routine, when he must begin to work out his own pattern for living, as an individual on his own.

What happens to him then?”¹¹

The gender of the Hungarian refugee in this news article is obvious. However, when Hungarian refugee women did appear in stories of the Canadian media, their role tended to be that of settings rather than actors in that spectacular play. *The Globe and Mail* reported the following success story of a Hungarian refugee in April, 1957:

“Take George Sabot, for instance. In his middle twenties, a biochemist in Hungary, he managed almost immediately to get a job in his own line with the Department of Health. With his wife and 2-year-old daughter, he’s settling down in an apartment in North Toronto, buying furniture on the instalment plan, and proudly includes a washing machine among his prizes.

Josef Laszlo, an engineer with a cement factory in Budapest, had specialized training on a process still in experimental stages in a Toronto plant. This gained him the immediate offer of a position at his own trade.”¹²

¹¹ ‘Sudden freedom mental hazard’ in: *The Toronto Globe*, 4 March, 1957. Retrieved on 1. April, 2008 from: http://www.osa.ceu.hu/files/holdings/selection/rip/4/pc/300-5-46--6-1-8_000177.jpg

¹² ‘Hungarians are quickly turning into good Canadians’ *The Globe and Mail*, 13 April, 1957. Retrieved on 1 April, 2008 from http://www.osa.ceu.hu/files/holdings/selection/rip/4/pc/300-5-46--6-1-7_000175.jpg

Certain archival documents of the Ontario Provincial Government also suggest that when it came to aiding new immigrants, men had a substantial advantage over women. The extensive correspondence between government officials and the Red Cross to give a helping hand to certain individuals who experienced difficulties reaching Canada only deals with a handful of women, most of whom are only mentioned as wives of those men who need to be helped. For example, A.V. Crate, Director of the Trade and Industry Branch of the Government of Canada wrote in a letter to J. McFarlane, Acting Central District Superintendent of the Immigration Branch at Department of Citizenship and Immigration that

“Attached is a letter which we have received concerning a Mr. Andrew Papp. His qualification may well prove of interest to us in Canada, and I am bringing it to your attention in the event that your officers abroad may wish to investigate to see whether Mr. Papp would like to proceed to Canada and what assistance might be provided to him.”¹³

In a letter to I.R. Stirling, Assistant District Superintendent at the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, R.A. Baker, representative of the Immigration Division at the Trade and Industry Branch expressed his deep concern for the fate of a certain young Hungarian man who had had a difficult fate but who appeared to be a good raw material for a good Canadian citizen.

“This young gentleman apparently is alone in the world. His father is missing and his stepmother emigrated to Australia. He evidently had a relative, by the name of Mr. Janos Hubert, who was said to have been working in the staff pay office of one of our railroad companies here in Toronto. Both railway companies’ personnel records were checked by the writer, and no record could be found of this relative.

In order to expedite Nicholas Fabian’s passage to Canada, and in view of the unusual circumstances, would it not be possible to have this young man report to the proper authorities in Vienna on an open placement basis?

¹³ Archives of Ontario, Hungarian Refugee Program Files, RG 9-3 b354211 - RG9-3 – HE4-1

A Mrs. Elizabeth M. Cresswell, of the British Red Cross Society, apparently met this young man in Austria, and she is of the opinion that he would make a good Canadian citizen if someone would take an interest in his case and assist him.

...anything you can do to bring forth results would be appreciated.”¹⁴

Some of the published memoirs of Hungarian refugee women also reflect the difficulty they faced when they arrived in their new country. The following description reflects the very limited employment opportunities that were open to women.

“In her mid-40s, Éva’s mother married a recently-widowed Canadian man who owned a small hotel, restaurant and a dance hall at Riding Mountain National Park. Éva also worked there during the summers, while her mother worked as a cashier at the dance hall.”¹⁵

These women managed to obtain work through the newly established family ties and as such, were dependent on the good-will of their male family members.

Assuming that neither Canadian government officials, nor journalists or charity workers were deliberately discriminating against women, – which was most probably the case – it is quite remarkable how forty per cent of Hungarian refugees were confined to the role of assistants to the protagonists in their symbolic battle of resettlement. The question arises: how did Hungarian refugee women cope with this secondary role? To come up with a meaningful answer, it is necessary to look at their situation in a comparative context of the 1950s Canadian and Hungarian socio-economic environment. Hungarian refugee women arriving in Canada found that two very important defining agents of this environment, the state and public opinion, had a completely different view of women’s desired participation in economy as those of Hungary.

