

A semi-peripheral myth of the “good mother”. The history of motherly love in Hungary from a global perspective¹

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Abstract Based on Foucault’s theory of the soul, as well as the methodological insights of Fernand Braudel and world-systems analysis, this paper demonstrates how the myth of the good and the bad mother was created by certain actors during the various cycles of the capitalist world system, and how these myths have been embedded in the logic of capitalist accumulation. We show how on the one hand these myths contributed to securing the unpaid reproductive labour, care and love necessitated by accumulation, and how on the other hand they supported a new market segment from the 19th century onwards by manipulating maternal conscience. First we present an outline of the history of the myth of the good mother and motherly love in the core countries of the world system, then we summarise the socialist myth of the good mother. Finally, we use empirical examples to illustrate the ways the contemporary Hungarian myth of the good mother has been shaped by dependence on the core countries and on the socialist Soviet Union.

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On 8 July 2018, the World Health Assembly (WHA) convened in Geneva with the partial aim of accepting a statement that breastfeeding and breast milk is the healthiest and most secure method of feeding infants, and that accordingly, member states of the UN needed to limit the (potentially) misleading marketing of companies producing infant formula. At one point, the US delegate interrupted the discussion by requesting that certain parts be removed from the statement, namely those in which the WHA would call on governments to protect and support breastfeeding and feeding breast milk to infants, and limit the popularisation of infant formula. When they were unsuccessful, the US representatives blackmailed the Ecuador delegation, who had intended to officially submit the statement, with the threat that unless they stepped back from this, the United States would instigate trade sanctions, as well as withdrawing their indispensable military assistance. As a result, besides Ecuador, representatives of a dozen South-American and African peripheral and semi-peripheral countries refused to submit the statement (Jacobs, 2018).

The strategy of the US delegation, which according to reports had astonished the assembly (Jacobs, 2018), is hardly surprising from a political economic perspective: it is in harmony with the economic policy of the Donald Trump government, which aims to deal with

the new-old crisis of US hegemony through protectionist measures (for example protecting US companies from the limiting measures of international bodies) and a rhetoric of economic nationalism (Parnreiter, 2018). The infant formula industry is an approximately 70-billion-dollar industry, and is dominated by a small number of European and US companies with significant interest in sales in peripheral countries (Jacobs, 2018).

A similar story was the Nestlé boycott in 1977. The boycott initiated by anti-poverty organisations, and preceded, among others, by the exploratory work of journalist Mike Muller (1974), which went by the unrestrained title *The Baby Killer*. These demonstrated that the aggressive marketing policy of infant formula production is directly responsible for the death of thousands of newborns in peripheral countries, where due to unhygienic circumstances, including the lack of clean water, feeding through formula entails significantly more risk than breastfeeding, to the decreasing of which it has contributed.

The above stories are highly instructive. The above not only shows that the “private sphere” is not the least bit independent from the “public sphere,” but also that transnational relations permeate even the most intimate of human (love) relations. For instance, how breastfeeding, an act of motherly love, is perceived by the mother is – at least in part – decided within the field of the power of interests related to transnational commodity production.

In this chapter, we accept as our starting point that the defining of “motherhood” and the right way to love as a mother – the creation of the myth of the “good mother” – takes place according to the interests of various actors. For this, we partly rely on Foucault’s philosophical anthropology, according to which “[t]he soul is the effect and the instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body” (Foucault, 1995, p. 30). Based on Foucault, we look at how certain actors construct the “motherly soul,” and how they are able to manipulate the mother’s conscience according to their interests. On the other hand, we rely on the methodology of Fernand Braudel and world-systems analysis, according to which history can be grasped in the dialectic of “great” historical events and “everyday life” (Braudel, 1977); and the relations between people can be understood within the context of those greater relations that they are part of (Wallerstein, 2004). On the basis of this, we look at the ways in which motherly praxes of love and care considered to be appropriate at a particular point in time are embedded into socio-economic structural dynamics. Thus the objects of this study are the ways in which the motherly “soul” as a construct is determined, and how practices such as child-rearing, that are considered particularly intimate, are related to great historical events – or how the mother–child relationship is embedded into broader human relations, that is, the dominant commodity production and market relations.

Who is a good mother?

