

Gendered Hate Speech and Political Discourse in Recent U.S. Elections and in Postsocialist Hungary

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**Abstract:** In her article "Gendered Hate Speech and Political Discourse in Recent U.S. Elections and in Postsocialist Hungary" Louise O. Vasvári illustrates gendered political discourse in the U.S. through a case study of the 2008 presidential campaign. While the campaign turned into a plebiscite on gender and sexual politics with Hillary Clinton and other female political figures depicted in the most traditionally misogynist terms, Barack Obama has in some leftist circles been seen as an empathetic figure who transcends both race and gender, although from the political right he has been attacked with racist and feminizing stereotyped invectives. In turn, in Hungary, deep-seated gender stereotypes continue not only unchallenged in post-socialist society but in public discourse have actually gone backwards. While the rise of masculinism is the primary characteristic of gender relations in Hungary today, ironically it also forms the bedrock of Western liberal democracy where gender stereotypes are deep-seated and where the backlash against women in the public sphere has been ongoing.

**Louise O. VASVÁRI**

### **Gendered Hate Speech and Political Discourse in Recent U.S. Elections and in Postsocialist Hungary**

For my theoretical framework in the article at hand, I employ feminist sociolinguistics and critical discourse studies in a concern with language not in and for itself, but to gain understanding of critical problems in society through language in order to make evident how the complex workings of power and repressive ideology work to sustain and perpetuate a hierarchically gendered social order within a variety of cultural and institutional contexts. I illustrate how unequal power relations can be naturalized by constant repetition of stereotyped degradation, hate speech, and othering of those considered a threat to the stability of the hegemonic social order (see Holmes; Lazar). Further, I employ Teun Van Dijk's terminology in critical discourse studies on how discourses (re)produce inequalities and political argumentation. Gayle Tuchman also shows in "The Symbolic Annihilation of Women in the Mass Media" how women are annihilated systematically by a combination of "absence," "trivialization," and "condemnation," terms I illustrate through my discussion of "shrew" and "bitch" discourses in the political sphere (see Vasvári, "Examples," "Intimate Violence"; see also Gill). R.W. Connell defines "gender regimes" as the "state of play in gender relations in a given institution" including the construction of various kinds of femininities and masculinities, the sexual division of labor, as well as gender ideologies (129). Following Connell's definition, the primary characteristic of gender regimes in Hungary today is the rise of masculinism — "macho democracy" — accompanied by the concomitant demonization of feminism. At the same time, masculinism still also forms the very bedrock of Western liberal democracy where gender stereotypes are as deep-seated and where, in particular, the backlash against women in the public sphere has been ongoing.

Historically, women in the public discourse of Western culture have always been negated. For example, Sharon Achinstein in her study of English revolutionary pamphlets shows how pornographic attacks and sexual slander demonized and scapegoated women as scolds and witches, attacks which could be read both as about male anxiety with psychological roots and as arising from cultural response to social change. In even broader historical terms, Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen show in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views* how women in various cultures and historical periods — who attempted to cross from the private to the public sphere — were vilified with stereotypes such as domineering dowager, witch, and scheming concubine. Or, with regard to the Middle Ages, Christina Neufeld shows in *Xanthippe's Sisters: Orality and Femininity in the Later Middle Ages* how in satirical depictions women were perceived as deviant speakers of loquacious gossip, as scolding shrews, and as cursing witches.

In the United Kingdom in 1997, history was made when in a Labour landslide 101 Labour women were elected unexpectedly to the British Parliament — and thus formed briefly almost one quarter of the membership — newspapers trivialized the newly elected women as "Blair's Babes" and "Blair's Backwrenchers": at the time journalist Polly Toynbee judged the first term as merely a casual, misogynist tag that identifies only the lazy prejudice of its user. If, however, ten years on one reads in Rachel Cook's article in *The Guardian* the testimony of some of those women about the systematic sexism and bullying they endured, it is evident that such gendered media creations are not merely casual invectives, but work to invalidate women's acceptability as political leaders (<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2007/apr/22/women.labour1>>). Again, in the 2009 election campaign women in Prime Minister Gordon Brown's Labour Party were depicted in headlines as "Gordon's Gals" or alternatively "Brown Sugars," while the women in David Cameron's conservative party became "Cameron's Cuties," "Dave's Dolls," and "Dave's Divas," and the women on the slate of Nick Clegg were "Nick's Nymphets" (see Mavin, Bryans, Cunningham). In France, in Prime Minister Alain Juppé's 1995 government there were 27% women (4 ministers and 8 secretaries) who were dubbed "Jupettes," a play on Juppé's name and on *minijupe* (miniskirt) (see, e.g., Dufourcq). In the U.S., where a populist right wing of the Republican party has dubbed itself the Tea Party, Palin and other copy-cat candidates following in her wake have been dubbed the "Tea Party Crumpets": crumpet like tart is a vulgarism for a sexually desirable woman (on metaphorical lexicalizations of woman as dessert, see Hines; on misogynist epithets in general, see Caputi).

