Gender in the Post-socialist Transition: the Abortion Debate in Hungary

Susan Gal

East European Politics and Societies 1994; 8; 256
DOI: 10.1177/0888325494008002003

Gender in the Post-Socialist Transition: The Abortion Debate in Hungary

Susan Gal*

Introduction

Historical periods have different meanings and implications when seen from the vantage point of women rather than men. For instance, feminist interpretations of the French Revolution show how the social theories, cultural constructions, and ideologies that inspired and guided events were "emancipatory" for non-aristocratic men, licensing their greater participation in public life, but the very same theories introduced a new gendering of politics that worked to exclude women of the popular classes and women of the aristocracy who had been powerful in the Old Regime. Similarly, while the Italian Renaissance is usually seen as a time of general expansion in many such cultural spheres as knowledge, artistic expression, and novel forms of social relations, the very changes which brought these for men resulted in a contraction of social and personal options for women.[1]

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe, accompanied by increased public expression, civil rights, and multiparty politics, has also been hailed as a "liberalization" and advance, even by those of us who object to the triumphalist Cold War rhetoric of mainstream American commentators, and are only too aware of the problems of peripheral capitalism and ethnic conflict that have engulfed that region. The turn away from state socialism in Eastern Europe is also a case in which a historical transition has had profoundly gendered effects. Women's experiences of the economic and political changes are different from those of men; the implications for women's lives are often more damaging. Equally important, while the terms of discussion about political and economic change in the region remain highly contested, it is clear that the long-standing primacy of ideas about the importance of the "collectivity,"

* My thanks to Katherine Verdery and József Böröcz for their generous editorial suggestions.

1. Joan Landes, *Women in the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1989) and Joan Kelly, "Did Women have a Renaissance," in R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz, eds., *Becoming Visible* (New York, 1977), pp. 139–64.

East European Politics and Societies, Volume 8, No. 2, Spring 1994.

uniformity, and social engineering has been challenged by a range of legitimating discourses that highlight individualism, legal rights, and the ineluctability of differences in human identity. As part of this shift, gender and reproduction, like ethnicity, are being discussed as moral and natural categories rather than social ones.

More specifically, while each of the countries of Eastern Europe is experiencing its own version of post-socialist transition, there are a number of gender-related changes that are relatively widespread. The emergence of multiparty elections has been accompanied by a collapse in the number of female lawmakers, in marked contrast to trends elsewhere in Europe. Thus, women have lost representation at the very moment when parliamentary bodies have gained a measure of power. While the share of women in the Finnish and Austrian parliaments increased substantially in recent years, in Romania it plummeted from thirty-four percent to four percent, in Hungary from twenty-one percent to seven percent, in Czechoslovakia from thirty percent to nine percent. Furthermore, in most of these countries, the end of state socialism has brought the end of state subsidies for food and food-kitchens, and a contraction in state-supported nurseries, kindergartens, and schools. Because women remain the primary caretakers of children and providers of housework, these changes affect women's everyday work burden and their ability to engage in wage work. Because women are disproportionately employed in just such worksites, they often face the greater likelihood of unemployment. Even when women's participation in the labor force is not declining, the existence of wage differentials by gender and the increasing trend toward economic polarization threaten to produce a feminization of poverty.[2]

Finally, of central concern for my purposes here: in all of the post-

2. The number of women in European legislatures was reported by Associated Press in 1991; reports on the current situation of women in the region include Małgorzata Fuszara, "Legal Regulation of Abortion in Poland," *Signs* 17 (1991), pp. 117–28; Julia Szalai, "Some Aspects of the Changing Situation of Women in Hungary," *Signs* 17 (1991), pp. 152–70; Dorothy Rosenberg, "Shock Therapy: GDR Women in Transition from a Socialist Welfare State to a Social Market Economy," *Signs* 17 (1991), pp. 129–51; "Germany and Gender: The Effects of Unification on German Women in the East and the West," (special issue) *German Politics and Society* 24–25 (Winter 1991–92); Gail Kligman, "The Politics of Reproduction in Ceauşescu's Romania: A Case Study of Political Culture," *East European Politics and Societies* 6:3 (1993), pp. 364–418; Irene Dölling, "Between Hope and Hopelessness: Women in the GDR after the Turning Point," *Feminist Review* 39 (Winter 1991), pp. 3–15; Barbara Einhorn, "Where Have All the Women Gone: Women and the Women's Movement in East Central Europe," *Feminist Review* 39 (Winter 1991), pp. 16–36; and other articles in the special issue of *Feminist Review* 39 (Winter 1991).

socialist countries, questions of human procreation and reproduction have become the focus of intense public debate and legislative action. Throughout the region (with Romania as a significant exception) relatively liberal regulations assuring easy access to abortion and birth control have been challenged since 1989, often successfully, and at the highest parliamentary levels. In Hungary, a newly formed group called "Defenders of the Fetus" brought the liberal abortion regulations to the Supreme Court in an effort to undermine their legality, and in 1992 Parliament enacted a new law which, while touted as a moderate compromise, is seen by many Hungarian women and some international observers as restrictive.

My aim here is to argue that in order to understand the process and direction of the East European transitions, it is not enough to examine the aspects of social life that mainstream social science has identified as crucial: privatization, marketization, democratization, the growth of civil society, and new forms of the state. We must consider the discourses and practices of gender as well, and not only in the study of the "private" and of personal power relations, but, as feminist theorists have argued, also as part of the political economy of the large-scale social transformations. In particular, I focus here on the politics of reproduction: the ways in which political interests at global, national, and local levels influence the policies, practices, and ways of conceptualizing human procreation and the female life cycle.[3] Questions of procreation and reproduction intersect with the processes of "transition" not only because they have far-reaching effects on such matters as the definition of rights and welfare, the population's age composition, and the constitution of the labor force, but more importantly because the insistent debates about abortion and the nature of motherhood reveal the ways in which politics is being reconstituted, contested, and newly legitimated in post-socialist Eastern Europe. Indeed, a careful analysis of the abortion debate in Hungary shows how new groups are being defined, how interests and justifications for action are being imagined, how the relations between citizens and the state are being conceptualized and contested, as individuals and groups constitute themselves for political

3. Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), has made perhaps the broadest argument about the relevance of the analytic category of gender for understanding large-scale political change; Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, "The Politics of Reproduction," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20 (1991) pp. 311–44 define and discuss the political centrality of reproduction.

action. In short, arguments about reproduction and the laws that enforce them produce and legitimate power for groups and factions vying for control of the political process.

Accordingly, this case study focuses not on the current practices of abortion, or the effects of various possible government policies on the economy or the lives of women—all important and complex questions—but rather on the cultural understanding of abortion, the discourses about it that have emerged in Hungary in recent years.[4] A focus on discourse is important for three reasons. First, in discussing Eastern Europe there is a tendency to assume that American observers already understand the terms in which people frame their concerns. The words themselves appear familiar because, like "democracy," "representation," "human rights," or "free press," "abortion" is an active term in American public debates, and likely to show up in popular argument as in theoretical debate. The apparent familiarity of East European discussions is especially high because East Europeans are often borrowing from American and West European scholarship and political argument, or orienting to the trans-national legal institutions of the European Community and the United Nations, the global financial and moral linkages of the Catholic Church and related organizations such as "Right to Life," or the multifarious strictures of the IMF. Indeed, in Hungarian debates, to claim that some term, some solution, some problem is "Western" or "European" is itself to enter into a well-worn discourse of value and identity, the fractal, dichotomizing discourse of West vs. East, Europe vs. Hungary. The rhetorical power of the words comes, in part, from this resonance with Western terms or rather, the clandestine combination of similarity and difference. Finally, Western scholars and journalists are themselves using East European practices and examples to redefine their own thinking. Thus, the readers of this report and the people described in it are very much in communication, living in the same mediated world.