Who is a mother? The mother is a woman who has a child. This statement, while seemingly banal, is the foundation of any historical enquiry regarding motherhood. After all, we may state that being a mother always entails being the mother *of somebody*. Being a mother is therefore not a quality or substance, but a relative position. It is a position that can only be interpreted in relation to the child or children. Inversely, the word “child” refers to two things in contemporary society. Firstly, it refers practically to everyone, since everyone is the child of somebody independently of their age. Secondly, it refers to people before the age of puberty, independently of who their mother is. In the first sense, “child” is also a relative position, the opposite relative position of “mother,” and they use this relation to position each other. In the second sense, being a “child” is a quality, that is, an absolute position. In contemporary societies, the emphasis is on the second sense, which also means that the child is an absolute position that designates a relative position, that of the mother.

While we were working on this research project, a colleague of ours shared a personal experience with us. On three consecutive occasions, her five-year-old daughter was taken to the doctor by the father. On the last occasion, when the (male) paediatrician saw the father with the daughter, he asked, “Does this daughter have no

mother?!” Our colleague, who had learnt about this from the father, was in tears when she shared the story with us.

What is motherhood? The case above can be interpreted in a way that based on the age (the absolute position) of the girl, the paediatrician was expecting a praxis positioned by him relative to the girl’s age, that is, the mother’s praxis – of bringing her daughter to the doctor. Motherhood as a human relation is therefore manifest in contemporary societies as everyday practices of reproductive tasks – care and love – that are necessary for the child to survive and live in welfare and well-being according to heterogenous social norms.

Who is a good mother? A good mother is a mother who is not bad. Behind this second seemingly banal statement lies an important theoretical and methodological insight. We can state that the good mother is defined negatively, that is, a good mother is somebody who does not fail to perform the tasks belonging to the praxis of motherhood, and performs them “correctly” – which in effect means loving her child “correctly.” In other words, the myth of the good mother is always constructed together with the myth of the bad mother. The question “Does this daughter have no mother?!” suggests that a mother not present in caring tasks (taking the child to the doctor) is a mother neglecting her praxis, and therefore is a bad mother. The expression of this expectation elicits an emotional response for this reason – this is the way the motherly *soul*, in a Foucauldian sense, works: it constructs a motherly conscience and reacts

to the accusation of being a bad mother with internalised shame and guilt. The motherly soul is the prison of the motherly body.

An outline of the history of the myth of the good mother in the core countries

The myth of the good mother is a capitalist myth. Although narratives about motherhood existed in the Middle Ages, most importantly the cult of the Virgin Mary, but in the Middle Ages, the ideal of the “good mother” was not clearly normalised or standardised (Thurer, 1995). According to Philippe Ariès, “[n]obody thought, as we ordinarily think today, that every child already contained a man’s [sic] personality [...] This indifference was a direct and inevitable consequence of the demography of the period” (1965, p. 39). According to the social historian Edward Shorter, who draws on Ariès, among others, there is also a reverse connection: mothers looked at the development of their children below the age of two with disinterest, which in turn contributed to high infant mortality (Shorter, 1975). According to Lloyd deMause’s description of life in the Middle Ages (1974), neither the nuclear family, nor private life in the bourgeois sense existed, and infanticide was a regular feature of family planning. Cohabitation was first and foremost a community of labour, not love.

But as Ariès (1965, p. 39) himself asks, if social constructions of the child and the mother (or the lack of these) were determined by

demographic relations, why did the modern myths of the child and motherly love begin to appear almost 300 years before the demographic transition?

The first bad mother: the myth of the witch. Firstly, between 1315-1322, the Great Famine and plague epidemic that followed resulted in the death of 30-40% of the European population, and the “Black Death” mostly hit peasants, day-labourers, vagabonds and craftsmen. Secondly, in the society of the Middle Ages, due to limited access to land and the protectionist limitation of craft guild membership, it was neither desirable nor possible for peasants or craftspeople to have large numbers of children. Moreover, communities of peasants and craftspeople regularly made efforts to control the birthrate in Europe. Various methods of both contraception and also pregnancy termination existed, but infanticide was also regular. These two combined factors led to a demographic crisis by the 16th and 17th centuries, peaking between 1620 and 1630 (Federici, 2004).