Regarding the treatment of the media of women in the public sphere, Deborah Cameron points out that exclusion of women in the public context does not have to depend on absolute prohibition, but can be achieved by gendered division of labor such as when until a couple of decades ago women's voices were not considered appropriate in the BBC to deliver the news, but only for unserious programs. It might be added that the first regular female news reader in the BBC was Angela Reppon in 1975, who was widely referred to as "the thinking man's crumpet" and who was eventually ousted by ageism. Karen Ross discusses how women parliamentarians are rarely treated by the media as their male counterparts, but are framed as women first and politicians second and trivialized by speculation over their private lives, domestic arrangements, clothing and hair styles, cookie-baking skills, and of course their age, altogether sometimes referred to as the three H's: hair, hemline, and husband. We might recall how Geraldine Ferraro, the first U.S. female Vice Presidential candidate in 1984 was asked by Agriculture and Commerce Commissioner Jim Buck Ross "Can you bake a blueberry muffin?" and on *Meet the Press* she was asked "are you strong enough to push the button?" As Kaitlyn Mendes discusses in a comparative British and US-American context of newspapers, feminism has failed to gain long-lasting support, with the "death of feminism" and the insistence that now we live in a postfeminist society where feminism is redundant and being declared with regularity in newspapers from the late seventies on. In the U.S. feminism has had trouble sustaining itself from one generation to the next, in particular in the political sphere, where today the country stands in some 70th place in the world in women's political representation and is dropping (see Carrol and Fox). As of 2012 only 17% of U.S. Senators were women, 16% of members of the House, and 12 governors (see Lawless and Fox). In particular the 2008 presidential election campaign was a kind of plebiscite on sexual politics with Hillary Clinton and other women candidates depicted in the most misogynistic terms.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the mere entry of women in more than token numbers to masculinist institutions normalizes the female voice in those institutions, but the perceptible threat it represents to masculine hegemony may rather lead to an intensification of sexism in the public sphere and most particularly in politics. Therefore, a linguistic analysis of the gendered language that permeates the public sphere is important as the performance of gender has become increasingly part of how the public understands politics. It then becomes important politically to pay linguistic attention to issues such as how, for example, the French press and the Academie Française have continued to be hostile to linguistic equality by blocking attempted feminization of prestige professional titles such as *ministre*, *maître*, *professeur* (see, e.g., Campernolle; Gervais-le Garff). Or, in English politics and elections are often described in terms of analogies and metaphors drawn from the traditionally masculine domains of war and sports with terms such as "war room," "war chest," "critical battleground states," candidates being "ahead/behind in the horse race," or "rounding the bend," "scoring a knockout punch," "taking their gloves off," and of course the expression "to find the right man for the job" (see Carver and Pikalo; Hannagan; Koller; Murphy). For example, Sarah Palin in her acceptance speech for the Republican Vice Presidential nomination in 2008 made prevalent use of "man" in her discourse, using it some thirteen times in place of gender-neutral "person" or "politician."

A young feminist political writer, Rebecca Traister, covering the 2008 convention in her *Big Girls Don't Cry: Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Michelle Obama and the Year that Changed Everything* pointed out how the 2008 presidential election brought issues concerning women, power, sexism, and feminism to the fore, concluding that in that year women's liberation found new life. Indeed, in 2008 with the candidacies of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, the U.S. had the two highest profile women candidates in its history and one year before Nancy Pelosi was elected Speaker of the House, thus becoming the highest elected female politician in US-American history. In sharp contrast to Traister's optimistic assessments, Anne E. Kornblut, who in her *Notes from the Cracked Ceiling*, like Traister, provided a blow-by-blow account of the 2008 campaign concluded that the revival of old stereotypes unleashed during the campaign set back the cause of feminist candidates by decades (see also Maloney). Similarly, Jane Caputi has also shown that the historic primary campaign that aroused so many hopes also aroused resentments and prejudices around sex, gender, race, and class. Caputi collected an array of representation of **the** vivid material culture of hate speech in the form of campaign buttons, stickers, hats, dolls, and posters which serve to illustrate the repeated techniques of otherization, alienation, demonization, dehumanization, and intimidation aimed at candidates, but

primarily at Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, who are often attacked together. Two examples, showing the confluence of sexism and racism, illustrate the tenor of this discourse: a T-Shirt with the logo, "I Wish Hillary Had Married O.J. Simpson" and "Obama Loves America like O.J. Loves Nicole" (see Dickinson and Anderson on the demonization of Black men and of women of all colors as evil, thereby recentring white masculinity; see Lakoff on the Simpson case; see also Dines on the obsession with "uppity" Black men as sexual and economic threat and on their sexually dehumanized images). Further, Enid Logan studied the concept of the intersectionality of class, race, and gender in the 2008 campaign which led liberals to become polarized around issues of race versus gender and that race worked for Obama in a way that gender did not for Clinton.