It is nevertheless important to remember that "abortion" is not only in part the same as various American and West European imaginings

4. For the importance of ideational, discursive factors in the transition from state socialism, see especially Katherine Verdery, "Theorizing Socialism: A Prologue to the 'Transition,' *American Ethnologist* 18 (1991), pp. 419–39. For stimulating discussion of this with special reference to gender see Gail Kligman, "The Politics of Reproduction" and also Katherine Verdery, "From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe," this issue.

of it, but also that it has different connotations in Hungary and is embedded in a different field of meanings than its American cognate. Indeed, this is the second reason why discourse is crucial here. As Emily Martin has shown, American discourses of reproduction, even scientific ones, encode images of a specific kind of political economy. If we view the debate about abortion in Hungary as part of a politics of reproduction, potentially comparable to similar processes in other parts of the globe, then it is important to specify exactly how it is differently encoded, differently linked to other political questions, differentially constituted as an aspect of other contests for control. For example, debates about abortion were part of arguments for racial supremacy and medical hegemony in the late nineteenth-century United States, part of an argument that pitted women's privacy, pleasure, and autonomy against society's moral revitalization in twentieth-century America, and part of the state's responsibility to protect the health of women and children in the welfare democracies of Western Europe.[5] Thus, it is not that the politicization of reproduction is peculiar to any region, or to the present transformations in Eastern Europe, but rather that the nature of that politicization reveals much about the polity in which it occurs.

Third, a focus on discourse and the debates around abortion allows us to turn this link between politics and reproduction around, and ask not how politics influences reproduction, but rather how the issue of reproduction constitutes the terrain on which—one of the means by which—claims for political power are made and through which they are widely understood as legitimate. Thus, in the present case, the abortion debate turns out not only to be very much about abortion, but also an argument in absentia with communism, and a scramble for newly available forms of symbolic capital. Indeed, it is a contest for control of the emerging principles of political rule.[6] It allows us to see the many

5. Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body* (Boston, 1987); on the various meanings of abortion in the U.S. see Rosalind Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice* (Boston, 1984), James Mohr, *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy* (New York, 1978), Faye Ginsburg, *Contested Lives* (Berkeley, 1989), and Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley, 1984); on Western Europe see Mary Glendon, *Abortion and Divorce in Western Law: American Failures, European Challenges,* (Cambridge, 1987).

6. Claus Offe, "Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe," *Social Research* 58:4 (1991), pp. 865–92, has claimed that of all the upheavals that have been dubbed "revolutions" in the last two centuries, only these show a "lack of any elaborated theoretical assumptions and normative arguments addressing the questions who is to carry out which actions under which circumstances and with what aims. . . . Instead of concepts, strategies, collective actors and normative principles, there are acting persons and their discoveries of the moment with their deliberately opaque semantic con-

ironies evident in the contest to make a new social order against a previous one whose elements are nevertheless the only building materials at hand. But the abortion debate is also an integral part of the re-stratification of Hungarian society. In contrast to the arena of privatization, which allows the reproduction of old elites based on existing expertise, social networks, social positions, and the consequent access to information and capital, the abortion debate is linked most closely to the political sphere where new elites are forming at the same time as they construct the cultural grounds to produce, justify, and legitimate their own mobility.[7]

What follows is a brief historical sketch of reproductive politics in socialist Hungary, then the contemporary situation. In discussing the last two years of controversy leading up to the 1992 parliamentary vote, my method will be to present several strands of the debate about abortion in Hungary, concentrating on two major lines of argument. The first was produced by "populist writers" and their allies, the members of the ruling coalition parties, and professionals who identify themselves as conservative or Christian doctors and lawyers. The second was produced by the writers, academics, and journalists aligned with the parliamentary "opposition." In sketching the outlines of these debates, I take up the analytical question: How were texts constructed, in the public media, so that they are efficacious in producing discursive categories or frames of reference that are reality-creating yet contestable? To answer this, I draw on the approaches to the analysis of speech event, metaphor, and text that have been emerging in contemporary linguistic anthropology, briefly indicating some of the typical characteristics of texts within each position, how they argued with each other, and how they

tent . . . such as perestroika and the metaphor of a 'common European home' " (pp. 866–67). I take this to be Offe's admission of bafflement at the current processes. His diagnosis suggests the need for the kind of approach represented here: The analysis of discursively organized human agency must be at the center of our attempts at understanding the transition.

7. For recent discussions on the reproduction of economic elites in Hungarian privatization see, among others, David Stark, "Path Dependence and Privatization Strategies in East Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 6:1 (1992), pp. 17–54, and József Böröcz, "Simulating the Great Transformation: Property Change under Prolonged Informality in Hungary," *Archives européenes de Sociologie* (in press). The relatively greater mobility among current political elites has often been noted; for a recent scholarly account, see Ákos Róna-Tas, "The Selected and the Elected: The Making of the New Parliamentary Elite in Hungary," *East European Politics and Societies* 5:3 (1991), pp. 357–94. My discussion of the self-legitimation of political elites implicitly relies on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic power," for instance, his *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, 1991).

were positioned with respect to discourses on other subjects in Hungary.[8]

Notes on the Politics of Reproduction under Socialism

Disputes about abortion and the related issues of childcare, welfare, and motherhood emerged repeatedly in Hungarian politics during the state socialist period. Although discussed within the rubric of "socialist planning," "population," or "health," they were often linked to industrial and foreign policy as well. A brief excursus into such debates is warranted here because the existing practices, legal precedents, institutional and personal memories produced through those policies and debates constrain (often in negative ways) what is seen as possible and desirable in the current situation. This, along with even older arguments I discuss below, forms the material which social actors can use as the basis for "inventing of traditions," constructing of new discourses, and understanding and implicitly evaluating practices.

Official abortion regulations following the Second World War required the consent of two physicians, including one gynecologist whose professional judgments about the health risks to the mother formed the basis of the decision. These regulations had emerged through a process of medical professionalization and heated political debate during the 1930s. Physicians linked to the Social Democratic party struggled against those organized by Christian parties; both were opposed by more frankly nationalist groups such as the Society for Health Policy that wanted to outlaw abortion on the grounds that Hungary had already lost enough population through the Treaty of Trianon. In practice, the medicalized procedure became extremely lax between 1945 and 1949, probably as an informal response to wartime rape.[9] But with the consolidation of Communist rule in 1949, abortion ceased to be a mat-

8. For discussions of this general approach to text and discourse, which also takes continental traditions seriously, see Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman, "Genre, Intertextuality and Social Power," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2:2 (December 1992), pp. 131–72; Susan Gal, "Bartók's Funeral: Representations of Europe in Hungarian Political Rhetoric," *American Ethnologist* 18 (1991), pp. 440–58.

9. For a useful review of Hungarian abortion debates and policies between the World Wars, see Katalin Hegedűs, "Az abortuszkérdés a két világháború között," in Judit Sándor, ed., *Abortusz és . . .* (Budapest, 1992), pp. 115–36.

ter of medical professionalism and medical judgment and became instead the object of centrally determined social planning. Policies concerning it were important enough to be personally mandated and signed by a whole series of first secretaries, starting with Rákosi, in the 1950s and including Grosz in the 1970s. Three quite separate phases of abortion regulation can be discerned, roughly corresponding to the waxing and waning of more general reformist strategies within the Party.