But the first seeds of the newly emerging capitalist world-system necessitated a constantly available labour force – for which the states and church had to interfere with reproduction patterns (Federici, 2004). Thus the answer to the question asked by Ariès of why the social construction of the mother–child relationship was radically transformed in the 15th century – several hundred years before the

first phase of the demographic transition – is that this was due to a well-organised campaign on the part of European states and church aimed at managing the demographic crisis. It took place through the interference with reproductive patterns in order to secure the labour force basis of the capitalist mode of production. One of the most didactic examples of this is from 16th-century Germany, where a mother could face punishment if it was considered that she had not made enough physical effort during labour, or if she had not shown enough love for her baby after giving birth (Rublack, 1996, p. 92).

At the same time, European states and churches began to wage a war on non-reproductive sex, birth regulation, abortion and infanticide through the use and bureaucratisation of witch-hunts. Witch-hunts were a manifestation of the newly emerging world-system, with the extension of bureaucracy and the state apparatus imposing its logic onto human relationships (Wallerstein, 1974) – in this particular case onto love and sex relationships. This “war” claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of women: prostitutes, unmarried mothers, midwives, women who had, or were said to have committed adultery, or women who were unable to produce their living infant to authorities after giving birth. Primarily, members of the lower classes (Federici, 2004). The witch myth of the 16th century became the first myth of the bad mother. It was no coincidence that a central element in witch trials was that witches were presumed to sacrifice children to the devil (Federici, 2004). The neglecting of loving and caring for children came to be considered a terrible crime, while the

myth of the good mother also appeared alongside that of the bad mother.

The myth of the angelic bourgeois mother. By the end of the 17th century, in most parts of Europe, the family and the education system – which had been established by that time – removed children from adult society, and this was accompanied with an expectation towards their parents from society to treat them with special care.

In addition, after 200 years of terror, first with the rise of the Dutch and then the British hegemony, with the bourgeoisie along with it, constructions of femininity also changed radically. The bourgeois woman – according to the expectations of the period – was without passion, asexual, pure, and was attached to her husband through tender friendship and faithfulness rather than sexual love. For the bourgeoisie, the family home had become completely isolated from the outside world; it became the sphere of the woman supported by her husband, while work and politics remained the sphere of the bread-earning husband (Federici, 2004; Foucault, 1990; Laqueur, 1992; Somlai, 1984). All this formed an organic part of the class identity of the bourgeoisie and its symbolic separation from other classes. The bourgeois man–woman relationship was materially and symbolically determined by the ways in which the bourgeoisie was embedded into the system of social relations of the period.

Elisabeth Badinter, in her search for motherly love, points to the fact that out of 21,000 babies born in Paris in 1780, approximately (or less than) 1000 were nursed by their mothers at home, and another 1,000 by live-in wet-nurses. The remaining 19,000 were sent away to wet-nurses (Badinter, 1981, p. 43). However, “[a]fter 1760 publications abounded advising mothers to take care of their children personally and ‘ordering’ them to breast-feed” (Badinter, 1981, p. 117). By this time it had become an accepted view among the Western-European bourgeoisie that children deserved pleasure with the mother. From this period onwards, even though the practice of wet-nursing had been prevalent among the upper classes for centuries, it was the woman not nursing her child – for whatever reason – that received scorn on account of not loving her child.

According to the slowly spreading bourgeois myth of motherhood, the mother was an angelic creature without desire, ready to sacrifice anything for the warmth of the home and her children. The image of the child had also radically transformed – it had come to assume primarily emotional value rather than economic, and thus in a certain sense it had become priceless. By the second half of the 18th century, the strict punishment-centred pedagogy of the 17th century had disappeared (Thurer, 1995). Child-rearing advice had been institutionalised, but this meant that any behavioural or welfare discrepancy of the child became the sole responsibility of the mother. In sum, the accusation of being a bad mother constantly hovered over

the bourgeois mother, and accordingly, she was haunted by the conscience of the bad mother.

From the 19th century, Darwinism began to permeate the ideology of the bourgeoisie. Motherhood received an evolutionary tinge. The successful woman became the one who was “good” at reproducing. Since no “decent” woman was permitted to have sexual desires, birth defects were interpreted as evidence of the indecent thoughts of the mother. Thus the myth of the bad mother was scientified (Thurer, 1995).