The subsequent 2010 midterm elections saw a far fall from 2008 in representation of women, as well as the loss by Pelosi from the House Speakership. As Kornblut shows, in 2008 each woman candidate received the kind of national ridicule generally reserved for philandering or corrupt men politicians (see Carroll and Fox; Edwards; Falk; Shaftall and Carroll; Whitaker). It is telling that the third name featured after Clinton and Palin in the catchy title of Traister's book, above, is Michelle Obama. Although not even a candidate herself, early in the campaign she was attacked as unpatriotic and seething with racial anger because she spoke in a Black female style far more blunt and critical than is acceptable in the majority society (on Black women's discourse styles, see Houston and Davis). The conservative Fox News also called her Barack Obama's "baby mama," a derogatory term for a woman with whom a Black man has had a baby (not necessarily even a girlfriend) and an insult not even one step away from calling her "Obama's whore," fitting the stereotyped perception of Black women's bodies as sexually lewd and unfit for respectability (see Tyree). Michelle Obama was, however, soon given a not-so-subtle discourse and fashion-makeover by the Obama team with a new speech emphasizing her humble roots as a granddaughter of a slave and turning her into a more or less mute fashion icon promoting alternative US-American fashion designers. And fifteen years after Hillary Clinton had tried to soften her image before Congress by introducing herself primarily in relational terms, as "as mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a woman," Michelle Obama tried at the Democratic National Convention to recast her own image with almost identical words, followed later by her repeated humorous self-description as "mom-in-chief" (see Kantor). Since the elections hate speech attacks from the right against the Obamas has continued, for example when Kimberly Small, a candidate for the Illinois legislature called Michelle Obama "hoochie mama" for supposedly wearing too short a skirt (which was actually a tunic) and the hot selling racist bumper stickers urging Obama not to "re-Nig" and even Facebook pages calling to assassinate the President and "his monkey children" (see Goodwin; see also Janis). While Michelle Obama had been criticized as too aggressive, one of the most telling racial slanders against Barack Obama himself was the following unbelievable characterization by Lorraine Berry: "No, I am not calling Obama a girlie President. But he may be suffering a rhetorical testosterone deficit when it comes to dealing with crises, with which he has been richly endowed" (Berry <[http://open.salon.com/blog/fingerlakeswanderer/2010/06/30/whose\\_president\\_you\\_calling\\_a\\_girly-man](http://open.salon.com/blog/fingerlakeswanderer/2010/06/30/whose_president_you_calling_a_girly-man)>). If we allow for the bad syntax here, Berry is saying that although as a Black man Obama has been well endowed physically, in political confrontations he is weak like a woman. If we enter "Obama" and "effeminate" into a search engine we can see similar attacks by other political pundits. While Michelle Obama is accused of being an angry and uppity Black woman, as well as a critical and emasculating wife, Barack Obama is accused of not being angry enough and this primarily by those on the left, who now accuse him of "wimping out" and caving in to Republican pressure. Of course, if he acted angry he would then be open to accusations of being an "angry black man" with deep hatred of white people.

Although all this is ostensibly racialized discourse, the invective against the Obamas are both couched in sexual terms, which is hardly surprising because, as Kevin W. Saunders suggests, throughout history obscenity has not really been about sex, but about degradation. Saunders traces the legal trajectory of degradation as it moves from sexual depiction to hate speech and posits that hate speech is today's conceptual equivalent of obscenity. The worst routine insult against any male candidate is to feminize him, as was done with an other Democratic candidate in 2008, John Edwards, who was ridiculed for having expensive haircuts and for being over-concerned with his looks. The right-wing political pundit Ann Coulter, who had earlier also labelled Al Gore a "total fag," also called

Edwards "gay" and a "faggot" but later supposedly "clarified" that she was not actually calling him homosexual, but was using the term as a schoolyard taunt meaning "wuss" (a combination of "wimp" and "puss[y]," meaning "a weak, cowardly man") and therefore she was just saying "that he is not manly or commanding enough to be commander-in-chief" (<<http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/03/04/coulter.edwards>>; on the term "gay" as part of homosexual culture see Pascoe; on Coulter's use of right-wing recurrent patterns of gendered diatribe, see Klein and Farrar; Molek-Kazokowska).