¹⁴ Archives of Ontario, Hungarian Refugee Program Files, RG 9-3 b354211 - RG9-3 – HE4-1

¹⁵ Andrew Princz, *Bridging the Divide. Canadian and Hungarian Stories of the 1956 Revolution*. (Montreal: Ontheglobe.com, 2006), 106.

From Communist Subject to Rational Individual – the state and the ideological aspect

The basic principles of communist ideology - as postulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels - stressed that the prominent example of class oppression was that of the female by the male and that this was caused by the existence of private property and thus true freedom for women was only possible through communism.¹⁶ Based on these tenets, communist policy-makers of the early 1950s redefined women’s inferiority: instead of a predetermined biological-natural trait, they considered it as socially constructed and therefore, alterable. Éva Fodor points out that “on at least one occasion in 1952, then-party secretary [Mátyás] Rákosi argued that women had a better chance of developing a true communist consciousness than men did because they came from the experience of double oppression: not merely on the basis of their class but also on their gender.”¹⁷

Consequently, Hungarian state ideology sought to eliminate male-female categories in many aspects of everyday life, but most importantly on the labour market. The official image of the female tractor driver or mechanic became an overarching symbol of this consideration by the early 1950s. Official theory emphasized that the utility of the individual for the purposes of the state does not depend on gender, but on ideological reliability which served as a basic requirement for carrier advancement. By creating a (seemingly) genderless category of the socialist worker, state ideology produced what Éva Fodor terms as ‘the communist subject’ “which fit the perceived political, ideological, and economic needs of state socialist Hungary.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Women and Communism: Selections from the Writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1950), 35-36.

¹⁷ Éva Fodor, ‘Smiling Women and Fighting Men. The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary.’ In: *Gender & Society*, Vol. 16 No.2. April 2002, 240-263, 243.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 241. It should be noted here that in practice, the communist subject was not genderless but possessed distinctively masculine features. Women in fact did stay in an inferior status because of their double duties of participation on the paid labour market and within the household. However, the primary concern of this paper is the ideological stand, not its practical implications.

Ideology created the image of a reformed family model, where traditional roles were redistributed according to the state’s interests. In the socialist family, the paternal figure became not the male member but the state itself that had complete control over the reallocation of goods and tasks. Members of the traditional family unit were directed into an umbrella-category of workers, whose main task was to serve the state and build socialism in a joint effort.

Socialist paternalism nevertheless did acknowledge women’s reproductive duties and aimed at facilitating women to fulfil them with the effective help of the state. In order to being able to simultaneously work and raise a family, women were provided with numerous services by the state such as free nurseries, paid leave if their children were sick and free of charge meals in schools. When the Hungarian refugees arrived to Canada, they found a very different predisposition on the part of the state – as represented by its social policies – regarding their roles within the family unit and in the economic context.

Contrary to the philosophy of the Stalinist regime in Hungary which did not tolerate dissent from its ideological principles on the part of public opinion; in the democratic context, the latter strongly influenced the state’s policies. In an environment of booming economy and growing consumerism, the ideal woman of 1950s Canada was “the mainstay of a household operation characterized by thrift and sobriety.”¹⁹ In terms of commonly held 1950s values, Stephanie Coontz documents strong condemnation regarding any deviation from the narrow acceptable life course, such as for those who did not marry and those who did not want children.²⁰ Doug Owram shows how working women with children in the fifties were viewed by the public as selfish and deviant.²¹

¹⁹ Rosemary A. Venne, ‘Half Century of Work: Women in the Labour Force’, In: *A Colloquy on Employment and Labour Law and Policy for the New Millennium: Promises and Paradoxes*, 491.

²⁰ Stephanie Coontz, *Women’s Work, Men’s Property: the Origins of Gender and Class* (London: Verso, 1986)

²¹ Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: a History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996)

The state shared and through its policies, even encouraged these notions mostly because of economic reasons. Rosemary A. Venne points out that “tax policies and hiring rules after the war aimed to force married women out of the paid workforce”²² and Ruth Roach Pierson claims that “in some employments, such as the federal civil service, if her husband was employed, the wife was forced to resign.”²³ Similarly, analysing the 1950 reciprocal agreement between Canada and Italy, Franca Iacovetta writes that it “reflected notions about married women’s prescribed roles as wife and mother and reinforced the assumption that married... women were dependent upon their men and could make no real contribution to Canadian society.” She also points out that contemporary assumptions held that “women were little more than part of the male newcomer’s cultural baggage.”²⁴

These few examples illustrate how dramatically different women’s situation on the labour market was in Canada, compared to Hungary in the 1950s. While in the former case, they were encouraged to stay at home as main caretakers of the family and the household; the latter environment encouraged them to work and the state even provided them with help to fulfil this requirement. In fact, being wage-earners provided Hungarian women during communism with a considerable authority within the family unit.