As a result of the industrial revolution, the British hegemony that was built on it, and the economic prosperity that sprang from the world-system, new markets emerged (Silver & Arrighi, 2003). One consequence of this was the expansion of products made particularly for children, creating a market based on parental love. For instance, one of the best-known children’s toys, the Teddy Bear, was created in the first years of the 20th century. The mother who failed to love her children enough or sacrifice enough for them, which from the 19th century had come to include purchasing the appropriate products, committed an unforgivable sin – she was a *bad mother*.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the bourgeois family model and the bourgeois myth of the good mother had come to serve as a standard in all social classes (Thurer, 1995). From the perspective of the ideology of the ruling class, the working-class mother was no less deviant (Badinter, 1981; Somlai, 1984; Thurer, 1995). The

mother working in the labour market became the perfect example of the myth of the bad mother, namely the neglectful mother, and it did not count as a mitigating factor that it was necessary for her to work. Mothers in working-class families typically had to work, and as a result they frequently had to leave their children alone for an entire day. Opium and swaddling were popular methods for keeping children safe during this time (Thurer, 1995). All this resulted in working-class mothers being perceived as *bad mothers* not only by others, but also by themselves.

The Fordist myth of the good mother. During the time of the two wars women had integrated into the formal labour market to an unprecedented extent. The Fordist mode of production and the lack of male workforce helped construct a new and special case of the myth of the good mother, which was clearly different from the myth of the bourgeois woman ready to sacrifice everything for her child. The breastfeeding and infant-care principles of the time, which propagated routine breastfeeding and feeding at set intervals, can be tied to this myth. Benjamin Spock's *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* was published in 1946 in the United States, which, in accordance with the defining child psychology theory of the time, recommended separation as soon as possible, and a withholding of love from the child. And even though he discusses at length the advantages of breastfeeding, he in fact suggests a breastfeeding practice that would be very difficult to maintain in the long term

(feeding at four-hour intervals, the introduction of additional food from the age of three months, regulating the duration of breastfeeding). In addition, he dedicates a separate chapter to the topic of “spoiling” the child, arguing that infants that are picked up and carried around for three months became somewhat spoiled. The approach represented by Dr. Spock not only mirrored the position of the child, but also the value of labour and production in a society where the biorhythm of infants needed to adapt to the dynamics of production. In sum, too much motherly love suddenly became undesirable.

The modern myth of the good mother. During the period of upturn for the US hegemony, by the 1960s the expansion of education, technological development, economic prosperity and the development of mass media turned motherhood into a battlefield, with various actors constantly attempting to redefine it according to their own interests. Capital was continuously looking for new forms of investment, while the household began to operate as a constantly growing market, based to a great extent on parental love.

As psychology became heterogenised, commercialised and embedded into pop culture (Rose, 1999), psychological and psychologising labels regarding *bad mothers* also spread widely. The myth of the bad mother was further scientified and psychologised: the “over-protective mother” emerged, along with the “neglectful mother,” the “over-solicitous mother,” the “rejecting,” “dominating,” and

“smothering mother” (Thurer, 1995, pp. 225–286). With the fragmentation of the myth of the bad mother, the myth once again became practically impossible to live up to.

Consumption habits and advertisements became closely aligned with habitus and identity. Commercials frequently re-romanticised pregnancy and the household, while propagating a “scientific” household management. Moreover, motherhood and the household as a market gained renewed momentum after the overproduction crisis of the 1970s. From the 1980s, doctors were able to determine the sex of unborn children with high probability, so expecting parents were able to purchase baby items particularly designed for girls or boys. The individualisation of products in turn created new supply and demand, thus further expanding the market. This is, for instance, when pink became the “colour for girls” (Paoletti, 2012). From this period, market relations making use of the “goodness” of motherhood became increasingly influential with regard to the social and cultural construction of the myth of the “good mother.” Buying goods became the ultimate scale of motherly love.

The socialist myth of the good mother in Hungary

By the 1930s in the Soviet Union, s, in relation to initial reform plans, the Soviet efforts of industrialisation had institutionalised the subordinated and informal forms of female reproductive labour,

similarly to the forms of capitalist modernisation (Csányi, Gagy, & Kerékgyártó, 2018). On the other hand, similarly to almost all European countries, the Soviet leadership began pronatalist propaganda, in the period between the two world wars. In 1936, all contraceptive methods were removed from the market (Hoffmann, 2003). Subsequently, the Pravda published an editorial about socialist morals and the importance of family and child-rearing, as well as an article that depicted the loving relationship between Stalin and his elderly mother (Somlai, 1990). Mothers with seven or more children were promised monetary compensation regardless of their family background – even in cases where their husbands had been convicted of engaging in counter-revolutionary activity. The propaganda emphasised that a child was a natural and necessary part of a woman’s life, a pleasure rather than a burden (Hoffmann, 2003, p. 102).