The attempt to feminize Barack Obama goes along with the obsession in rightist circles to spread the claim that he is not only un-American, but was not born in the U.S. and a Muslim and this is in addition to the premise that an African American man cannot be trusted and that he seduces rather than leads (see Duffy, Page, Young; on popular discourse on race in the 2008 election see Janis <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1556>>). To bring full circle the conflation of racist and sexist discourse, Dee Dee Myers, press secretary in the Clinton administration, riffing on a comment once made by Maya Angelou, joked that if Bill Clinton — born poor and raised by a single mother and lover of junk food and the saxophone — was the first Black president, Obama could be the first woman president (see Kornblut). In short, while during the campaign the right reviled Obama for not being man enough, for the left he has had much more latitude to act female than Hillary Clinton. However, as I note above, two years on some on the left were also clamoring for Obama to "man up," as in a column "Man Up, Obama, or Make Way for President Palin," which goes on to advise that he "ditch his professorial, community-organizer mean and crack some heads" (Reilly <<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-02-11/man-up-obama-or-make-way-for-president-palin-david-reilly.html>>) or as Michael Sherer put it more succinctly in the title of his 2007 *salon.com* commentary: "Hillary is from Mars, Obama is from Venus: In the Democratic Presidential Pack, the Leading Man is a Woman and the Leading Woman is a Man" and he wrote that Obama had rejected male metaphors quoting Obama: "'the decision to go to war is not a sport'" and that he — Obama — would have made "'lady folksingers'" proud with his empowering statements such as "'we can discover the better part of ourselves as a nation ... we can dream big dreams'" (<[http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/07/12/obama\\_hillary](http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/07/12/obama_hillary)>). In both the negative and the supposedly positive feminizations of Obama can be seen that his body has become a discursive space for competing conceptions of national belonging and disaffiliation, of citizenship, ethnicity, and nation, as his actual mixed race hybridity and what might be called "cosmopolitan Blackness" cannot fit into a political news discourse defined by whiteness (see Selzer; compare also Achter on the earlier presidential campaign of Jesse Jackson).

All the foregoing is not to imply that even men have an easy time to conform to the culturally defined mythical requirements for masculinity sought in a candidate, as shown in the the following tongue-in-cheek Associated Press release, which used findings from voter exit polls to construct the profile of the "perfect" presidential candidate for 2008: "Wanted: a former altar boy from the Southwest who speaks Spanish, married into a rich Republican family from Ohio and revolutionized the Internet after working as a volunteer firefighter in Florida. Position: President of the United States." The article went on to add that he should also be a 'Medal of Honor winner' with combat experience who helped normalize relations in Vietnam. He must: Love outdoor sports and drop his g's when talkin' about huntin' and fishin' and car racin'; Be a former quarterback for the University of Michigan Rose Bowl team; Be a trained economist who taught in Minnesota, where he met his wife, a nurse, whose father is a former governor; Be a volunteer fireman, who 'drove his pickup truck to help out the World Trade Center site'; Be "a billionaire in his own right who developed software" (Carroll and Fox 12). George D. Bush, although falling dismally short on both the successful businessman and war hero aspects of the above description, long tried to cultivate an image of rugged "real man" US-American masculinity as both heroic leader and rugged cowboy, with the aid of the accoutrements of masculinity, the gun, the white Ford pickup truck, and white cowboy hat posing with a chainsaw to clear brush and making statements like swearing to get Osama bin Laden "dead or alive" (see Gutterman and Regan; on the cultural centrality of the "warrior" metaphor see Carver; Roper).

Pelosi, who is to date the highest elected woman government official in U.S. history, has been — at least since the sudden appearance of Palin on the national political scene — perhaps the woman politician with the most impeccably performance of femininity and has to some degree dodged some

of the public image problems that plagued Hillary Clinton. Known as the "Mother of Five in Pearls," but also as having a "spine of steel," she is a rich and glamorous wife, mother and grandmother who dresses in Armani suits and touts her love of chocolates and housekeeping skills to the media and who on her inauguration as Speaker of the House filled the stage with the children and grandchildren of colleagues: Pelosi's "performance of femininity is so far superior to Clinton's that it is painful ... she's got the schmalz factor all sewed up" (Warner <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/14/opinion/14warner.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/14/opinion/14warner.html?_r=0)>). Nevertheless, all this carefully orchestrated performance of traditional femininity has not kept Pelosi from being accused by communications consultant Ken Sunshine of being a wife, mother, grandmother and in her spare time [becoming] speaker of the House, or of being regularly characterized as shrill, crazy "mean as a snake, a hag, a bitch, and even James Bond villain Pussy Galore" (Dabbouse and Ladley 181).