Not only state policies and the public’s general predisposition toward women’s roles were completely different in Canada, economic principles and possibilities also showed drastic dissimilarities compared to Hungary.

From Worker to Domestic Labourer – the economic aspect

²² Rosemary A. Venne, ‘Half Century of Work: Women in the Labour Force’, In: *A Colloquy on Employment and Labour Law and Policy for the New Millennium: Promises and Paradoxes*, 491.

²³ Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson (eds), *No Easy Road. Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s*. (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990), 305.

²⁴ Franca Iacovetta, ‘From Contadina to Worker: Southern Italian Immigrant Working Women in Toronto, 1947-62.’ In: Jean Burnet (ed.), *Looking into My Sister’s Eyes: an Exploration in Women’s History* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986), 197.

The years following the Second World War brought about a significant economic boom in Canadian economy. Kelley and Trebilcock note that “large-scale private investments in the natural resources and manufacturing sectors, and government investments in physical infrastructure and educational facilities, combined with pent-up consumer demand from the Depression and war years, fuelled the boom.”²⁵ Wartime economy was rapidly transformed into one producing consumer goods and urban centres expanded in a fast pace. The rise of giant corporations brought about an emphasis on capital investment and labour productivity, which inevitably led to a higher unemployment rate which from 1939 to 1958 ranged from about 2.8 to 5.9. per cent.²⁶

Parallel to the transformation of the economy was the change in women's participation in paid labour. During the war years, great numbers of women entered the labour force to replace men who had joined the army and “day nurseries and tax exemptions were among the concessions offered to encourage wives to work.”²⁷ This radically changed after 1946, when men returned from the war and wanted to take up work again. As a general ‘rule of thumb,’ Margaret Benston claims that “when there is less demand for labor... women become a surplus labor force but one for which their husbands and not society are economically responsible.”²⁸ Her notion can be supported by women's participation rates in the Canadian labour market, which rose from 24.4 per cent in 1939 to a high of 33.5 per cent in 1944, but by 1946 dropped down to 25.3 per cent, then to a low point of 23.6 per cent in 1954,²⁹ on the eve of the Hungarian refugee movement.

²⁵ Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic. A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 311.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 311.

²⁷ Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson (eds), *No Easy Road. Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s*. (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990), 304.

²⁸ Margaret Benston, 'The Political Economy of Women's Liberation' in: Nona Glazer-Malbin and Helen Waehrer (eds.), *Woman in a Man-Made World* (Chicago: Rand McNally Press, 1972), 125.

²⁹ Based on Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto. Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984), pp. 18-59.

Changing economic circumstances also reflected in the family status of women who did take up paid work. Veronica Strong-Boag argues that young women who stayed in their jobs after marriage, “often retiring from the labour force in their mid twenties... tended to produce two to four children in relatively quick succession. They commonly devoted energies and talents to the home front until the youngest was in primary school or beyond.”³⁰ Taking into account that the fertility rate (the average number of children per woman) in the baby boom period between 1947 and 1966 peaked at 3.9 children around 1959,³¹ the period of staying at home could easily stretch out to eight-ten years.

The observations of an article from the popular *Chatelaine* women’s magazine in 1953 neatly illustrate the above pattern. The interplay between values of consumerism and social expectations toward women are clearly demonstrated in the following passage. Presenting an ideal young Canadian woman, the author of the article made the character say that

“First the house loan must be paid... Then I’d like to get an automatic washer, maybe an ironer, a dining room set and some money in the bank for emergencies. By then I should have my five-year pin from C.I.L. and I’ll be ready to quit. I’ll be twenty-five then, and it will be time for the children.”³²

While consumerism was gaining ground in North America, the communist states of Eastern Europe engaged in a fast paced and forced industrialization project where “the regime continued to privilege production over consumption.”³³ The fast industrialization of the highly agricultural Hungarian economy required a large number of workers, hence women came very handy for the project. Fodor claims that “a vast campaign targeting the inclusion of women in

³⁰ Veronica Strong-Boag, ‘Canada’s wage-earning wives and the construction of the middle class, 1945-1960’ in: *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 29 (Fall 1994), 21.