The first, between 1949 and 1954, was an extremely restrictive ban that criminalized abortion, putting in place a strident anti-abortion information campaign and a series of stringent reporting practices that in effect put the adult population under surveillance. The 1953 abortion regulation refused the possibility of abortion even on medical grounds. This was partly in imitation of Soviet practices and in response to Soviet pressures, partly in reaction to the postwar labor shortage. The emphasis in official announcements was on the military and production needs of Hungary and the responsibility of every person to subordinate personal choice to the overriding interests of national population requirements. Known popularly as the "Ratkó period," after the woman who was health minister at the time, it is remembered by older women as a time of enormous hardship. Illegal abortions appear to have increased substantially. Demographically, the policy produced the desired result only in the short run: the sharp increase of births soon leveled off to postwar rates.

The death of Stalin and internal changes in Hungarian leadership ended this restrictive period, although the regulations were not actually changed until the broader liberalizations of 1956, when abortion was allowed to adult women on demand. In describing these changes, Szalai notes that the possibility of abortion was welcomed by the public as the granting of individual choice in decision making about family affairs. It was regarded as a publicly unacknowledged but important victory of the 1956 revolution. In the wake of this policy, the number of reported, legal abortions reached a high of 85.1 per thousand women of childbearing age between 1965 and 1969, among the highest in Europe. Although the death rate had started falling after the war because of improvements in health care, this was far outstripped by lower fertility (including the rise in abortion rates), so that by the 1960s the Hungarian population, like many in Western Europe, was not replacing itself.

It was in response to this demographic decline, and also as part of the

general political retrenchment following the reforms of 1968 which included a package of material incentives for childbirth, maternal leave, and childcare grants to mothers that a new and restrictive abortion policy was put into place in 1973–74. This policy was perceived as so coercive that it precipitated a rare (and little-publicized) moment of overt resistance from groups of social scientists and students, who petitioned Parliament and collected signatures against the regulations, in the provinces as well as the capital, until they were threatened with job loss. The regulations were publicly justified as a response to the negative effects of abortion on the woman's health, and with statistics supposedly showing an increase of premature births to women who had had abortions. But this latter association was never demonstrated. More broadly, a media campaign reasserted the rationale of national over individual interests and attacked the "unhealthy" spirit of individualism (leading to birth control) as unacceptable in a socialist society.[10]

The policy of 1973–74 restricted abortion to women who were unmarried, or already had two children, or were over thirty-five, or had serious housing problems, or lived in poverty, or if detailed examination revealed that the abortion would present serious health hazards for the woman. The decision was made by medical-lay committees operating in outpatient clinics. Their procedures were widely experienced as arbitrary, humiliating, and corrupt. The restrictions themselves were seen as unfairly privileging some social groups, especially given the power of the committees to charge money for the procedure. Of constant concern to women were the unhygienic circumstances of the clinics themselves. Nevertheless, the routinization and ultimate laxness of these procedures, and women's growing sophistication about the system, meant that only a very small proportion of requests went ungranted.[11]

10. This and my further discussion draws on the following surveys of postwar abortion policy: Ferenc A. Szabó, "Abortusztilalom, anno: A művi vetélés törvényes üldözése Magyarországon 1956 előtt," in Sándor, *Abortusz*, pp. 137–62; M. Farkas, "Miért leszünk kevesebben," *Valóság* 11 (1985), pp. 46–53; György Szepesi, *Népesedésünk ma és holnap* (Budapest, 1986); István Monigl, "Ideológia, népesedéspolitika és a jövő," *Társadalmi Szemle* 8–9 (1990), pp. 89–98; Rudolf Andorka, "Érvek a családbarát szociálpolitika mellett," *Társadalmi Szemle* 8–9 (1990), pp. 61–71.

11. Julia Szalai, "Abortion in Hungary," *Feminist Review* 29 (May 1988), pp. 98–100, provides a brief but useful summary of responses to the 1956 and 1973 regulations; my information about the more recent regulations comes from the bills proposed by the parliamentary parties. The 1973 resistance was first mentioned to me in hushed tones by those who participated in it; for reference to it, see note 1 in Marietta Pongrácz and Edit S. Molnár, "Az abortuszkérdés Magyarországon, 1991," *Statisztikai Szemle* 69:7 (July 1991), pp. 509–31, in English, see

Following the institution of these regulations, the number of legal abortions decreased by close to fifty percent, but was still high by European standards. The 1973 policy was in force until the late 1980s when the abortion committees were abolished, along with most of their restrictions, so that abortion became available more-or-less on demand. It was in response to this that a small group calling itself "Defenders of the Fetus" appealed to the Supreme Court of Hungary, arguing, in the new post-socialist climate, that something as important as abortion policy should at least be in the form of a law, ratified by Parliament, rather than simply a paternalistic regulation, ordered by the Central Committee, sent to the Health Ministry, and immediately put into effect. The Court ruled that because the right to life was safeguarded by the Hungarian constitution, a decision had to be made by Parliament about the circumstances under which this could be abrogated; it mandated that the legislative body make a decision by the end of 1992.

It was this series of moves that once again opened the public debate about abortion that stretched from early 1990 to the final days of 1992. The law finally passed by Parliament was a compromise measure, judged "liberal" by much of the Hungarian and even the international press. Although it lacks the formal restrictions of the 1973 measure and a woman no longer has to appear before a committee, there are other aspects of the law that leave very much open the possibility of informal and structural effects that could have restrictive consequences. A woman must visit a social worker from the "family-protection" service who "counsels" her regarding abortion, its medical dangers, contraception, adoption, and other services available. The woman herself must sign a statement saying that she is in a "crisis situation" in order to get the abortion, and the price of the procedure has been more than doubled. Those eighteen years of age or younger must get parental consent; husbands must attend, if at all possible; and women must wait three days after the initial session with the social worker before actually having the abortion. Hospitals and doctors are allowed to decide for themselves whether or not they will perform abortions. Christian doctors' groups have already called for resistance; the government coalition opposes abortion so it is perhaps not surprising that the Welfare Ministry and thus the state-run hospitals are not supportive. Furthermore, the script

---

Suzanne Körösi, "Hungary: The Nonexistence of 'Women's Emancipation,'" in Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Global* (New York, 1984), pp. 289–93.

of the counseling sessions as well as the hiring of social workers must be approved by the state. This puts heavy pressure on rural women, poor women, and especially women whose families do not approve.[12]

Although this simple list of policies indicates something of women's historical experience in Hungary, it does not at all do justice to the intricate interplay, during any historical moment, of labor force participation, state policy, and planning on abortion, childcare and child welfare policies, and the official rhetoric about the nature of women and motherhood. Nor does it link these to the general crisis of state socialism. One example from the middle 1980s will provide an indication of the complexity of these interactions.

As is well known, the "hoarding" of labor and the production of a labor shortage that were systemic characteristics of state socialist economies demanded the full employment of women as well as men. But this led to notoriously lax labor discipline and "overemployment" in socialist firms especially in the administrative or clerical categories where women were and are disproportionately employed. In Hungary, the mounting political and economic pressure to reform socialism and socialist firms by restricting "overemployment" and increasing efficiency collided with the Party's commitment to full employment, which was an important source of its legitimacy and of general political stability. At the same time, the efforts required by the Party's long-standing ideological commitment to gender equality were never fully expended. For example, women entered education and the labor force in unprecedented numbers, but they were employed in lower categories than men with similar educations, and women's wages were, on average, twenty percent lower than men's. Furthermore, by the mid-1980s the semblance of gender equality was getting harder and harder to retain even in partial form: adequate childcare, old-age care, and further aid with housework required further, insupportable expenses.