Hillary Clinton, already as First Lady and then as a candidate first for the Senate and then for the presidency has fared far worse than Pelosi, although ultimately many of the stereotyped invectives against them are identical. As Regina G. Lawrence and Melody Rose suggest, Clinton's ultimately unsuccessful race for the White House involved at least three interlocking factors: the role of gender stereotypes in politics, contemporary media norms and routines, and the individual candidate and her particular political context. This web of variables has made it difficult for some to isolate the impact of sexism versus other factors, and has also allowed for many to dismiss the sexism by focusing exclusively on other factors, but, whatever her real and imagined political handicaps, there is no question, as Caroline Heldman argues, that Clinton was framed as a "bitch" and "ball-buster" for daring to play the big boy's game using their rules for not conforming to traditional expectations of femininity, although Pelosi has not fared that well either.

Clinton was already one of the most controversial First Ladies variously referred to as co-president, power-seeker, symbol of baby-boomer womanhood, congenital liar, but also as pathbreaker, and international activist and defender of women and children (see, e.g., Trent and Short). Karrin Vasby Anderson examined Clinton's political identity as a First Lady and as candidate for the Senate and suggested that the "bitch" narrative used against her in the media turned her political identity into a sexist caricature and overshadowed her substantive discourse and circumscribed her political agency (on women and authority see, e.g., Sutton). In 1999 Charlotte Templin studied the obsession with the First Lady among cartoonists — an almost exclusively male profession — and the overt and often sexist depictions in nearly half 400 cartoons studied. A typical example is a cartoon with Bill Clinton wearing a dress and holding a purse, a reflection of the "Battle of the Breeches" of the reversal of roles of the henpecked husband and the wife as the virago, one of the most long-lived motifs in popular literature and art (on this, see Gössinger). In such cartoons Clinton is depicted as a "shrew" par excellence and in need of silencing and in some her head is all mouth or her mouth is taped shut: she has a zipper for lips or is shut in a box with air holes. No other First Lady had been tagged as frequently and it is also noteworthy that the cartoons by supposedly liberal cartoonists do not substantially differ in content from most conservative ones. These examples are not trivial but show that the history of US-American mass media cartoons have been a major form for the (re)production of racist and sexist myths with the claim to humor (see Tsakona and Popa).

Judith Trent and Cady Short-Thompson examine Clinton's discourse competence in her speeches as First Lady and as candidate for president. In the former they find the rhetoric of masculine, feminine, and neutral styles, and they find that in her campaign speeches she used a more direct and aggressive language and the use of the first person I. However, while Clinton provided more depth of discussion of issues, she did not speak against her opponents aggressively and used in a nurturing style instead. Similarly, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell contrasts how while an earlier presidential candidate's wife (and herself later presidential candidate) Elizabeth Dole downgraded her Ivy League professional credentials with her Southern-belle style of talking in the Republican convention, Clinton omitted virtually all discursive markers by which women enact their femininity publicly and used an impersonal tone, provided minimal information about herself and her ideas and unfolded her narrative deductively in the fashion of a lawyer's brief. The findings about Clinton's performance are consistent in several studies: Michele Bligh, Jennifer Merola, Jean Reith Schroedel, and Randal Gonzalez examine the media hype about Clinton finding her "voice" and showing her "feminine" side after her New Hampshire primary defeat when she supposedly cried. J. Lustick contrasts the speeches of Clinton and Palin,

where Clinton suggest that she fights not for herself but for all the women and refers to herself as a mother for her country, a role that obligates her to protect her nation, while Palin lists herself as "mother of one of those troops" and "just an average hockey mom." Lustick concludes that while Clinton represents a modern-day third wave feminist agenda, Palin is anti-feminist who prefers to reduce womanhood to something associated with housewives and hockey moms. Further, Lawrence and Rose examine Clinton's ads, her website, and screen shots and conclude that she spent much of the campaign trying to establish a "gender neutral" appeal with some feminine flourishes, but then turned deeply masculine later in the primaries.

Of all the stereotypical and trivializing gendered metaphors used to conceptualize Clinton's role as an "unruly woman" in public life, the term "bitch" — sometimes paired or alternating with rhyming "witch" — has been so often applied to her, as well as to other women candidates, that we can refer to its as an archetype of female identity, which also functions as a contemporary rhetoric of containment disciplining women with power, with "bitch discourse" functioning as a rhetorical frame that shapes political narratives and governs popular understanding of women leaders. 1984, when George H.W. Bush was running for reelection as Reagan's Vice President, was the year that Vice Presidential debates became a mainstay. The showdown between Bush and Geraldine Ferraro was widely anticipated because Ferraro, Walter Mondale's running mate on the Democratic ticket, was the first woman candidate for national office by a major party. Earlier in the week Bush's press secretary Peter Telley had already landed in hot water for saying that Ferraro came across in the debate as "too bitchy" and so later Barbara Bush also claimed that in her deleted insult against Ferraro after the debate, where she had referred to Ferraro as "the four million-dollar\_\_\_ I can't say it but it rhymes with witch," she had been thinking of "witch," which of course makes no sense since "witch" was the word the missing word rhymed with (see Lim; Troutman).