³¹ Rosemary A. Venne, ‘Half Century of Work: Women in the Labour Force’, In: *A Colloquy on Employment and Labour Law and Policy for the New Millennium: Promises and Paradoxes*, 494.

³² Zoe Bieler, ‘White-Collar Wife’ in: *Chatelaine*, August 1953, 40.

³³ Susan E. Reid, ‘Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev.’ In: *Slavic Review*, Vol. 61, No.2, (Summer 2002), 215.

the paid labor force and in educational institutions ensued with surprisingly fast results.”³⁴ In their comparative study of women’s employment in Hungary and the United States, Evelina Panayotova and April Brayfield estimates that women’s participation in the labour force in 1955 was above 40 per cent in Hungary.³⁵

Several scholars argue that the political goals of the Hungarian Stalinist regime were consistent with the economic need to draw women into the labour force. “Socialist regimes pushed an industrialization program that was (per-force) labor-intensive and capital-poor, necessarily requiring the labor-power of everyone regardless of sex. More than any ideological commitment, this fact produced socialism’s emphasis on gender equality and the policies that facilitated it.”³⁶

The economic tendencies in Canada and Hungary during the early 1950s were spectacularly complementary to each other. While in the former case, the post-war economic boom brought about the appearance of capital-intensive and labour-productive giga-corporations; the state-controlled industrialization projects in the latter country were labour-intensive and capital-poor. These tendencies obviously had different effects on women’s participation in the labour market. While in Canada, women’s wage earning was limited in time and space and usually interrupted by the establishment of a family; in Hungary the state encourage its female subjects to take on the double role of raising children and taking part in economic production.

Conclusion

³⁴ Éva Fodor, ‘Smiling Women and Fighting Men. The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary.’ In: *Gender & Society*, Vol. 16 No.2. April 2002, 240-263, 245.

³⁵ Evelina Panayotova and April Brayfield, ‘National Context and Gender Ideology: Attitudes toward Women’s Employment in Hungary and the United States’ in: *Gender and Society*, Vol. 11, No.5, (October, 1997), 627-655, 630.

³⁶ Catherine Verdery, ‘From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe.’ In: *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 8 No.2 (Spring 1994), pp.225.255, 30.

This paper argued that Hungarian refugee women who arrived to Canada after the aborted revolution of 1956 had a much more difficult task in acculturating into their new country than men. The increased difficulties were the results of the drastically different concepts of female gender roles within the contemporary Canadian and Hungarian contexts.

Communist ideology sought to eradicate male-female differences in the workforce both for ideological and economic reasons. On the ideological ground, it created the notion of the genderless communist subject whose utility to the state depended on his or her ideological devotion and not physical abilities. In the economic area, the state pushed an enormous industrialization project which demanded a huge work-force from which women could not be excluded. In exchange, the state provided women with free facilities of childcare and other benefits; and appeared as an all-powerful paternal figure who ensures the just allocation of the family resources.

Arriving to Canada, women had to face a relative lack of concern toward them on the part of government authorities and the public. The dominant values of the age, based on the possibilities raised by the booming consumer-driven economy, regarded women’s work a temporary necessity that should definitely cease to exist after the establishment of a family. Women were accepted – but not expected – to work while young and newly married but were considered selfish and irresponsible if they stayed in the workforce after the birth of their children. The state’s social policies also followed this pattern in as much as the government was interested in pulling women out of the labour market to make room for men and to follow the interests of the capital-intensive but labour-short corporations.

Therefore, while Hungarian women were significant and respected contributors to the family income under the aegis of communist economy, they found themselves unnecessary or at least of secondary importance in a fast-developing capitalist economy. Confined to the kitchen space for years as guarantees for industrious men and highly principled children, their

KATA BOHUS

FREEDOM FIGHTER TODAY – HOUSEWIFE TOMORROW.

HUNGARIAN REFUGEE WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE IN CANADA AFTER THE 1956 REVOLUTION

primary experience was that of losing authority within the nuclear family unit. Therefore, their accommodation into contemporary Canadian society was most probably more traumatic than that of their male counterparts.

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