A policy plan that would "solve" both problems at once emerged among social scientists who advised the party: encourage women to leave the labor force for housework, long-term child-rearing, and care of

12. The process of compromise through which the final law was passed would present an interesting case study of tensions within the ruling coalition, since the Christian Democratic members of the coalition pressured for a much more restrictive law, while the less restrictive version suggested by the government was actually quite close to the form of the law proposed by the liberal parties. However, this paper is concerned not with the details of the political process itself, but with the symbolic meaning and effect of the arguments marshalled on all sides.

the aged by offering relatively generous maternal leave (an earnings-related subsidy for women staying home for child-care), at the same time orchestrating an upsurge in mass media and medical advice to stress the supposedly biological and unchangeable causes of inequality between the sexes, biological causes which supposedly make women unhappy with the demands of paid work and make them long for motherhood and social "complementarity" with men.[13] By 1985, a sizeable media campaign lamented the feminization of many occupations, and laid the social problems of children at the feet of working women. The major intellectual journal of Hungary published a polemic by two female psychologists explaining in just these terms not only individual and marital unhappiness, but also the high divorce rate, men's high mortality rate, and the very real sense of overwork, conflict between job and work, and general dissatisfaction among women. Commenting on this interrelated set of policies and media campaigns, Hungarian sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge notes, with heavy irony, that the dictates of nature and the needs of the failing socialist economy came harmoniously together.[14]

Even more ironic is the fact that they converged as well with the critique of state socialism developed by the "democratic opposition," those who opposed state socialism during the 1970s and 1980s, often at the risk of their livelihoods and well-being. These dissidents, many of whom later emerged as leaders of the opposition liberal parties most eager to institute civil society, capitalist relations, and human rights, constructed a powerful argument about the family. For them, the private sphere and family were the only spaces available for the social solidarity and opposition to the socialist state that came to be called "anti-politics." Anti-politics identified the private sphere as that in which men could act as free agents, and anti-politics implicitly required women to maintain that sphere in material and conceptual terms, insisting that women should want to be havens against the heartless state.[15]

13. The extended example and commentary are provided by Zsuzsa Ferge, "Kell-e Magyarországon feminizmus?" *Ifjusági Szemle* 2 (1987), pp. 3–8.
14. Ferge, "Kell-e Magyarországon." The psychologists' polemic appeared as Judit B. Gáspár and Zsuzsa F. Várkonyi, "Két második nem," *Valóság* 7 (1985), pp. 67–76.
15. Joanna Goven, "Gender Politics in Hungary: Autonomy and Antifeminism," in Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, eds., *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (New York, 1993), pp. 224–40, has shrewdly suggested this link between gender and dissent in Hungary; see György Konrád, *Antipolitics* (New York, 1984),

As I will show, these earlier debates, as well as ones characteristic of the 1930s, have significant uses in the post-socialist period. Indeed, we must keep them in mind in order to understand many of the discursive aspects of the "transition."

Populist Writers and Christian Professionals

It is not an exaggeration to say that opposition to abortion was an integral, if implicit, part of the cultural understandings that helped to organize the political opposition to communism in the 1980s in Hungary. Among the populist writers who constituted one strand of this opposition, references to abortion appeared regularly. On September 27, 1987, about 150 people, writers, scholars, technical workers, and others took part in a semi-legal meeting held outside of Budapest that was later sanctified as the first successful, large-scale public action of the many politically diverse social groups and networks that constituted the growing opposition to the government. Many of the participants have since become prominent in Hungarian political life. Populist writers who later became ministers in the first post-socialist government were well represented, as were "democratic dissidents" who later became members of the parliamentary opposition. As in other criticisms of communism following Gorbachev's instigation of perestroika and glasnost, the dominant themes of the meeting were economic and civil reform. It is noteworthy, however, that in contrast to many other speakers, the complaints expressed by populists were markedly not economic. One such writer opened the meeting with the following words:

> We know that our country has become crippled, we have become crippled in our moral attitudes, in our beliefs, in our material circumstances, in our communities, crippled in our lack of trust in politics. We are *unable to be born in proper circumstances and in sufficient numbers,* unable to grow up, to study, to form families, to live, to work, and to develop our national characteristics (italics mine).[16]

---

and Václav Havel, "Antipolitical Politics," in John Keane, ed., *Civil Society and the State* (London, 1988), for the classic expositions of this stance.

16. Sándor Lezsák, "Köszöntöm Vendégeinket, Barátainkat!" in Sándor Agócs, ed., *Lakitelek 1987: A Magyarság Esélyei, a tanácskozás hiteleles jegyzőkönyve, 1987 szeptember 27* (Budapest, 1991), p. 6. All translations are mine.

To understand this as the call to arms it was, and the conspicuous place of reproduction in it, we must see the discourse in which that writer has placed himself and how he has done it.

A distinctive feature of discussions about abortion in Hungary for over a century has been the assumption that it is a population issue. In this the Communist state simply followed earlier precedents. Unlike the situation in Poland, where statistics on the number of abortions are difficult to come by, Hungarian demographers have been counting with great attention for decades. In the background of this obsession is the concern with population decline. In its simplest form this is the worry, well known to state-socialist planners in Hungary as well as in other parts of Europe, that a declining population is also an aging one; the resources for pensions and support of the elderly constitute a massive social-financing dilemma.[17]

But in Hungary the decline of population also evokes, among educated people, echoes of an older worry: warnings about the imminent death of the nation, enunciated by populist writers in the 1930s who turned to the countryside in an effort to redefine national consciousness after the losses of Trianon, following the First World War. They created a tradition of "sociography," a genre that combined ethnographic observation, literary skill, and social criticism focused on the neglect of rural problems by the urban ruling elite. In the process they also (re)discovered a rural tradition of population control, the one-child system, that had been in existence since the abolition of serfdom. In several parts of the country, well-to-do Hungarian peasants, but not their ethnic German and Slovak neighbors, restricted reproduction to a single child, usually in order to keep the patrimony undivided and viable.

The literature on the one-child system goes back to the early years of the nineteenth century and is enormous, filled with speculation on why and how the control was accomplished. Statistics and arguments about the use of statistics played an important role in these debates, as they do in the more recent discussions about abortion. It appears that enormous social pressure, usually from older generations, especially older women within villages, enforced birth control well before modern methods became available and well before the kind of industrialization that seems to have produced the demographic transition in other regions.

17. For a Hungarian version of this argument, see Andorka, "Érvek."

For the populists, however, this was not an interesting scientific question, but an emotionally wrenching political phenomenon. They invoked Herder's prophecy that Hungarians would drown in a Germanic and Slavic sea, as well as old tropes about the loneliness of the Hungarian language in the middle of Europe. The figure of eternal "danger," "victimization," and "unpredictable fate" is a familiar one in the arsenal of nationalist discourse; and the link to national extinction is perhaps most salient for countries with relatively small populations or recent losses. Here it was tied directly to contraceptive practices and to the supposed danger of rural "matriarchy"—(old) women exercising too much power in the countryside. As part of their own claims to legitimacy as the keepers of the national flame, populist intellectuals argued that Hungarian peasants were deliberately, selfishly, and wrongheadedly destroying themselves; unless the populists could save them, the nation would simply die out and be forgotten by the world.

Among the activities of such intellectuals was the Society for Health Policy, organized in 1935 with the express purpose of providing information and opinion on "biopolitics." Quite distinct from the conservative organization of Christian physicians, it included doctors, writers, lawyers, and others concerned with the size and nature of the Magyar population and the purity of its blood. With a frankly eugenicist program, the Society aimed to safeguard the health, size, and "biological strength" of the Magyar people, and took a strong stand against the liberalization of abortion advocated by Social Democratic physicians as well as against the moderate regulations of the Chamber of Physicians, a self-policing professional organization.[18]

With these precedents, the abortion question was a delicate one for the Communist party taking power after the Second World War. Like the Russian and especially the German Communist and Socialist parties, which exercised great influence on it before the Second World War, the Hungarian party did not have an explicit population policy but did have a commitment to free abortions as part of a plan to achieve women's equality. Yet Soviet models had to be followed in the early

18. An important collection of the 1930s debates about abortion, population, and the one-child system can be found in "Elfogy a Magyarság?—Ankét," *Nyugat* (1933); see also Hegedüs, "Az abortuszkérdés," which deals as well with the activities of medical organizations. Also very useful for understanding the social context of the controversy: Ildikó Vásáry, "'The Sin of Transdanubia': The One Child System in Rural Hungary," *Continuity and Change* 4:3 (1989), pp. 429–68, and Dénes Némedi, *A népi szociográfia, 1930–1938* (Budapest, 1985).