A decade and a half after the Barbara Bush invective against Ferraro, in a 2010 research poll Robin Gerber also found "rhymes with rich" as one of the negative terms applied to Hillary Clinton, with others being untrustworthy, ambitious, crooked, power hungry, selfish, self-centered, liar, scary, arrogant, cold, dishonest, fake, overbearing (<[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robin-gerber/rhymes-with-rich\\_b\\_89490.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robin-gerber/rhymes-with-rich_b_89490.html)>; see also Miller, Peake, Boulton). Neither Obama nor McCain attracted anywhere near as negative a reaction, with the most negatives about the former being judged inexperienced, arrogant, unqualified, unpatriotic, lacking courage and the latter of being old and untrustworthy. Interestingly, although all were running for the same office and McCain not for the first time, only Clinton was called "power hungry." Although humorously, what Fey was trying to achieve in her sketch is the political act of reclaiming the term "bitch" much as Kate Figes explains: "When it's being used as an insult, bitch is an epithet hurled at women who speak their minds, who have opinions and do not shy away from expressing themselves and who do not sit by and smile uncomfortably if they are bothered and offended. If being an outspoken woman means being a bitch, we will take that as a compliment, thanks" (<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/jan/26/gender.society>> (see also Figes, *The Big Fat*). With all this, bitch discourse as political insult just never seems to lose its force: for a more recent case see the October 2012 scandal around the insults "man's bitch" and "ditch the witch" against Australia's first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. For another example see the *Facebook* campaign initiated in 2007, whose aim has been to push the song "Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead" from the *Wizard of Oz* to the number one on the charts during the week of Margaret Thatcher's death in April 2013 (<<https://www.facebook.com/Ding.Dong.The.Witch.Died>>).

During the campaign Clinton was the object of the most vehemently obnoxious misogynistic attacks in the media, or as Rebecca Traister puts it, of a "torrent of ill-disguised hatred and resentment unleashed by angry male pundits" ("The Witch" "The Witch Ain't Dead, and Chris Matthews is a Ding-Dong." *salon.com* (9 January 2008): <[http://www.salon.com/life/feature/2008/01/09/hillary\\_nh](http://www.salon.com/life/feature/2008/01/09/hillary_nh)>). While many of the comments are from the expected male commentators who are part of the right-wing infrastructure on talk radio, Fox television, and in the blogosphere, some are by supposedly otherwise liberal pundits and comedians and also by a few visible women commentators. Many of the insults go well beyond the accustomed malignment of political opponents and are better labelled as character assassination and demonization.



In contrast to the candidacy of Clinton, the choice of Palin — the new and inexperienced governor of Alaska — was a clear attempt to co-opt a certain kind of feminism into supporting McCain. She was chosen cynically by a group of male Republican operatives with the hope of countering Clinton's candidacy by putting forth a local beauty queen and youngish mother of five (the last of them an infant with Down's syndrome), whom they assumed would be a kind of silent and smiling blank slate. While Palin indeed did present herself as primly, but enticingly feminine wearing soft glasses and conservative suits paired with short skirts, she also performed a kind of Annie Oakley frontier tomboy persona as a hunter, fisher, and snow mobiler. She self-styled herself as a Bible-believing Christian and combination of hockey mom and pit bull with lipstick. After the election and her subsequent premature and awkward resignation midterm as Governor of Alaska, Palin transformed herself into a political celebrity entrepreneur and reality entertainer: she has become an instant millionaire with her own reality show and a ghost-written book on conservative antifeminist feminism, *America by Heart: Reflections on Family, Faith and Flag* (on faux-feminism's co-opting the empowerment discourse of feminism, see Schreiber's *Righting Feminism*; for an apologia of Palin as reflecting traditional values, see Sanchez). For her public speaking persona, Palin has adopted a linguistic performance of stereotypical femininity and "authenticity" combined with new forms of female empowerment and economic and cultural capital (on Martha Stewart's similar pseudo-folksy feminine speech style see Davis; Sclafani).