The first period of Hungarian state socialism was characterised by the female labour force being channelled into the transformation of the mode of production. Full-time motherhood, where a woman would use her labour for her own family and not for the whole of socialist society, was unacceptable for the contemporary propaganda. Contrary to the bourgeois myth of motherhood, the “good mother” could not be “a mother only.” Officially, motherhood was portrayed as not challenging, so that a woman could easily perform – even outperform men – in factories and agriculture besides being a mother. As such, motherhood as praxis and love was not part of official

propaganda. Bringing up children to become self-confident workers and socialists was at the forefront, but was not the means to this end.

From 1952, however, the regulation of motherhood became a clear direction for the party. It was ordered that “the public prosecutor give the greatest possible support to the police force” in order that people contributing to abortions could be identified and convicted (Schadt, 2003, pp. 135–137). These criminal cases were treated as serious and involved imprisonment and a restriction from participation in public affairs as well as medical praxis (*ibid.*). This tightening matched the concept of motherhood as an openly social function: “[i]t has to be clear that abortion is not a private matter, but a matter concerning the entirety of the people, it is a serious criminal offence committed against our working people and future” (Schadt, 2003, pp. 136–137; our translation). Abortion measures were complemented by a tax liability of those without children, which – also based on a Soviet example – required people above 24 years of age but not yet retired and without children to contribute 4% of their income (Schadt, 2003, pp. 136–137).

In its latent content, the myth of the good socialist mother in many ways resembled the Fordist myth of motherhood, which emerged in the core position of the world system. This resemblance is not coincidental, as they were constructed by similar dynamics, and built around a similar idea of maternal care. In both, breastfeeding was adapted to the cyclical monotony of industrial production. A proposal submitted to the Council of Ministers in 1953 outlined a

practice similar to what Spock had recommended on a psychological basis:

If the working woman breastfeeds her child in an on-site crèche or one that is close to her workplace, or her home that is close, during the first six months, she is entitled to two nursing breaks of 30 minutes, then, until the ninth month, one break of 30 minutes, which is included in working time and remunerated with the average wage. If the mother breastfeeds her child in her home or in a crèche that is distant from the workplace, upon her request, the two 30-minute breaks can be taken as one hour-long break. (KSH, 1953, p. 92; our translation)

It was the so-called “Ratkó generation” (named after Anna Ratkó, Minister of Welfare, later Health, between 1949 and 1953) that was most directly hit by all of this, since as a result of the ban on abortions, the number of births had escalated, while at the same time mothers only received six weeks of maternal leave. Afterwards they had to return to work, and infant care was entirely organised around the pace of their work. We can learn the following from the memories of a nurse working at a factory crèche at the time:

The shoe factory began at quarter to six, but the children had to be brought there at around quarter or half past six so that their mothers could get to occupy their places by the so-called assembly lines by the time the factory whistled at quarter to six. [...] The children would come in the winter darkness, crying, the streets would echo with their crying [...] On many occasions, you had to forcefully remove the naked children from around the necks of their mothers, so that they could run to work. (Szülők Kézikönyve [Handbook of Parents], 2015)

Although the abortion ban was replaced by a relatively liberal abortion regulation practice in 1956, and the childless tax was also abolished in 1957, the socialist myth of the good mother only began to erode in Hungary during the late 1960s. Besides the narrative of Stalinist industrialisation, the country had already taken out western loans in 1952, and was on the brink of bankruptcy. Due to the changing structure of the world system that came with the beginning of the period of global financialisation, Hungary, which had primarily exported food and raw materials, ended up in a worse trade position. Parallel to these processes, maternity benefit (GYES) was introduced in 1967, and extended to three years in '69. The introduction of GYES was narrated as a pronatalist measure on the one hand, and as a measure of child wellbeing on the other on the basis that a continuous experience of motherly love is crucial for the child in the first few years. In reality, however, it was an economic policy decision driven by the exhausted socialist economy and the total failure of full employment: it made it possible to remove a large proportion of (female) workforce from production without creating unemployment. The three-year benefit, which could be extended to a longer period with more children, reinforced a bourgeois image of the mother that had never entirely gone away – that of the full-time mother.

