Smiling Women and Fighting Men: The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary
Author(s): Éva Fodor
Source: *Gender and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Apr., 2002), pp. 240-263
Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3081863
Accessed: 19-04-2016 17:34 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
http://about.jstor.org/terms

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Sage Publications, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Gender and Society*

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

SMILING WOMEN AND FIGHTING MEN
The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary

ÉVA FODOR
Dartmouth College

The gendered assumptions embedded in the construction of the rational individual are well established in Western feminist thought but inapplicable to describe societies operating on different principles, such as East European state socialism. This article identifies the communist subject as the building block of communist political ideology and argues that this formulation was no less male biased than its counterpart, the rational individual under liberal capitalism. In state socialist Hungary this male bias came to be expressed differently: Women were integrated into society through membership in a social group perceived as relatively homogeneous regarding interests and obligations and with gender-specific qualities and privileges. These qualities were considered inferior to men's since women—because of household responsibilities—were not capable of total devotion to the communist party. The author explores this construction of the female communist subject through a content analysis of classified materials from the archives of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

The gendered assumptions embedded in the construction of the rational individual, the cornerstone of liberal political theory, are well established in Western feminist thought (Eisenstein 1988; Pateman 1988) and continue to inform scholarship on gender relations in developed capitalist societies (Phillips 1991). These feminist insights, however, are much less useful for explaining the character of male domination in regimes where the concepts of the individual and rationality are not central to political participation. East European state socialist societies, for example,

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Direct all correspondence to Éva Fodor, Department of Sociology, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH 03755; e-mail: eva.fodor@dartmouth.edu.* *I am grateful to a large number of people for helping me along with this project in various capacities: John Campbell, Gil Eyal, György Fodor, Eric Hanley, Gail Kligman, Susan Markens, Matthew McKeever, Ruth Milkman, Carole Pateman, Julie Press, Ivan Szelenyi, Eleanor Townsley, the librarians at the archives of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in Budapest, and Christine Bose and several anonymous reviewers of Gender & Society. While writing this article, I received financial support from a grant from Országos Tudományos Kutatási Alapprogramok in Hungary, from the international doctoral fellowship of the American Association of University Women, and from a dissertation fellowship from the University of California, Los Angeles.*

REPRINT REQUESTS: *Éva Fodor, Department of Sociology, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH 03755; e-mail: eva.fodor@dartmouth.edu.*

GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 16 No. 2, April 2002 240-263
© 2002 Sociologists for Women in Society

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

replaced the concept of the rational individual with that of the communist subject, a person whose political participation was predicated not on his or her rationality and ownership in the body but on total devotion to the communist Party and the acceptance of its leaders as the ultimate authorities on the good of the community (Jowitt 1987). Was this formulation devoid of the male bias well-known in liberal political philosophy? In other words, was the communist subject genderless? And if not, how was male domination embedded in this most basic communist political concept?

To answer these questions, I set out to explore the construction of the female communist subject through a study of classified documents produced by the Hungarian political leadership during the period of single-party communist rule, between 1949 and 1989. The views—written or spoken—of these high-level party functionaries formed the basis of the official position on gender distinctions, the simultaneous application and subversion of which defined the treatment of women in the state policies of the country after World War II. While the words of even these singularly powerful party executives were sometimes ignored or sabotaged, always interpreted and misinterpreted, their direct influence on people's ideas, on policy making, and on gender relations in general can hardly be questioned. My analysis differs from existing discussions of the gendered nature of Marxist-Leninist ideology in that it explores not its oft-described theoretical expressions but its practical application in a concrete historical context.

My findings reveal the persistent yet flexible nature of patriarchy: The discursive foundations of male domination were transformed but never eliminated under state socialism. Specifically, I argue that instead of the free and rational individual, communist ideologues constructed the notion of the communist subject (or the communist person), which fit the perceived political, ideological, and economic needs of state socialist Hungary. While on the surface genderless, the ideal communist subject had distinctly masculine features, and women could never completely satisfy the requirements. In particular, because of their reproductive duties, which were left unchallenged by state socialist policy makers, women could never be considered as reliable and as devoted to the communist cause as men were. Hence, their enforced participation in the world of work and politics could only be segregated and inferior.

I begin this article with a theoretical comparison of the patriarchal assumptions embedded in the concepts of the individual citizen and its analogue under state socialism,[2] the communist subject. A short discussion follows about the nature and history of the communist political system as well as women's position within it, in Eastern Europe and in Hungary specifically, to provide the reader with some background to my analysis. I also explain the process of data collection, organization, and analysis. Next, I present my findings about the construction of women as subjects of the state, seen as inferior to men primarily because of their inability to maintain total devotion to the communist party. By the end, the reader should have a better understanding of the gender of the communist subject as it was imagined and acted on by the highest levels of political leadership in state socialist Hungary.

