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Family Policies and Gender under State Socialism: The three-year-long parental leave and the fate of nurseries between 1960 and 1990

Abstract

Scholars analysing the development of European family policies spell out the trend that most European countries seem to 'say good-bye' to 'old maternalism' (Orloff 2009; Matzke and Ostner 2010), while there is a shift of focus from the unit of 'family' to a more individual approach of female employment and gender equality. Such shift, however, is much less tangible in some of the post-socialist states. The Czech Republic and Hungary seem to be especially resistant to change, and insist on keeping their extremely long parental leave systems in place. Such systems prevent the employment of mothers of small children not only through financial (dis)incentives but also through the 'compulsion of altruism' connected to them. This paper will present the historic roots of long parental leaves in Hungary, analysing the (economic, demographic and social) factors that lead to its introduction in 1967, and taking account of the most important actors who played part in designing this (by the time) unique legislation. The paper also assesses the effect of long parental leaves on the availability of high quality institutional care in nurseries during the 1970s and 1980s in Hungary. Special attention is devoted to the role of the socialist women's organization, the Hungarian Women's Democratic Union. Findings are based on archive materials as well as interviews conducted with some of the important designers of the legislation.

Introduction

Extended maternity leave [gyermekgondozásisegély, GYES], introduced in 1967 in Hungary, was the longest paid child-care leave in the world that time, providing a possibility for mothers to stay at home with their children for 2.5 years initially, and for 3 years since 1969. GYES, which became a universal benefit in the late-1990s, has remained in place ever since despite attempts to cut its length or make it means-tested. What is more, two further long leaves, one income-related (GYED), and another one for families with three or more children

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(GYET) were implemented in 1985 and 1993 subsequently. Hungary has kept generous family policies under the global crisis and general austerity policies. This paper presents some of the reasons of the persistence of long parental (in fact: maternity) leaves despite pressure not just coming from the change of Hungarian family structure and preferences of mothers but also repeated suggestions by the OECD (2006) and directives by the EU (e.g. Barcelona targets) to develop quantity and quality of child care institutions and foster maternal employment.

We argue that the **timing of GYES** is crucial to understand the successful and long lasting compromise made by the communist political elite with the population in the late 1960s. The “welfare compromise” of the Kádár-regime was to a large extent played out in family policy measures. We argue that due to the success of GYES there has been no substantial path-departure or path shift in the historical development of parental leaves in Hungary. The process of adding new types of parental leaves (GYED and GYET) to the already existing program can be described as “layering” (Streeck and Thelen 2005), when new elements are attached to already existing institutions.

Following Morgan (2006; 2011) we confirm that the development of leaves can be understood **in connection with the fate of child care services**. The different set of programs belonged to different bureaucratic structures and they often presented a trade-off in the eyes of political decision makers: They either promoted long leaves or nursery care. Thus in times of accelerated decision-making on leaves, the development of nurseries typically slowed down.

The decisions of the male political elite in alliance with demographers (especially since the 1970s) were always linked to a renewed conservative **nationalist discourse** over the causes of decreasing fertility rates. Such discourse had its roots in the mid-war years’ conservative nationalist regime (Szikra and Szelewa 2010). In the process of designing long leaves the only women’s organization, the National Association of Hungarian Women (MNOSZ) who had reservations about returning to “traditional” female roles, was successfully sidelined. This organization finally had to give in to the leaders of the Party and turned to a “depoliticized” field of activity: that of the quality assurance of nurseries. The paper thus presents the struggle of a women’s organization under communist rule, the limits and the possibilities of

its activities in influencing welfare reforms and how they finally managed to promote the aim of the **emancipation agenda**.