With the combination of the socialist myth of the good mother, the bourgeois myth of the good mother – which had been reinvigorated by the introduction of the maternal benefit –, and western

constructions of femininity, which had increasingly begun to filter in, mothers found themselves facing expectations that they would not have been able to fulfil, even under much better material circumstances.

As Susan Zimmermann observes, “a reporter described with abhorrence the young mothers they met at the tiny landing of a high block of flats, they were killing time there in tracksuits or swimsuits, surrounded by four screaming, crawling toddlers and three sleeping babies lying around like ‘potato sacks’ on a couch” (Zimmermann, 2012, p. 109; our translation). The “GYES mother” (benefit mother) appeared in the contemporary discourse as a woman locked into an environment lacking in stimuli, half-mad with boredom and abandoned – which, in some cases, may not have been very far from the truth. “The phrase ‘GYES depression’ or ‘GYES illness’ was being used as a cliché in public discussions” (ibid.). In contrast, during the same period, the expression “latchkey child” (“kulcsos gyerek”) also appeared, which referred to children who had no one waiting for them at home after school or during a school holiday, and so were able to freely move between school, public libraries and home with their house keys hung around their necks. The expression itself emphasised the lack of adult – primarily motherly – care, and the bourgeois family model with a full time stay-at-home mother. The heterogeneity and ambivalence of social expectations regarding motherhood, along with the crisis of the socialist myth of the good

mother, expressed the ambivalence and crisis of the socialist system on the level of discourse and interactions.

The contemporary myth of the good mother in Hungary

The mounting debt of Hungary and the rest of the socialist bloc and their economic dependency on western core countries, along with Western-European countries no longer being able to sell their investment commodities on their own domestic markets, contributed to a formal reintegration of the region into the world system. By signing the Maastricht Treaty, joining NATO and later the EU, Hungary was completely integrated into the formal circulation of the world system (Éber et al., 2014). This integration meant both a source of cheap labour, and a new market for the core countries. Along these two aspects, the core countries colonialised motherly love and constructed the contemporary myth of the “good mother” in a semi-peripheral country.

One of the primary means of making labour cheap is increasing the share of informal reproductive patterns in relation to the share of wages and welfare institutions in the costs of subsistence. Although the post-transition governments consistently cut back on the social security system of the former state socialist regime, due to the constant demographic drop, none of these governments radically changed the exceptional, although not entirely unique, lengthy

maternity benefit. Nevertheless, while between 1967 and 1985, child-rearing ensured women had an active role in society due to the benefit being equal to a normal wage, after the regime change the provided amount was only a fraction of an average wage, which intensified the role of women as carers, and destabilized their position in the labour market.

Moreover, demographic indicators did not improve regardless of the possibility of lengthy maternity leave. And since Hungary entered the competition for cheap labour within the region, problems of demography came to the foreground- Accordingly, one of the first parliamentary debates after the regime change was centred around the tightening of the abortion law. The phrase “full-time mother” was reborn in the rhetoric of right-wing parties, establishing a role model of a properly caring mother, who devotes her life to her family. In addition, from the regime change onwards, but especially after the 2008 crisis which had irreversibly eroded the promise of catching up with the West, the right-wing rhetoric started to place emphasis on a woman’s duty to give birth. In connection with this, as another effect of reintegrating into the world-system, from the 1980s an increasing number of western, particularly American, films entering the Hungarian market had communicated the superiority of the lifestyle of the core countries, especially the life of American suburbia (Taylor, 1996). In Hungary, the film *Home Alone* (1990), broadcast every single Christmas from the mid-‘90s, regularly implanted the sentimentalism of motherly love into viewers. These kinds of films do

not thematise the material basis of households, only the importance of the warmth of the (American suburban) home and motherly love framed within wealth and consumption. All of this has resonated very well up until today with both the bourgeois myth of the mother, invoked in Hungary from the 1960s, reinvigorated after the regime change and again with renewed strength after the 2008 crisis, and the neoliberal narrative.