1950s, models which severely limited abortion and required propaganda activities emphasizing the importance of the family in building socialism. Central party leaders denied that a lowered birth rate was related to the movement of women into the labor force. Building on earlier worries, blamed the Ministry of Health for being "against the people," unless it restricted abortion.

Ironically, following the 1956 liberalization of abortion, party ideologists themselves associated abortion and population policy with the "problem of nationalism." They worried that certain elements of a new generation of populist intelligentsia would attempt to "incite anti-Communist feeling" with this issue by raising the spectre of "national death" due to abortion. Indeed, it appears that the recasting of abortion policy that resulted in the restrictions of 1974 was motivated only in part by negative demographic trends. Recent investigations of party documents concerning abortion between 1950 and 1981 revealed the parallel fear among ideologists that the party would be seen as "against the nation." [19]

Thus, the early "oppositional" activity of the populist writers located high in the Writers' Union (for example, Gyula Fekete), who again sounded the alarm about the "death of the nation," explicitly relied on abortion to evoke the memory of the earlier debate. They, and a younger generation of populist intellectuals, were able to draw on an older discourse about the death of the nation and use it against centralized Communist power. Being against abortion was implicitly equated with being against the death of the nation, which in turn was an important element in opposition to "alien" Communist rule.

Continuity with the earlier discourse was accomplished by a number of textual practices. Once again statistics were freely cited: the "four million Hungarians" (note: not fetuses or even people, but Hungarians) who had been killed by abortion in the thirty-five years of the liberal abortion policies of the Communists, compared with the much smaller military losses at Mohács, the battle in 1526 at which Hungary fell to the Turks. Other comparisons were to the Battle of the Don (Stalingrad) in the Second World War, where an entire Hungarian army was destroyed by their Soviet adversaries. Headlines in right-wing journals noted: "Abortion is a national catastrophe," or a "Biological Trianon."

19. Party documents about abortion are analyzed in Gábor Jobbágyi, "Az abortuszkérsés a pártiratokban 1950–1981," *Valóság* 5 (1990), pp. 53–63; also Monigl, "Ideológia."

The writers of the 1980s, like those in the 1930s, associated all of these deaths with *moral* decline.

Another excerpt, from the same meeting in 1987, will reveal some of the other ways in which opposition to abortion was constructed as part of nationalist feeling, and how a continuity with the earlier discourse —indeed, the recontextualization of that earlier discourse into the current circumstances—was accomplished:

> What we feel is not economic, or not only economic and not just political, it is much bigger than that: we feel the coming of a catastrophe for our nation that will burn up everything.[20]

Our author goes on to detail the "paralysis" and "mood of death" that surrounds everyone and apologizes for his tone, which he characterizes as one of exaggerated pathos. He uses this pathetic tone, he says, to point up the fact that things are not as bad as they seem:

> This is a nation that has seen harder times [even than now]. Here the Neoaquistica Commission has harvested its victims, Haynau has taken our blood, and just in this century of horrors we have had one act of revenge after another, the hangings and the expulsions. We are probably the first in the world not only in suicide and mortality, not only in *failure to increase/be born* and in diminution of population, but also in the production of emigrants. It started with the staggering loss [an allusion to Trianon], it continued after 1920 with further expulsions through which many many valuable brains ended up in the service of foreigners, the highpoint being the departure of Béla Bartók; then came the forced emigration of 1945–48 during which a great variety of spiritual, intellectual forces left the homeland in masses, topped only by the exodus of 1956. And in our own days there is the flood out of Transylvania. As if out of a sack that has been chewed by mice, the Hungarian nation is being emptied of its people, its valuables. So, there is a basis for our fear of death. . . . There is a phrase deep in the Hungarian consciousness which we have not been able to face: death of the nation.[21]

There is much to be learned from this passage about the form of national rhetoric. But most relevant here is the creation of a historical narrative, a string of events which, by being listed in chronological order, gain a unity of causation. So we are invited to understand that suicides are the same kind of social phenomenon as abortion or the

20. István Csurka, untitled comments, in Agócsa, *Lakitelek*, p. 24.

21. Ibid. The Neoaquistica Commission alludes to a seventeenth-century Habsburg attempt to strip the Hungarian nobility of its privileges, wealth, and independence after the Turkish wars; Haynau was the Habsburg general in charge of executing those who participated in the 1848 Hungarian revolution and organizing the legal and financial retaliations that followed.

diminution of births, which are in turn narratively parallel to (and iconic with) religious persecution, territorial diminution, emigration due to the most various of causes (Note: the emigration of Bartók was expressly to escape impending fascism, while the 1945–48 emigration was made up, in part, of fascists). This is indeed a textual invention of tradition, making communism, which is presumably responsible for the current suicides and abortions and exodus from Transylvania, the enemy of the nation, by categorizing it with a litany of other enemies (and vice versa). Later on, the same speech equates all these losses with moral losses: the obvious and rampant godlessness and nationlessness under communism.

The populist writers locate the high rate of abortion as part of the immoral atmosphere of state socialist society. In this way their national rhetoric dovetails with the religiously based and Church-supported arguments of conservative Christian professionals. They continue a decade-long critique of state socialism. As many commentators in Hungary have pointed out, the political economic structures of state socialism destroyed most social organizations between the family and the state, indeed socialized many functions of the bourgeois family. Populist critics add that it devalued motherhood in a misguided attempt to equalize the sexes. By seeking the centralization of all power, state socialism promoted an atomization of social life. This supposedly produced a "selfish" obsession with material success (which was available through the second economy) and a concomitant neglect of ethics, care, and concern for other people and for the less fortunate—a neglect that was said to extend even to the notorious lack of courtesy in public encounters. A sordid concern with money linked to overwork in the second economy, a crisis of higher values, a "cynical materialism" are linked, in such discussions, to the high rate of abortion. Those who choose not to give birth because of financial insecurity or lack of an apartment in which to raise children are labelled materialistic and unethical for putting creature comforts (of child as well as parent) above responsibilities to higher ethical values, such as "life" and the good of "humanity" or the larger Hungarian nation.[22]

22. My analysis of the positions of demographers, along with conservative Christian doctors and lawyers, draws in part on my reading of the newspaper digest *Tallozó* for the period between 1990 and 1991, the debates published in the daily *Magyar Nemzet* for August 21, 1990, and April 1991, in *Népszava* of January 1992, and especially on the multidisciplinary journal of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, *Magyar Tudomány* 2 (1990) and 7 (1990), which published a two-part forum of professional opinion on abortion.

These same values are stressed by physicians and lawyers who have publicly appealed for restriction of abortion. In addition, members of the legal and medical professions charge state socialism with a disregard for expertise, specifically their own expertise in medicine, law, or medical ethics. This too is a long-standing criticism of the socialist state. Unlike some of the populist writers, however, the vocal doctors, a group that includes several women, do not abandon women altogether. On the contrary, they advise against abortion for the women's own sakes, once again using statistics to show that medical research proves the adverse, even catastrophic, results for women of having abortions. A high incidence of infection and subsequent infertility are noted and linked to abortion per se, rather than to hygienic conditions in hospitals or to specific abortion techniques. The doctors know best. The alleged infertility problem links up with the concern for "national death" since abortion is presented as doubly dangerous: it kills a Hungarian and prevents the woman from giving birth to more, healthy Hungarians.