The three-year-long maternity leave of 1967

One of the driving forces of the introduction of an extended maternity leave in 1967 was the increasing tension between the compulsion of work and the scarcity and crowdedness of child care facilities (Ferge 1972; Tímár, interview 2010). Experts reported that neither the increase of the number of places nor the quality of the care in nurseries was satisfactory (*Összefoglaló* 1968). Care at home was cheaper, they argued, and mothers on GYES would receive recognition as doing work at home that would be “beneficial to the whole society.” Meanwhile, economic planners, like János Tímár, who is considered to be the “father of GYES”, were engaged with boosting the efficiency of production under the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) and argued that mothers of small children frequently went on sick leave or were late from work, thus hurting productivity, in comparison with “more efficient” male workers.² Meanwhile, an emerging group of child psychologists presented an additional argument in support of GYES by stressing the need to strengthen the “early bonding between a mother and a child.” János Tímár himself acknowledged the involvement of a distinguished child-psychologist, Emmi Pikler, in the design of the program (Tímár, interview 2010).³ Personal connection between the circles of economists and psychologists has stimulated the process of designing the world-wide novelty of long paid maternity leave. Emmi Pikler’s husband, György Pikler, was the head of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office since 1948 for two decades – a decisive figure of the New Economic Mechanism and a close ally of Rezső Nyers, leader of NEM.⁴ Haney (2002, 96) refers to the 1965 Conference of the

² The New Economic Mechanism (NEM) was authored by a group of experts under Rezső Nyers, and introduced market-like mechanisms into the Soviet-style planned economy.

³ Emmi Pikler, paediatrician, was the founder of an “infant-care institute” in 1946, which soon became a main methodological center. Her methodology, which made her world-famous, was based on the revelation that infants and small children should be let move in a free manner and thus they should be let develop in their own pace. She also discovered a methodology through which the hospitalization of small kids in infant care could be prevented. The Pikler Institute, as it is called today, still organizes courses about this methodology for students from all over the world. See <http://www.pikler.hu/3.0/en/index.html>

⁴ György Pikler was the master of several distinguished sociologists in the Statistical Office, including Zsuzsa Ferge. The mysterious death of the influential statistician – falling out of a window in 1968 – still calls for rumours. Some say that he was killed by the secret service.

Hungarian Psychological Association devoted fully to the then new discipline of child psychology as being influential to the decision on GYES.

All the above mentioned economic and child-psychology-related considerations would not have been enough for the Party to issue a costly family policy program. The decisive concern was the Party's panic about the drop of fertility rates in the early 1960s. Indeed, the total fertility rate (TFR) started to decrease at the end of the 1950s and reached the record low of 1.79 in 1962. Similarly to the 1930s, the so called "rural writers" [népiírók] initiated and lead the debate on the issue of population decrease in the weekly intellectual journal "Life and Literature" (*ÉletésIrodalom - ÉS*). Just like their conservative predecessors, they directly linked the "greatness" of a nation to the increase of birth-rates in 1962. The "trauma of Trianon" (Hungary losing two-thirds of its territories following the lost First World War) appeared in their discourse as the "disadvantageous geo-political situation" of the Hungarian nation. Hungary, they argued, will be in an even greater danger due to the higher fertility rates of neighbouring countries (Heller et. al. 1988; Gábos and Tóth 2000). Modernization, individualization, and the depreciation of "motherly duties" due to emancipation were accused for the decrease of birth-rates. In an argument reminiscent of both the Stalinist period and the late 1930s, the "rural writers" presented having children as a moral obligation to the (socialist) nation and (cautiously) accused the Kádár regime of losing touch with "socialist" values (Heller et. al. 1988).

The Politburo soon ordered the Committee of State Economies [ÁllamgazdaságiBizottság]to prepare a report on "population issue". The report confirmed that Hungary "had the lowest fertility rate in the socialist bloc" and also – following Sweden – one of the lowest in the whole Europe (Előterjesztés, 1962). Originally, two ways of tackling the problem appeared. The first alternative was to promote "societal and political environment" of child-raising, including the development of nurseries. Besides experts, the issue of nurseries was pushed by the only women's organization of the communist times, the Council of Hungarian Women (*Magyar NőkOrszágosTanácsa-MNOT*) whose representatives frequently called for the development of child care services not only on ideological grounds but also based on the experiences reported from their local branches all over the country. This organization, invited to the Party's congresses, argued that female employment opportunities and childcare institutions, rather than long leaves, would be the preferable path to women's

liberation. Tímár in his memoirs recalls the initial opposition of MNOT leader Mrs Zsuzsa Ortutay (wife of the former Minister of Culture) against the extended maternity leave, which as he remembers, disappeared in a year, “seeing the benefits of GYES”.⁵