Palin's politics can be characterized as gendered populism, epitomized by her two-minute minute political ads, addressed to "common sense conservative women" where she depicts herself and her followers as "Mamma Grizzly Bears": an interesting image combining the nurturing mama with the aggressive grizzly. In the video she proclaims that "it's a mom awakening in the last year and a half ... because Moms just know when something is wrong" and proceeds to recount that in Alaska mamma grizzly bears stand up and attack when their young are in danger and ends the piece by switching animal metaphors and promising a whole stampede of (Republican) pink elephants in Washington (<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF-OsHTLfxM>>). While Clinton is seen as the epitome of the "unruly woman," Palin is "unruly" only in terms of liberal feminism and she can afford to create a spectacle of herself as extremely feminine, and, at the same time — in violation of feminine gender norms — as fearless, rugged, and self-sufficient, a beauty queen who can nevertheless kill and field-dress a moose and hunt from small aircraft (see Kahl and Edwards). Although Palin has not been spared sexist attacks, these were primarily for being "stupid," an epithet referring less to her actual lack of intellectual sophistication than as code for her "white trash" social origins. The leftist commentator Bill Maher — who claims he is a "pottymouth, not a misogynist" — has referred to Palin as "cunt," "dumb twat," "bimbo," and "airhead bimbo" characterizing an attractive woman who is stupid and probably promiscuous (although interestingly, the term is a transvestite word, as its masculine -o ending from the Italian indicates, in the 1920s as a stupid man). Liberal talk radio host Ed Schulz regularly blasted "Bimbo Alert" before his commentaries on Palin, while to compete with the Hillary-hating T-shirts there was a "Sarah Palin is A Cunt" T-shirt in giant neon green. And on the internet can also be found copies of a photo of Palin with her three daughters including her oldest daughter, Bristol, who later gave birth out of wedlock, tagged as "Harlot" while her two other daughters, including the 10-year old, each labelled a "Future Harlot"-s. The internet is also full of conjectures, accompanied by before and after pictures about whether Palin got breast implants or just a pushup Wonderbra. She is also the first presidential nominee to have (fake) nude pictures of her posted on the internet and to have a hardcore pornographic film titled "Nailin Paylin" made about her, which was released in timely fashion in November 2008. In one of the scenes a Palin-look alike has intercourse with drunk Russian soldiers, a riff on an ignorant comment she made during the campaign about being able to see Russia from Alaska (*Sarah Palin* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4EDWVWOLXMO>>). But the most telling scene in the film features a threesome with Palin, Hillary Clinton, and former Republican Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice characters. Together the three apparently offer a gamut of possibilities for male masturbatory fantasies: Palin as Madonna-whore, Clinton as mature dominatrix, and Rice as the exotic Black "Dominatrix of State" (see also Givhan's description of Rice's commanding matrix-like outfit of black military coat and high-heeled boots as exuding sex and power when she was reviewing U.S. troops in Germany).

In order to compare the gendered political discourses in the United States with that of Hungary, I discuss next the situation of women and feminism in Hungary, where there is a striking lack of feminist consciousness similar to countries of the former Soviet bloc in general: the term feminism is still understood as it was used abusively under state socialism where it was a contradiction in terms since communism was a state patriarchy imposed from above and that feminized both women and men negatively and where there was a disconnect between ideology and everyday life with no real transformation of patriarchal attitudes and practices in either the public or the private sphere. In postcommunist countries' public discussions it is assumed that in the gender regimes of state socialism before 1989 women were given undue preferential treatment (see, e.g., Gal and Kligman 8). This narrow localized interpretation of feminism — aptly dubbed "totalitarian Lib" (Bollobás) — has contributed to the inadequate development of a postsocialist feminist discourse in Hungary, where many women's identity formation is such that they continue to view barriers against them as personal or even essentialist biological problems rather than in the context of deeper cultural and socio-psychological cultural inequalities. In postsocialist society gender stereotypes are deep-seated and continue not only unchallenged, but have actually gone backwards with the dominant masculinized framing of public issues revealed, for example, by negative stereotypes of women in professional and, in particular in political life. In the absence of adequate feminist voices in politics, the masculinization of political party culture has no alternative political discourse to counter the masculinized framing of public issues. Twenty years on, state socialism still continues to influence strongly how many individuals think about government, society, themselves, and the socialist past. The ongoing traumatic relationship with the communist past is expressed in two contradictory discourses. The first is the resurgence of a retrograde misogynist patriarchal discourse of Hungarianness (*magyarság*), fueled by the desire to reject the false utopianism of communism. This discourse promotes conservative state rebuilding and a return to a mythical nationalism where part of freedom is defined as a return to traditional gender identity.