Here the case of a group of vocal demographers makes an interesting contrast. Unlike the doctors and lawyers discussed above, some of the demographers were indeed consulted by the Party in its decisions about population policy. Demographers close to social planners and therefore involved in these decisions have defended the abortion policy of 1973–74, and the more liberal one of the late 1980s. But their colleagues lower down on the career ladder often do not. The defenders argue that the statistics show restricting abortion never raised birth rates very much. It only forced people to have and finish their families sooner, not to have larger families. A major concern of demographers is the aging of the population and the negative effects of that on economic stability. In discussing this, the demographers explicitly state what the populists do not: immigration from other countries with growing populations could solve the problem from a demographic point of view but would be "difficult" or "unacceptable" for "social reasons"—alluding diplomatically to the nationalist, xenophobic agenda.

Fending off the doctors' attacks, a demographer cites European evidence that abortions do not harm the health of the mother; against the populists, he argues that economic incentives are less coercive than banning abortion, and more likely to lead to modest population increases. Demographers presuppose the goal of efficient production of more babies. The demographic arguments are technical, use comparative data from other countries, and state that Hungary's problems are

largely the same as those of Western Europe and the result of long-term trends. But this pragmatic, rationalistic discourse is most vulnerable to the argument of the female physicians and the populist writers: The technocratic approach is itself immoral they say; abortion should no longer be a matter of "population policy" but rather of a basic moral stance toward humanity.

Unlike the doctors and populists, the lawyers do not ask for a ban on abortion but rather for the restitution of the rule of law, of the rights that have been denied in previous regulations. Yet, perhaps the most militant demands for restriction of abortion came from an organization led and in part initiated by a lawyer, "Pacem in Utero." [23] The appeal to rights is of course a familiar feature of anti-Communist discourse. Who exactly is being deprived of rights here? Anti-abortion lawyers argue that in the abortion decision there are four interested parties: the fetus, the mother, the father, and "society," although physicians add that they too constitute an interested party. Of these, argue the lawyers, the Communist regulations required only the mother's voice. Thus, the exclusion of the fetus, the father, and society must be rectified. Lawyers are pleased to speak for all three.

In more recent versions of this rhetoric, the separate strands I have outlined are brought together; it is argued that banning abortion would protect the nation against death, would protect the woman against the physical ills allegedly brought on by abortion, and would protect the right to life and right to influence of the fetus, the father, and society. As one article puts it: "We need a change of systems in this area too. We need to change from the self-destructive socialist model to the European model of the law-governed state (Rechtsstadt)." [24] For, the argument continues, "to restore the value of life, to provide this basic norm, is not the business of the market, but of politics." The vivid image cited earlier, of the nation as a leaky sack of grain, chewed by mice and thus slowly losing its people and its valuables, also alludes to such fears of depredation through a world market that will ruin the social fabric and allow local valuables (people and money) to leave the country. Thus,

23. The choice of Latin for the name of this group metonymically accomplishes the very unity between doctors, lawyers, the Catholic Church, and the populist guardians of Hungary's history that I suggest in this section. Latin simultaneously evokes the authority of the Catholic Church, the prestige of modern medicine, and the glories of the national past, since this was Hungary's official language of law, legislature, and learning until the nineteenth century. My thanks to József Böröcz for pointing this out.

24. Judit Kovács, "A emberi élet szent: Mikor és meddig," *Magyar Nemzet,* April 10, 1991, p. 6.

what is implicitly being criticized here is the capitalist market (another producer of selfish greed), and what is tacitly requested is a state that will restore morality, in part by banning abortion.

In these writings the figure of woman emerges as ignorant (they don't know what they are doing when they have abortions), but also as willfully so, since they don't want to know, to the extent of being likened to "trainable dogs," sad dupes of the Communist system. Because of supposedly generous maternity leaves and favorable divorce and custody laws, women are also seen as the corrupted beneficiaries of the Communist state. 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.

It is striking that the abortion debate helped to form and brought into a single anti-abortion camp a number of emerging social groups—writers, doctors, lawyers—that one would have thought were differently positioned with reference to institutions, interests, and social values. It also brought together very different strands of anti-Communist argument. What links these groups and arguments is that the anti-abortion stances are clearly tied to enhancing the groups' professional interests and presence in the social space between state and family that has opened up in the wake of socialism. Their arguments buttress claims for the indispensability of their leadership and expertise at the higher echelons of a society in which the principles for judging leaders and experts are, at this historical moment, very much a matter of contention.

The Liberal Opposition and the Construction of Politics

Let us turn now to writings about abortion from newspapers published by the parliamentary opposition, the *Beszélő,* and the *Magyar Narancs.* In contrast to the dramatic, even grandiose, rhetoric of the populists and the doctors and lawyers warning against abortion, we find here an ironic tone. The titles are playful, the articles often filled with puns, bitter parody, or savagely funny put-downs. One article on the abortion question was titled: "Kis jogi pornográfia," literally "A little pornography about the law." This plays on the earlier title of a remarkable and much admired avant-garde novel *Kis magyar pornográfia* [A short survey of Hungarian pornography, or perhaps a short Hungarian pornography], which was itself a parody of all those titles published by the Communist

presses [A short survey of art/ history/ literature] that pretended to educate the new socialist man with canned versions of arts and letters in Hungarian. I have selected a somewhat extreme version of this kind of article, to provide the flavor.

> Those who argue against abortion on the grounds of church or legal principles, are not able to see past the fact of egg fertilization (conception). They don't consider that that fact is preceded by another, one which is the greatest in a person's life, the most intimate, without exaggeration the most sacred: making love. In the course of legal arguments, this sacred act is turned into a sacrilege. The bed is first the object of searchlights, then it is tossed into the street. There anybody can photograph it, touch it, spit on it, according to his mood. . . . What many people object to in pornography is that it takes exactly the most inner moments and tries to put these in front of the public, thereby destroying their intimacy. A law about abortion would do just that. . . . This is no longer a woman's problem. It is the problem of the eternal couple, the man and the woman, since in this way the intimate relation which is their most valuable private matter is put in front of the public. This kind of prosaic description of love-making puts it right beside any other everyday bodily function. Therefore, the question is not whether one should ban or allow abortion, but rather whether or not one can, or should at all, regulate such a phenomenon by legal means.[25]

The tongue-in-cheek quality of this text is evident in the use of theological terms to discuss sex and pornography, the high moral tone combined with the outrageous suggestion that laws about abortion are a kind of pornography (the latter a growing phenomenon, by the way, on sale on the streets of Budapest, and one that the churches and nationalists are firmly against). By agreeing with the religious and legal-minded that sex is sacred, this young man is able to parody those with grand moral claims. But the frame of the argument is nevertheless serious: It introduces the distinction between private and public on which all the arguments of the opposition parties rest.

The distinction between public and private that underlies the playful argument may recall the familiar bourgeois distinctions, but this is a superficial reading. Rather, through the ironic, parodic handling of religion and morality, through the invocation of privacy as a sacred good, this writer inhabits the words, as Bakhtin would say, of a previous set of writers; he establishes, for his own purposes, an intertextual link to a quite different strand of argument than the populist writers quoted

25. János S. Ráduly, "Kis jogi pornográfia," *Magyar Narancs,* March 18, 1992, p. 5.

above. The precedents these evoke are the left-liberal, modernist, often Jewish, cosmopolitan intellectuals of fin-de-siècle Hungary, and more recently the anti-Communist dissident intellectuals. In short, he aligns himself with the self-styled "liberals," the producers of "samizdat" literature, the former theorists of "anti-politics," that strategy for surviving communism that was described by György Konrád for Hungary and Václav Havel for Czechoslovakia.