The other alternative proposed by experts of the Party back in 1962, was the extension of paid maternity leave to six months. Finally the Politburo decided to follow a third (and cheapest) alternative, to increase maternity leave to three years but without pay, similarly to the program introduced in Poland a few years later. In a famous speech at the 1962 Congress of the Party, Kádár explicitly referred to the difficult situation of families with many children, whose living standards “are to be raised more rapidly than the average”. He declared: “[W]e will increase maternity leave already in the following year and make it possible for mothers of small children to go on unpaid leave in order to care for their children until their third birthday, without damaging their employment rights” (MSZMP 1963, 78.).

Despite efforts fertility rates continued to decrease and thus the Politburo ordered a new, follow up report on the population issue in 1966. This report was prepared by demographers (as opposed to Party-experts), the representatives of an emerging profession, based in a newly established Demographic Research Institute in the Central Statistical Office. According to the “strictly confidential” minutes of the Politburo-meeting, the suggestions of demographers generated heated debates especially on the issue of abortion within the Party leadership (Előterjesztés, 1966.).⁶ Kádár himself agreed that the 1956 legislation on abortion was “too liberal”: “Letting mothers decide on how many children they wanted was only due to the panic of the time” and he added that this was not a right that should be provided for women.⁷ In the end, however, members of the Politburo agreed that Hungary should not follow the example of Romania under Ceaușescu’s coercive antiabortion measures. At the same time, they also rejected the demographers’ pleas for large increases in family benefits and services: “The situation is not such that we could identify with the report of the Statistical Office” said Kádár, who did not believe that such complex solutions would be needed for stopping the demographic decline (ibid.). Instead, the regime settled on a more

⁵According to Tímár, Mrs Ortutay sent him a bunch of flowers on the first anniversary of GYES, showing acknowledging the positive effect of GYES on women’s lives. (Tímár, interview 2010)

⁶MOL- 288, 1966.

⁷Notes about the meeting of the Politburo on the population question, 4th November, 1966. MOL-288 f-5/406. 15-36. (Hungarian National Archives.)

simple, compromise-solution consisting of a longer, paid child-rearing leave (*gyermeknevelésigély, GYES*), introduced in 1967.

The timing of GYES, implemented parallel with the short-lived experiment of the New Economic Mechanism, is of crucial importance for the design of the program. The main idea of NEM was to introduce “efficiency” into the mechanism of planned economy. Fewer unskilled workers were needed for “intensive” (as opposed to earlier “extensive”) growth and mothers as “unreliable” workers were targeted for job reduction (Klinger, interview 2010; Ferge 1972). Economists of Institute of Central Planning also made calculations of the costs of nursery versus home care and found that the former was far more expensive. The normative payment for the maintenance and running of nurseries was 12 500 Hungarian Forints (HUF) for a year in 1967 plus meals (7.50 HUF/day, partially financed by parents), textiles (560 HUF/year) and toys (Akócsi 1967:285). Adding up all the costs (around 15.500 HUF/year) economists found that providing 600 HUF/months (7200 HUF/year) flat rate allowance for mothers (500 HUF for members of cooperatives) is still just half of the costs of nursery care.

GYES was originally provided until children reached 2.5 years of age, as from this age kindergarten could receive children under special circumstances. However, due to the lack of child care facilities, the length of GYES was soon increased to 3 years (in 1969). The payment was slightly above 30% of the average wage, thus it became popular mainly among low-skilled workers – which fitted the original idea of its designers. Only full-time employees, with a twelve-month work record before giving birth, were eligible, which also meant that mothers with no previous work record or irregular employment were excluded from the system. As Varsa (2005) shows, Roma mothers were often left out of this provision which fitted the Party’s idea to boost fertility rates especially among ethnic Hungarian mothers. Importantly, the years spent on GYES counted as “employment” in the calculation of social insurance rights.