This historical reversal is often, paradoxically, combined with strong doses of anti-Westernism and communist nostalgia in particular for the paternalistic entitlements the latter system offered. As Susan Gal posits, the label "feminist" is often publicly ridiculed and rejected, with little support for women as legitimate political actors. Gal examines feminism as "traveling discourse" and laments that most studies do not deal with cross-regional and international interactions of feminism which is precisely what I am attempting to do here, primarily from a socio-linguistic perspective (see on the situation of women and feminism in Hungary, see Adamik; Bollobás; Calloni; Chiva; Fábrián; Fodor; Haney; Huseby-Darvas; Jung; Kis; Kovács and Váradi; Tóth; Zimmerman; on negative and sexualized media discourse constructions of the term feminism itself, see Jaworska and Krishnamurthy; on postcommunism in Central and East Europe in general, see Calloni; Clavero; Einhorn; Gilligan; Guenther; Harvey; Holmgren; Johnson and Robinson; Miroiu; Pascall and Kwak; Roman; Rueschemeyer and Wolchik; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári; Tötösy de Zepetnek, Andraş, Marsovszky; Watson). Erzsébet Barát outlines three heterogeneous although contradictory lines of public discourse about women in postcommunist Hungary: 1) the anti-communist discourse of branding feminism as simultaneously an inheritance of state socialism and akin to it as an attempt to bring about a totalitarian "vaginocracy," 2) anti-US-Americanism within aggressive US-American feminism seen as alien to Hungarianness, and 3) homophobic discourse which paints all feminists as "unruly women," lesbians, or masculinized amazons who "terrorize" other women into following their "poisonous" ideology ("The 'Terror Feminist'"; see also Barát, "Hungarian Political" where she analyses the Hungarian situation in conjunction with the Hillary Clinton campaign). These three discourses — political, nationalist/essentialist, and sexual — are not only overlapping, but synonymous in using the identical age-old technique of rhetorical containment of the perceived enemy by vilification, trivialization, insult and ridicule (on feminist and European Parliamentary discourse, see Ilie; Wodak).

Next, I look at an extreme example of how the boundaries between the popular, the public, the private, and politics are changing and developing new forms of "public intimacy" which has allowed for the same level of sexual objectification of political figures as of pop stars, but with much more radically destructive aim (see Van Zoonen) and here is the final question: what do famous sexy celebrities like Jennifer Lopez, Sarah Jessica Parker, Jessica Alba, Lindsay Lohan, Paris Hilton, Jessica Simpson, Pam Anderson, and Lady Gaga have in common with the three main political figures

discussed in this article, Clinton, Palin, and the Obamas? The answer is that of all of the above there are available inflatable sex dolls for purchase on the internet, where, for example, the box of the Palin doll features a look-alike of a librarian with glasses and conservative suit, but with enormous breasts bulging out of her open prim white blouse. The logo promises the buyer that one can cross party lines with one's own inflatable running mate and suggests that the doll could stand in for the candidate in the next Vice Presidential debate and that Palin makes sexism sexy. The "Mrs. Satan Hillary" doll comes with a large round open mouth, and has led to claims on the internet that it had to be recalled because it damaged customers' organs. However, it is the example of the "Original Blow-Up Barack Presidential Love Doll" which is the most problematic as it invites simultaneously penetration and advertises the doll's supersize endowments, harkening back to the combination of sexualized racist and fag discourses: "He f\*\*d the economy. Now you can f\*\*k him back! He'll batter your bush. Visit his oval orifice. He's got a presidential-sized power tool! He's a clear winner in this year's presidential election. He's got the biggest staff ever!" (<<http://www.ihatethemedia.com/barack-obama-blow-up-sex-doll>>).

Political psychologists and linguists believe words and slogans can hijack the way people vote in what George Lakoff — grounding his theory in neuroscience — referred to as the "murky region where our unconscious beliefs, attitudes and instincts drive much of our conscious behavior, including our voting behavior" (<[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/the-palin-choice-and-the\\_b\\_123012.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/the-palin-choice-and-the_b_123012.html)>). Lakoff explains the choice of Palin as Vice Presidential candidate as an example of political marketing by the Republicans which the Democrats were not able to counter. While the Democrats' response to her candidacy addresses her inexperience and ignorance and that she is a right-wing ideologue, such truths are largely irrelevant in a national political dialogue that is fundamentally metaphorical. Lakoff points out that while Obama tried to campaign on actual issues, the Republicans — who cannot win on issues — utilized symbolic mechanisms of the political mind, the worldviews, frames, metaphors, cultural narratives and stereotypes with "family values" at the center of discourse, called (unconscious) conservative conceptual frames. If, for example, Hillary Clinton was framed alternately as a long-suffering wife or as a calculating "bitch" and "nutcracker," these are cultural narratives hardwired into people's brains through repeated exposure. Although they can be identified, feminist attempts to construct alternative metaphors and narratives are difficult to get inscribed in people's brains versus the entrenched narratives with which they have been bombarded through the centuries. That is, I have illustrated how gender ideologies are (re)produced and sustained through talk, narrative, and image through practices which recur every day at the micro level and that much of the hostility expressed by men (and women) against feminism and women is based on cultural metaphors which structure our reality providing ready-made interpretations. In sum, the situation for women whether in the U.S. or in Central Europe's Hungary — the latter a country and culture of a very different history and provenance than that of the U.S. — shows similar ideologies and that both are based in a negative gender construction and practice today.

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