It was exactly such intellectuals who argued in the 1980s that the private sphere, the second economy, those few social spaces not occupied by the socialist state were the places where dissident male intellectuals could enact "anti-politics," behaving as if they lived outside the socialist state, and in a democratic polity; they envisioned the creation of a private civil society as a substitute for democratic politics. This celebration of the private redefined it as no longer a woman's preserve, but it looked back nostalgically to an idealized pre-war, non-conflictual, bourgeois family that never existed. The nostalgia extended to house decoration, so that old lace or silverware, nineteenth-century furniture inherited from grandparents, and even war medals displayed on the wall were taken to be signs of bourgeois values. In the southern village where I have done fieldwork since 1987, such furnishings were often shown to me with pride as a sign of a brave and oppositional political stance.

As Goven has shown, the ideal was linked, in the early 1980s, to a critique, within even mildly oppositional circles, of women in general as aggressive, selfish, sexually insatiable, destroyers of men's health, and rejectors of children. Such women were allegedly produced by communism's insistence on changing the "natural" relations between the sexes exemplified by the ideal "European" bourgeois family. Although this image is not salient in current writing about women and reproduction within the parliamentary opposition, neither is support for any notion of women's rights, although the opposition movements are conspicuously obsessed with rights in general. Indeed, as we have seen, the availability of abortion is defended on quite different grounds.[26]

This becomes clearer in another, more serious article, which nevertheless uses the same allusion in its title (Kis magyar abortusztörténet or A short history of Hungarian abortion), thereby making the same intertextual link to an artistic avant-garde and political dissidence.[27]

26. See Goven, "Gender Politics."
27. András Mink, "Kis magyar abortusztörténet," *Beszélö,* November 30, 1991, pp. 22–25.

The article is a list of historical events too long to reproduce here, so I will summarize. At first it appears that the textual strategy parallels that of the populist writers but this is a list of the previous laws regulating abortion in Europe, including the populist writers' debate of the 1930s. Significantly, the author puts into this sequence, and labels as precedents, the major previous experiments in banning abortion: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, Ceauşescu's Romania, Rákosi's Hungary. These are moments of horror in every Hungarian's historical imagination, quite apart from their abortion policies. The author notes, as well, that the fear for the death of the nation is usually accompanied by xenophobia concerning particular other groups, defined as different and alien, that are reproducing faster. And in an unusual move, he cites the three-quarters of a million Hungarian Gypsies who are the silent targets in the present case.

By making current abortion law the endpoint of this sequence, this author also invents a tradition, but one with quite a different implication for action than his populist colleague. Until this point there is, then, a substantive disagreement as indicated by the different historical sequence that is cited, but a metadiscursive agreement: arguing by historical precedent. Indeed, the use of historical precedent for political legitimation is a notorious characteristic of the region's political life, as famous among natives as among foreign observers. Thus it is striking when, at the end of the piece, in the final paragraph, the author turns against just this stance:

> None of this, of course, touches the moral judgment of the issue. . . . The decision about that . . . is not a historical question, but one about moral philosophy, and so it is not part of our subject matter in this article.

Thus, while constructing a history through exactly the kind of decontextualizing and recontextualizing strategy that is used by our populist above, and implicitly inviting the inference that banning abortion in history has had horrific consequences, he poses it as a private, moral issue, and not a public, political question.

Although the opposition newspapers and politicians offered a considerably more liberal proposal for legalized abortion than the populist writers and their governing coalition, we see that the arguments they produced were hardly about abortion only. For the opposition writers, abortion has just as little to do with women and their rights as for the

populists, and just as much to do with morality. Where they differed decisively was in their implicit images of the relation of these to the state and its functions.

We can infer their preferred images of the state not only from explicit depictions of how politics should work, but from the metadiscursive presuppositions in these arguments. The populists' images presuppose a state built on a moral consensus, one that represents a national/ethnic unity, one in which there is little public debate because someone else decides what is best for the entire community. That the governing coalition harbors such views is supported as well by my interviews with the social planner who designed and drafted the government's abortion proposal. He insisted without benefit of current polls or other sorts of evidence that regulating abortion in the way he planned not only was the European ideal, but was necessary as the embodiment of the national moral consensus. The state thus envisioned implies subjects who are united by a similarity, an ethnic and moral solidarity. The notion of a society united by similarity is a familiar one, only the purported sources of the imagined uniformity have changed, from socialist collectivity to ethnic identity. Not coincidentally, this is a state that also implicitly rejects the cruel market, providing instead the moral grounds for social services well beyond the banning of abortion. And it discursively produces a social group (the parties in power and their supporters) who are uniquely qualified to create and run such a state: qualified because of their true Hungarianness (as opposed to Jews and Gypsies) and because of their moral sensitivity, materially demonstrated exactly by their concern about the primal, naturalized issues of life and death in abortion. Ironically, this claim by doctors, lawyers, and populists to "know better" will also be quite familiar to those who have lived under the guidance of the vanguard party. But it is also the case that many Hungarians are increasingly nostalgic for the paternalistic relation to government that state socialism produced.

In contrast, the arguments of the opposition parties suggest a minimalist state, one that would neither construct nor assume a unity of purpose or morality in the populace, one that would make a sharp divide between the public (in this case the sphere of the state) and the private. The private, for them, would include private property and the unbridled workings of the capitalist market and those with the social networks and positions to take advantage of it. Private includes, as well, moral judgments deemed to be the concern only of the citizen-individuals,

undistinguished by gender or ethnicity, such a state would ideally construct as subjects.

Since they define it as a private question, abortion is not an issue that the opposition parties particularly want to discuss.[28] For them it provides no means of accumulating "credits," moral claims, symbolic capital in the eyes of the voting public. For the governing parties, who are, despite their present political position, largely impotent in vital questions of economic reorganization, regulating abortion provides a cheap way of putting into practice their image of the paternal state, providing the leadership in morality that everyone has identified as missing from everyday life. Not incidentally, it provides a material form of power as well, in the jobs made available through the web of counselors and social workers that will carry out the new abortion regulations. This is power and material patronage that, in a faithful reproduction of the tactics of their Communist predecessors, the members of the current government coalition could actually redistribute.

Some of the Women

But the abortion debate was not only about forms of state power. It was also about abortion and therefore about women's bodies. To what extent, then, is the kind of state and state-society relation implicitly proposed by populists and opposition likely to engage women's political energies? The women who will have to live with the new law have not been entirely silent during these proceedings. But they also did not participate very much in the battles for discursive hegemony described above. Rather, they constituted a marginal voice, quieted by charges of selfishness and by their own critiques of the double and triple day that communism (and the second economy) demanded from women. In Poland the threat of restricted abortion is partly what energized women's movements. This happened on a small scale in Hungary in the protests

28. This is not to say that articles and debates about abortion were missing from the newspapers and magazines of the opposition. Indeed, János Kis, a philosopher, former dissident and former head of the opposition party SzDSz, published a serious and well-received philosophical treatise on the moral and ethical questions raised by abortion: *Az Abortuszról: Érvek és Ellenérvek* (Budapest, 1992). It is telling, and in keeping with the strict liberalism of Kis that, as he explains, his major examples deliberately avoid the situation of the pregnant woman and the fetus, attempting instead to arrive at general moral principles about these questions that are not special to women or the situation of pregnancy.

of 1973, and it may happen again. For instance, the small group of professional and entrepreneurial women (calling their organization "Esélyegyenlőség," equal opportunity) who organized a forum to discuss abortion, vociferously disagreed with anti-abortion arguments. They claimed, in their own version of anti-Communist argument, that once again decisions were to be made about and for them, but without their participation.