When introducing GYES on the 1966 Party congress, Kárdárchampioned monetary compensation for domestic work as a victory for women’s rights, a great step forward the emancipation of women (MSZMP 1967, 34-35). The number of recipients was 143 800 in 1969, but it soon doubled and reached its peak in 1977 with 290 030 beneficiaries (Figure 2). As Figures 1 and 2 illustrate, the introduction of GYES (and later GYED) had a slight negative

effect on the enrolment into nurseries showing the “trade-off” between promoting home-based motherly care and institutional child care in the late-1960s (Akócsi 1967; Korintus 1995).

GYES, formally financed by social insurance, remained outside of the institutional structure that administered pensions and sickness/maternity insurance. This distinction illustrates the decentralized pattern of administration of the Hungarian welfare state that enabled political leaders to successfully expand and modernize family-related programs in separation from other important social insurance schemes (Inglot 2008, 204). With the introduction of GYES Hungary took a maternalist turn (Koven and Michel 1993) as it financially promoted motherly care until kindergarten age. With the limited availability of nursery places, extended maternity leave became not a choice but a necessity especially for rural and unskilled workers. The timing of GYES magnifies the importance of economic considerations in designing Hungarian family policies. The power of this explicitly familialist (Kammerman and Kahn 1978) compromise of the Kádár-era is shown by the fact that this provision seems to be unshakable ever since. On the contrary, it has been supplemented with an insurance-based parental leave in the mid-1980s and a further, extended leave for 3+ families in the early 1990s – a typical example of “layered” institutional reforms (Streeck and Thelen 2005).

The time politics of child care deserves some attention: What distinguishes Hungary from the Poland and Romania, and makes this country similar to the Czech Republic and Slovakia (see Hasková 2011) is the very strict division of children under and above three years of age both in case of institutionalized child-care and in state-financed motherly care. The “magic three years” underpins the finding of Hagemann et al (2011:40) that there is indeed a “strong path dependency of the time structure of childcare and schooling extending back to the nineteenth century” in Eastern and Western Europe. As we argued elsewhere, this division was created by nationalist educational aspirations (Szikra 2011), and made it nearly impossible in the long history of Hungarian child care institutions to seriously consider the creation of unified child care services for children of 0-6 years, as well as to alter the system of three-year-long parental (maternity) leave even half a century later.

The effects of GYES on nurseries and women's agency in the 1970s and 1980s

The Party elite continued to promote motherly care with extended paid leaves in the 1970s and 1980s and thus decided to opt for "traditional" family roles as opposed to the Marxist idea of gender equality. This inevitably meant that child care services received much less political attention. The celebration of long maternity leaves as achievements in "women's emancipation" was an interpretation that did not meet the view of the Council of Hungarian Women [Magyar NőkOrszágosTanácsa, MNOT]. The 1984 population program generally stated the wish to achieve "quantitative and qualitative development" and thus "modernization" (*korszerűsítés*) of already existing facilities, while, as a new phenomena, the need for parents to increasingly finance the costs of running kindergarten also appeared as a sign of decreased central budget.

In this period, women's agency played a crucial role in pushing for more and better nursery care even if strong political forces worked against it. It was the achievement of newly emerging female experts that despite the existence of generous child-care leaves that provided the possibility for mothers "to choose" between child facilities and home-care, the reputation of nurseries did not deteriorate (as was the case in Poland and Romania) while the demand for nursery care continuously increased. Women's agency was not present in the same form as in capitalist democracies (like the feminist movement, protests, NGOs and pressure groups) but materialized in the alliance of professional women devoted to the issue of nurseries. The organization of experts and politicians from MNOT, ministries and background institutions managed to include well-known pedagogues, child-psychologists and devoted nurses to lobby for a series of important, and often costly, reforms in favour of nurseries.