Along with this, a pronatalist campaign video – masked as a celebratory video for Mother’s Day – of the so-called Young Families Club (Fiatal Családosok Klubja) from 2017 employs the aesthetic of the US hegemony to present an idealised picture that is radically different from the everyday reality of the majority of the Hungarian households. The short film depicts the everyday lives of two well-off families, and uses every possible motif already familiar to us from the upper-middle-class lives of the aforementioned family films. The campaign video ends with the motto “Motherhood involves less sacrifice and more happiness than you would think” – which perfectly summarizes how the pronatalist redefinition of the myth of the good mother takes place in similar ways, in similar cycles, in different regions of the global commodity production system. This sentence is not essentially different from the rhetoric of the Soviet pronatalist campaign of the Pravda in the 1930s or 1940s, only this time it was made in accordance with the aesthetic of the US film industry.

In addition, as we observed above, from the end of the 19th century, but especially from the last third of the 20th century, the household

have functioned as a segment of the market based on motherly love and conscience. Thus, Hungarian households and mothers have also functioned as a market for the industries of the core countries. Although commercials of domestic products aimed particularly at children were already present in Hungary in the 1970s – for instance, commercials of baby food –, these did not yet operate with the myth of the good mother. TV commercials appearing from the 1980s onwards – as well as advertisements that later appeared on the internet – which primarily popularised products from the western core countries, were characterised by the negativistic definition of the bourgeois myth of the good mother. One of the first non-Hungarian and non-Eastern European TV commercials directly aimed at mothers with young children was a nappy advert of a Swedish company. In the commercial, the babies are happy because they are wearing the nappies of the given brand, which keeps their bottoms dry. According to the logic of the commercial, if somebody fails to buy the given brand, she fails to do everything in order to prevent her child from harm, and therefore lacks in motherly love – she is, in the bourgeois sense of the word, a *bad mother*. To give a different example, the slogan of a German baby formula from the late '90s went, using a catchy tune: “what is good for the baby, is a pleasure for mummy,” suggesting that a good mother loves her child so much that it is a pleasure for her to purchase that particular formula. This successfully linked the pressure to consume – unfamiliar in (early) state socialist regimes – with the quality of motherhood.

Furthermore, with the broadening of the supply of mass media, the internet, social media and books, the third phase of the scientification of the myth of the good mother has been imported into Eastern Europe. Official or self-appointed experts and celebrities have constantly redefined what being a good mother means and how a child should be loved. Adapting to this, commercials frequently present the operating mechanism of the product with the help of an experiment or animation that looks scientific, and is adapted to the requirements of scientific household management – since the good mother is also a good manager of the household.

Thirdly, commercials affect the shaping of the habitus and the identity, and operate with the reinforcing of personal competencies. It is quite typical for a baby “using” a particular brand of nappies to be given this brand name as a nickname adjective. Commercials beginning with “mothers know that ...” are also cliché, which often refer to competencies that are otherwise hardly connected to motherhood. In other words, they suggest that a good mother needs to excel not only at motherhood, but also in other areas of family life and the household, and consequently put the burden of parental care on mothers exclusively.

According to the latest marketing trends, formula producers operate with the respect of the private sphere by emphasising competences associated with motherhood and the freedom of choice. In one formula advertisement, for instance, mothers feeding their babies with formula and with mother’s milk – the two identity groups – make

peace by the end of the commercial and accept each other's maternal praxis. The name of the product is only visible for two seconds at the end of the video, encouraging unsuspecting mothers to enthusiastically share this message of freedom and acceptance through the channels of social media, often not even aware that they are partaking in the viral marketing campaign of a formula company that builds on the idea that formula feeding is identity-shaping, and as an identity is beyond criticism. This is a good example of how the myth of the good mother has come to be tied to the myth of *choice* as a liberal value and the implication that choice is given for everyone: the good mother is somebody that keeps herself informed and educated in all areas, and chooses the best for her child in every situation – preferably on a scientific basis –, and this choice is typically connected to practices of consumption.

In all, the good mother is somebody who is striving to give the best to her children and entire family in every situation and on every level all by herself, by making conscious choices: she cares and entertains at the same time, binds the family together, and places her needs, if she has them, behind those of the family. The constant redefining of the myth of the good mother continuously increases general frustration in mothers as it is impossible to fulfil the variety of abstract expectations. Moreover, in addition to expectations, through the positioning of the mother in this way, all responsibility of decisions regarding children and the family are attributed to the mother.