More privately, my discussions with Hungarian women in urban as well as rural settings reveal a sense of bafflement and irritation about these debates. Why the enormous attention to abortion at a time of general economic and political dislocation, is a question asked not only by foreign observers but by Hungarian women themselves. At Christmastime 1992 I received a letter from an acquaintance, a woman of forty with a recently earned college diploma, who lives in the village where I work. She wrote in alarm about the beating of Gypsies in the streets of Budapest, about the anti-Semitic statements of members of the current government, and then she asked: "And meanwhile, what are they doing in Parliament? Eighty-year-old men, those idiots, amuse themselves by screaming against abortion when unemployment is enormous and the potential parents themselves have nothing to eat. . . ." As some of the anti-abortion writings themselves either state or assume: many Hungarian women have a sense of entitlement concerning abortion, and this seems to be substantiated by recent polls.[29] More than seventy percent of the population agreed that abortion should be available for "social reasons." Women described to me the possible loss of abortion in the familiar terms of the "East/West" discourse: It would be a lack of "civilization" in the country, a return to the backwardness and barbarity of the Stalinist years. They see abortion as a major, often the only, form of contraception, and thus a means of control. In contrast to the United States and Western Europe, where abortions are primarily obtained by young, unmarried women, in Hungary they are typically the recourse of married, older women who want to limit already existing families. Even the most pious Catholic women, active for years in the local rural church, expressed a conviction that abortion must remain legal. One of these, in her late forties, paused significantly when I put the question to

29. For detailed analysis of a representative sample of Hungarians polled on questions related to abortion in May 1990, see Pongrácz and Molnár, "Az abortuszkérdés."

her, and answered, "They couldn't possibly take that away." Urban women often responded with anger to my question: In the face of a chronic shortage of housing in Budapest, "who is going to give me the space to put another child at the kitchen table?" Echoing the words of my acquaintances, a woman, interviewed anonymously in a weekly newspaper said, "As long as society can't assure me the money to raise my child, they shouldn't have anything to do with this question." [30] Clearly some women are creating a discourse about abortion that is not at all congruent with any of the others I have discussed.

Yet there is another aspect to the larger issue of women, work, reproduction, and family. Even more than in the village where I have conducted fieldwork, educated women in Budapest feel great frustration in trying to balance work responsibilities and housework/motherhood, both of which are seen as largely their work. While socialism met some of its (unasked) promises to women in Hungary by engineering their massive entrance into the labor force, it did not provide adequate flexibility of work or childcare nor a rearrangement of gender roles to ease housework. The resultant difficulties of managing both kinds of work are being laid at the feet of state socialism by many women. It is the system they blame for not allowing them the choice of being full-time mothers. When abortion decisions are left to women, this is seen by many not as a chance for autonomy, but as the state allowing men to abandon women and children. More subtly, many women in their thirties and forties feel a sense of guilt about their supposed lack of skills in child-rearing and housekeeping. They express a feeling of inadequacy because of their lack of training (caused by their own labor force participation, and their mothers' wage work) in the "civilized womanly arts" of decoration, dress, and nurturance. Thus, ironically, a critique of state socialism for these women includes the demand for higher wages for men to support wives and children. If this set of conceptions includes a further valorization of "motherhood," as many populists and Christian organizations argue it should, this may yet provide grounds for some women to actively support anti-abortion groups, and for many more to simply acquiesce in a new organization of their subordination within the broader arena of Hungarian politics.

30. *168 Óra,* May 15, 1990, p. 8.

Conclusion

Because it is differently linked to questions of nationhood, anti-communism, morality, and women's and human rights, abortion has a different meaning in Hungary today than, for instance, in the contemporary United States, or in other regions of the world. Cultural conceptualizations about abortion are part of quite different discourses, less linked to sexuality and women's autonomy, but rather involving notions such as national identity and the defense of civility, within the construction of the newly open and contested field of Hungarian politics. By looking carefully at some of the texts produced within this debate, I have tried to specify as well the specific textual strategies—recontextualization, iconicity, intertextuality—through which the contrasting discourses are constructed.

The populist and the oppositional arguments against abortion I have outlined, as well as the ones being created by doctors, lawyers, and some women's groups, are arguments in absentia with a state socialism that no longer exists. It is the construction of a new politics against, and out of, the materials provided by the old. But anti-communism is a capacious category. A more interesting question is the way in which different groups constitute themselves against what they define as state socialism, the unintended ironies and continuities with the old in what they propose, and the political positions that such opposition makes invisible or impossible.

Populist intellectuals labeled communism as "against the nation." As in earlier versions, this discourse is suspicious not only of communism but also of the power of women to decide about reproduction; it sees demographic decline as a cultural rather than economic problem, a challenge to national identity. Lawyers, physicians, and demographers all argue for the indispensability of their expertise, and the oft-repeated accusation against communism is its alleged preference for ideological rather than expert advice. Yet this anti-Communist rhetoric ironically reproduces arguments that are all too familiar to those who have lived under the infantilizing tutelage of an intellectual and political "vanguard." For each of these experts implies that ordinary people should not make decisions for themselves. People, laments one woman physician, will continue to want abortions no matter what they are told about its ethical and physical dangers, as long as abortions are convenient and available. Thus, this portion of the abortion debate is yet another move

in the self-constitution of intellectual and political elites who claim their positions not because they represent the people, but because they know better what is best for everyone.

One of the few positions that anti-communism does not allow, at this historical moment, despite the general concern with human and civil rights, is the defense of women's rights and autonomy, exactly because this is so firmly linked (by physicians, lawyers, demographers, populists, and even the liberal opposition) to women's supposed advantages under state socialism. In addition, for the opposition, such claims would spoil women's role as maintainers of the family, that institutional sphere of supposedly "free" political and economic action. It would be antithetical as well to what many members of the opposition value as the moral purity of a liberalism that makes no distinctions of identity among "citizen-individuals."

Debates on abortion were not, of course, invented by post-socialist critics. Hungarian state socialist planners were deeply involved in a politics of reproduction, attempting to shape procreative practices through legal and discursive means in the service of various and changing political goals: Communist militarism and industrialization, emulation of Soviet models, or reformist attempts to rescue the failing political economic system. Legitimations of the regulations variously called on socialist solidarity, progress, or belatedly, on the "nature" of women.

What is distinctive about the post-socialist debates is that the reverse relation is more salient: Arguments about abortion and the proper forms of reproduction in 1990–92 were not the means to reach already defined political goals. They were presented rather in an attempt to argue about and justify broad political and moral visions and to gain moral and political credibility for their proponents. Rather than the shaping of reproductive practices for political ends, we see the shaping of politics through the coded discussion of reproductive practices. Exactly for this reason, the debate about abortion has had a significant role in constructing the symbolic, discursive aspects of the transition, the ways in which people imagined, represented, and understood their practical opposition to state socialism and their own interests in its demise. It is central as well in political and professional claims about who is better able to govern, or who is better suited because of morality, identity, and expertise to administer the legal and medical bureaucracy of the state.

Thus, the Hungarian debate about abortion is one of the crucial sites

at which much broader political arguments are being rehearsed, arguments starting with anti-communism but going well beyond simple opposition to Communist rule, to argue about forms of the state, to constitute and valorize groups that make claims about their political, symbolic value while they simultaneously try to construct the means by which such value is to be measured. The abortion debate makes politics. It also makes political groups, including large political coalitions as well as small women's organizations, and new social strata—new elites vying for mobility during the current restratification of society. But just as surely, politics as constituted by the range of such groups will decide how the new abortion law is put into practice in Hungary. And that, in part, will determine what kind of transformation the "revolutions" of 1989 will turn out to be for women.