After the "lost battle" over more child care as opposed to long leaves, the women's organization now increasingly turned to welfare work. The "depoliticizing" of MNOT was initiated by the Party in its declaration on "women's policy" when the earlier women's organization, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women [Magyar NőkDemokratikusSzövetsége] was ceased and a new organization, that of MNOT was

created.⁸ The new organization had to become incorporated into the work of companies, co-operatives, institutions, providing background information to promote the “solution of the women’s question”. Separate committees dealing with issues related to “protection of mothers and children”, pedagogic work, legal issues and “family protection”, agriculture etc. were formed and the whole organization started to function more like a research institute, rather than a political lobbyist for women.⁹

A perfect illustration of this process is how nurseries and care work was promoted by MNOT in the 1970s. The organization around nursery care started from field-work and from the “realization of the needs of small children to play” and gradually lead to important national reforms of nursery care. The first step was made already in the early 1960s by a female expert promoted by MNOT who introduced a method “to interrupt the monotony of children’s lives” in nurseries with “activating games” (Polónyi 1990:6; Vokony 2002). Trainings organized to learn the new methodology brought stakeholders together for the first time. Not much later, Mrs. Ágnes Akócsi, the head of the nursery-unit within the Health Ministry, Mrs. Erzsébet Varga, inspector of nurseries in Budapest, together with Mrs. Ferencné Noszály, director of the nursery-teacher training school, started to organize expert-meetings for nurses. As a next step, a Ministerial Directive to establish so called “methodological nurseries” was issued in 1966 due to the successful lobbying of Mrs. Akócsi, and the ministry also reserved a fund to provide toys for children (Polónyi 1990:6).

It was often emphasized by these experts that nurseries have been established, on the first place, to secure female employment and assure women’s “complete emancipation”. It is, they argued, exactly for this reason why the development of nurseries should remain “politically highly important” (e.g. Akócsi 1970:270). No wonder that they worried about the effects of the introduction of three-year-long maternity-leave. “Let us consider honestly that we thought that the child-care leave introduced in 1967 would make it unnecessary to further develop nurseries. But this idea did not work out as the majority of lone parents as well as qualified female employees take up child-care leave at a maximum of one-year” – as the paediatrician in charge of nurseries of the 4th district in Budapest evaluated the situation

⁸ 1013/1970. V.10. Korm. számú határozat a nők gazdasági és szociális helyzetének megjavításáról.

[Declaration on the remedy of the economic and social situation of women.]

⁹ The process of change is illustrated by documents to be found in the Political Archives, PIL-896 f-8/9. öl.

a decade later (Kardos 1978:11). Kardos himself carried out detailed statistical research on the crowdedness of nurseries and persistently argued for high quality care.

The development of nurseries in Budapest actually slowed down already between 1957 and 1967 (as compared to the early 1950s), and it fully stopped following GYES, between 1968 and 1971 (Kardos, *ibid.*). The introduction of childcare leaves and benefits, at least initially, caused a significant drop in the percentage of children enrolled in nurseries overall in the country, from 11.3% to 9.45% between 1966 and 1968, followed by an increase in the early 1970s and the peak in 1983 of 15.7% (Figure 1). As another important effect, the introduction of GYES substantially altered the age of children attending nurseries: The number of children below one year of age halved, while that of children above 2.5 and 3 years increased sharply (Akócs 1971:12). The share of children older than three years increased by five times between 1965 and 1977, and reached one-tenth of all children in Budapest (Kardos 1978:19). There was an attempt to direct these children to the kindergarten but it failed “on the resistance of kindergarten pedagogues as they could not reach the same aims with these children as with the older ones” (*ibid.*). By this time, the overwhelming majority of nurseries were run by municipalities. Companies were allowed (and often encouraged) to “buy” places for the children of their most important employees and to provide help in building and renovating the facility in free “communal work”.