Finally, it is important to mention the problem of motherhood in public discourse, and also its place within the Hungarian feminist discourse. With the reintegration of the Eastern European region, Western European and US discourses have also filtered in. And while both during and directly after state socialism, women's movements primarily addressed the world of work (an example is the debate surrounding the extension of the retirement age in 1992), within civil society as a whole, including feminism, issues around the question of liberty soon gained priority (Fábián, 2009). The latter is especially interesting since the question of abortion was at the forefront of reproduction discourses of the regime change, and there was little difference in policy between governments on the left and on the right. Moreover, the problematising of motherhood and family planning remained almost entirely in the conservative discourse, while on the left, it appeared in a somewhat reactionary approach, primarily as the denial of the intrinsic value of population growth, and through the emphasising of the right to have power over one's own body. The movement *Másállapotot a szülészetben!* ("Respectful Maternal Care"), which emerged in 2016 and was also novel as a political movement in more than one way, partly broke through this rigid framework and presented the question of motherhood in a new light. The movement, partly growing out of the home birth movement, problematised pregnancy and birth as general questions affecting all social classes. At the same time, moving away from short-term political goals, it embedded the questions of giving birth and having children in a general context of female autonomy as a systemic critique

of the patriarchal regime – as a result of which, the leftist, feminist direction employing systemic critique appeared simultaneously with the conservative family-centric direction in the movement.

Summary

Relying on Marxist feminist (c.f. Seccombe, 1974) and world-systems perspective (c.f. Dunaway, 2012) literature, in sum, we can state that within the household, an “accumulation of human capital” takes place, since it is there that the future labour supply is produced (Dunaway, 2012, pp. 102–103; Terleckyj, 1975, pp. 230–231). Firstly, this necessitates parents’ labour of care, love, consumption, socialisation, and in a certain sense, ideology (Seccombe, 1974, pp. 15–16). Secondly, the costs of “human capital accumulation” are also relegated to households. In this sense, by being the primary locations of socialisation, they are also the place where the cost of capital return is made cheap. Thirdly, the household can be considered a market, since households with a higher income are encouraged to consume well above subsistence by the advertising industry and mass media.

Moreover, we can state that the myth of the good and the bad mother and the correct ways of motherly love and care comprise a segment of the dominant ideology that ensures the status quo of the given global system of accumulation: on the one hand, it makes certain

that the majority of the labour necessary for the “accumulation of human capital” is assigned to women, and on the other, that households, and in particular their female members (using their own earnings), secure the costs necessary for “human capital accumulation,” and even those beyond what is necessary.

Furthermore, we can state that the constructions – myths – of motherhood function in a way that if the woman in the relative position of motherhood fails to perform the motherly praxes of love, care, and consumption, she will appear as a bad mother to herself and her environment. Since motherhood is narrated as defined by humanity, a sacral order, or evolution, being an unloving mother counts as a sin against humanity, God, or nature, and thus it is a sin especially grave and shameful. After all, in the myth of the good and the bad mother, it is those acts of the woman that contradict the logic of capital accumulation that are interpreted as grave sins, thus causing pain for the motherly soul crafted through centuries of capitalism.

At the same time, in those periods and regions of the capitalist commodity production system where mothers’ labour is needed on the formal labour market, the myth of the good mother is adapted in a way that it facilitates the channelling of motherly labour into formal productive labour. In these periods and regions, being a good mother is typically defined in a way that the praxis of motherhood does not make the praxis of wage labour impossible.

The contemporary myth of the good mother in Hungary is romantic, sentimental, scientific, and based on self-sacrifice and consumption. It can be viewed as a present end point of a constant redefinition of several centuries' worth of transnational structural dynamics embedded into semi-peripheral positions. In it the expectations of cheap labour, reproduction of semi-peripheral development combine with narratives of the modern transnational market. The good Hungarian mother performs all reproductive labour for her child in a selfless manner, sacrificing herself within the household, and acquires all products from the market that contribute towards her child's well-being as a sign of unlimited love. The good Hungarian mother is conscious and informed, she is aware of the work of the experts of motherhood, and leads the household in a scientific manner. She primarily self-identifies as a mother, and expresses this identification through her conscious consumption practices. If the good Hungarian mother does not succeed in performing these praxes for any reason, she experiences guilt and shame, as this is how the motherly soul functions.

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