An even greater decline was experienced following the introduction of the income-related child care leave, GYED, in 1985: Enrolment rates decreased from 15.34 to 13.49 between 1984 and 1986 (Figure 1). This time the decline remained persistent due to the gradual political and economic turn of the country. While nurseries became financially independent institutions as a result of the New Economic Mechanism in 1969 (Akócsi 1971:9), they were moved under the supervision of local hospitals in 1983 (Polónyi 1990). Experts were outraged not just because their newly formed professional independence was hindered but also because of attempts of “rationalization”, that is, closure of nurseries followed by a unification of formerly independent units, and the moving of children from smaller nurseries to large, more crowded ones. Similarly to Romania and Poland, the responsibility of nurseries was shifted to local municipalities soon after the fall of communism. However, this time no regular payment was coming from the central government until 1997. Smaller and

poorer municipalities closed down their nurseries and enrolment rates declined to 11.53 by 1989 and further to 9.12 per cent by 1992 (Table 3).

Going back to the 1970s, we must emphasize that several factors contributed to the boost of the building of nurseries in this decade. Some of these factors were interlinked but others just coincided with each other. The most important of all these was the parallel concern with decreasing fertility rates and the emerging interest in “families” and the establishment of “family policies” (Ferge 1978). The fact that the “Ratkó-generation” born under the abortion ban in 1953, started to have children exactly in these years, added another reason. The establishment of new and “modern” housing estates starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, where young families with at least two children were given a priority of acquiring flats, was another important factor. These families, as is often emphasized by contemporary documents, “demanded” nursery care for their children. Thus between 1972 and 1978 55 new nurseries were opened in Budapest (and only two of them by factories) (Kardos 1978:11). Concerning the whole country, the majority of nursery places were established in the capital and other large cities between 1975 and 1980 (altogether 13 thousand), often as part of developing housing estates. At the same time, only one thousand new nursery places were established in villages, most of which were eliminated in the early 1990s (HCSO 1991; Korintus 1995).

The improvement of the quality of care, which was crucial for the popularity of nurseries, was largely achieved by the alliance of female experts who managed to establish a central institution for the supervision and quality control of nurseries all over the country. The timing of the idea of a “methodological institute” is crucial: Focused attention on child care and families coincided with the establishment of national institutes in various fields of health care under the supervision of the Ministry of Health.¹⁰ The National Institute for Day Care Centers (BölcsődékMódszertaniIntézete, BOMI), set up in 1970¹¹, had the task to ensure the standards of nurseries all over the country, to conduct research, develop methods and guidelines, to monitor nurseries and to provide training and consultancy for caregivers (Korintus 1995:8). The institute issued guidance concerning the physical environment of

¹⁰Several institutes, including one for addictology, one for research, and another one for pharmaceuticals were set up. The close link between health administration and the methodological institute is illustrated by the fact that it was set up in the nursery of the Institute of Public Health.

¹¹ 22/1970. EüM miniszteri utasítás.

nurseries (e.g. to provide at least 4 m²/child), including directives not just about the building itself but furniture, toys, dishes, setting up of the courtyard etc. As the head of the institute remembers, one of the main challenges the new institute faced was the rearrangement of nurseries set up in the 1950s that were not suitable for their purpose: Ordinary flats with no possibility of taking the kids outside, lack of courtyards and toys etc (Polónyi 1990).

Research conducted in the institute (often with the help of “modern technology”, including the filming of children) proved, among others, that kids who were gradually acquainted with the nursery within one or two weeks had a much easier time later on, also in terms of avoiding sickness. Newsletters were issued to share the findings of the institute with care-workers all over the country (Polónyi 1990:15).¹² The institute had regular contacts with fellow communist countries, among which the East-German model proved to be the most important given the high rate of children enrolled in nurseries (see Hagemann et. al. 2011). Hungarian experts, especially child psychologists, were also asked to provide information for their German colleagues (Polónyi 1990: 18).

The head of the institute lobbied not only in the highest political level for financing higher quality care but also at companies providing toys and textiles for a cheaper price for nurseries. Another issue constantly pushed for by female experts was the training of care workers: The length of curricula was increased from one to two years in 1969, and psychological and sociological subjects were given a greater emphasis. However, the training remained on the secondary level. The head of nursery-unit within the Ministry of Health argued: “It would provide a moral acknowledgement of nursery care-workers to receive – according to their task – the same level of training as kindergarten pedagogues or school teachers. The architect who lays the foundation of a building is not of smaller value than those who construct the walls, even if their work is less spectacular. If the foundation is not solid, the house will collapse.” (Akócsi 1970: 271.)

All in all, the National Institute for Day Care Centres, its allied expert group together with MNOT attempted to counter the argument about the low quality of nurseries, and thus (indirectly) the primacy of home-based maternal care. The statements of the 1971 Women’s Congress attacked on the pro-GYES arguments stating that “it is not true that women would

¹² Another research conducted for the Danish Lego company by MártaKorintus observed children how they included Lego bricks in their free play (ibid:18).

be inefficient employees” and that it is crucial for women to take part in employment and not just in reproductive work”.¹³ For achieving this aim the increase of quality and quantity of child care institutions proved central. The argument of MNOT and the interest of nursery care experts met at this point: The latter insisted that “factors that harm the development of children are not to be found in the *institution* of nurseries; rather, they are due to the *quality of care* provided” (Akócsi 1968).

Conclusions

The “welfare compromise” by the Kádár regime following the suppression of the 1956 revolution meant that directly coercive measures, like the ban on abortion or the childlessness tax, were replaced by a set of decisions promoting the “well-being” of the population. A number of these were linked to the “population program” of the party reacting to the decreasing of fertility rates in the early 1960s. The introduction of unpaid, three-year-long maternity leave in 1962 was soon followed by the provision of a 2.5 year long paid leave called “GYES” which was then the longest paid leave in the world. GYES was “sold” to women as an important move towards their emancipation which is a typical argument of “differential feminism”, emphasising the merits of motherly care which deserves (financial) appreciation. The path-setting program of GYES also meant the return of Hungarian family policies to conservative maternalist solutions rooted in the mid-war years, calling for the strengthening of “traditional” male and female roles. The maternalist turn inevitably meant that the development of child care services for 0-3 year old children that speeded up during the early 1950s became halted.

The compromise over GYES satisfied the majority of stakeholders. This solution was exactly what conservative nationalist intellectuals, leading the debate on the “population problem”, wished for as they believed that the turn away of women from their “motherly obligations” was the prime cause of low fertility rates. GYES was also a perfect “solution” to hiding labour surplus for reform economists working on the New Economic Mechanism, in the centre of which lay increased “efficiency” in times when the acknowledgement of unemployment was politically impossible. GYES (besides other welfare measures) provided an increased legitimacy for Kádár and his political allies which was crucial for the new party-leadership

¹³ The Statement of MNOT on the Women’s Congress, October 29-30, 1971. PIL 896 f-1/9.öl/1971.

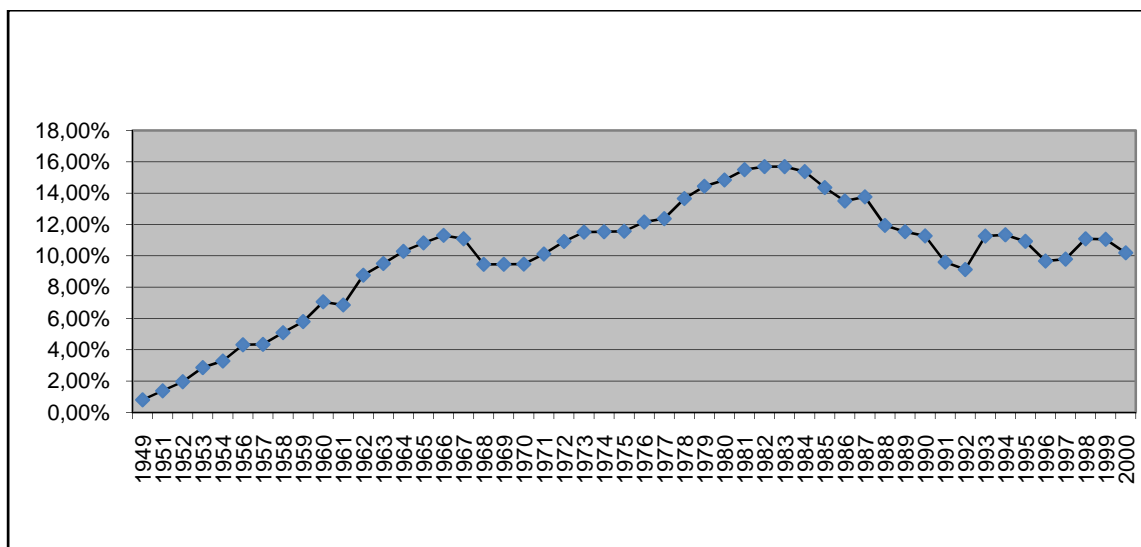
following the banned revolution. The two newly emerging professions of child psychologists and demographers could also see their new scientific findings put in practice through GYES which increased their prestige.

The only dissatisfied stakeholder was the communist women's organization, the National Alliance of Women [MNOT] that cautiously but persistently warned about the drawbacks of long leaves all the way through the 1960s. Indeed, GYES was the open acknowledgement of the failure of the Marxist emancipation project (Adamik interview, 2010). Following its defeat over GYES the women's organization was reorganized and became depoliticized in 1970. We traced the process of how MNOT together with overwhelmingly female professionals organized for increasing the quality of nursery care. Starting from an informal organization their activities gradually formalized and finally manifested in an independent institution devoted for the assurance of quality of nurseries all over the country.

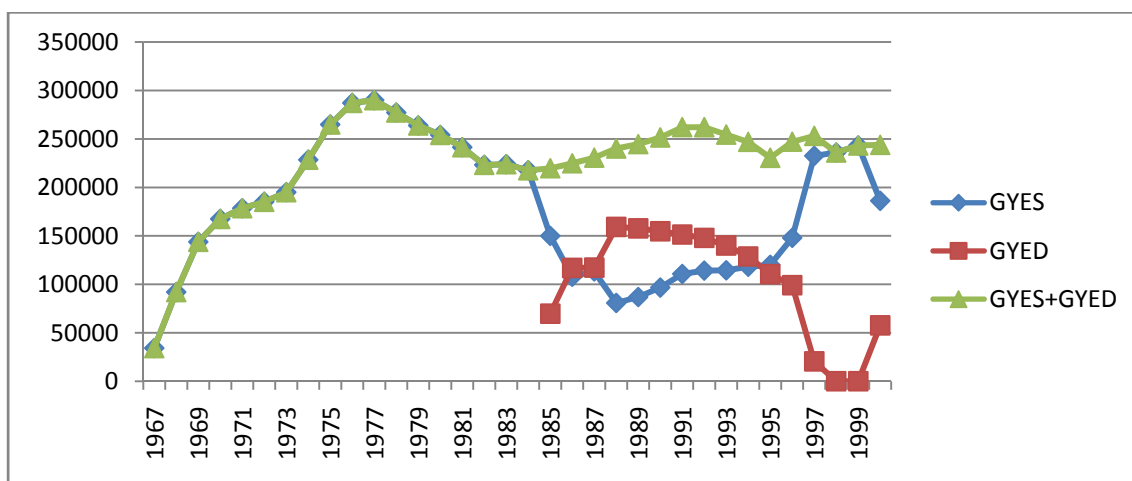
GYES, and its income-related counterpart, GYED (introduced in 1985) had an important effect on how families with small children organized their lives. First unskilled and later also highly qualified women decided to stay at home with their children until their two or three years of age. Nursery attendance, especially that of children below one, subsequently decreased following the introduction of extended leaves. However, enrolment rates gradually climbed back in the 1970s, reaching their peak in 1983. We argued in the paper that the relative popularity of nurseries was largely due to the increased quality of care fostered by the alliance of female professionals and MNOT. Through the "betterment of the lives of children" the women's movement found a way to achieve some of its emancipation-aims in a "soft" and "apolitical" way.

Appendix

Graph 1. Children in nursery care in Hungary, 1949-2000 (% of age group)



Graph 2. Number of mothers on extended maternity leave in Hungary, 1967-2000



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