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

INDIVIDUALS AND SUBJECTS

The concept of the individual citizen has been central to an understanding of people's participation in the public sphere in liberal democracies. Carol Pateman (1988, 1989) and other feminist scholars (Eisenstein 1988; Jones 1993; Phillips 1991) have pointed out that this free, rational individual, the main building block of modern liberalism, is not gender neutral; the abstraction from gender only hides his embedded masculinity. For reasons often described as natural or biological, only men are assumed to be in full possession of their own bounded bodies, a property right considered the basis of individual freedom. Women's bodies change in pregnancy and through hormonal cycles and can be legally contracted out through prostitution or surrogacy (Markens 1997). Women are occasionally forced to give up at least partial claims to their bodies once they sign the marriage contract: Marital rape is only recently considered a crime in a number of countries, among them, in newly liberal, post–state socialist Hungary. Moreover, the state has claims over a woman's body when she gets pregnant by retaining the right to deny (or demand a "legitimate" reason for) abortion or by holding women responsible for treating their fetuses properly (Blum 1999; Daniels 1993; Gomez 1997). Exactly because of their childbearing duties, women are considered too emotional, intuitive, and nature-bound to qualify as sufficiently rational and self-interested. Hence their citizenship status, and thus incorporation into the public sphere of liberal democracies in their own right, is tenuous and conditioned on their assimilation to the male norm.

These patriarchal foundations of liberal capitalism were carefully outlined by feminist scholars by the end of the 1990s. But these concepts and descriptions have little to say about gender relations and gender ideologies in societies that subscribe to a strict antiliberal, communist ideology and that abolish private ownership over productive assets, as well as capitalist profit, freedom of enterprise, faith, and speech, along with the very concept of the free individual and individual rights. How, then, is male domination created and reproduced in such a setting?

Scholars argue that in Eastern Europe, the concept of citizenship was replaced by the more fitting subject status: The population, not only women, but men also, came to depend on the goodwill of the party-state for their livelihood, welfare, and protection (Bruszt 1988; Verderey 1994; Walder 1995). Furthermore, the emphasis on the individual was replaced by that on the community and the ultimate good of the international proletariat (Jowitt 1987). Individual rights were displaced by the determination of whether and how a person or a group would fit the purported long- or short-term goals of the proletarian revolution. The representatives of the party-state claimed monopoly over setting these goals and means ("teleological knowledge") and legitimated their power on this basis (Konrád and Szelényi 1989). Individual rights, profit, and rational calculations of the technical kind were secondary, if relevant at all.

In this context, when analyzing the gendered nature of Marxist-Leninist political discourse, there is no point in looking for the individual as the bearer of self-

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

interested rationality who can claim ownership rights over his body—the concept that is relevant in liberal democracies. Instead, researchers point out that the party-state, rather than creating distinctions along the lines of gender, effected a homogenization process in social citizenship and claims making (Graham and Regulska 1997). As Verderey (1994, 229) noted, "socialist paternalism . . . [sought] to eradicate male-female differences to an unprecedented degree, casting onto the state certain tasks associated with household gender roles." Along the same lines, Kligman (1994, 255) argued that the communist party-state "generalized the dependency relations experienced by women and by children in the context of the patriarchal family to subordinate men as well." Watson (1997, 24-25) went so far as to argue that gender (or other social characteristics) had no relevance to political participation since everyone was deprived of their political rights and citizenship in this state-dominated "curved" political space: "Political/civil citizenship in both its formal, abstract, positive sense and its real, everyday negative sense was impervious to social difference" (Watson 1997, 24).

Indeed, both men and women became subjects of the state, although not in their own right (because individual rights were not acknowledged as primary) and not through their spouse's status either. Rather, they became subjects through membership in a few well-defined social groups, such as "workers," "the youth," "agricultural laborers," "party members," or "women" (Fodor, forthcoming). People made claims to the state and participated in social life through ascribed membership in these social groups, the members of which were assumed to have similar problems, characteristics, and tasks in building worldwide communism.[3]

Yet in contrast to previous scholars who emphasize the gender homogenization effect of state subjugation, I want to refocus attention on the explicit gender differentiation and male bias embedded in the concept of the ideal communist subject as well as in women's incorporation through group membership. A close analysis of the discourse of party ideologues reveals that the foundations of Marxism-Leninism, as practiced in Hungary, were no less male-biased than its liberal-capitalist counterpart. Just like liberal thinkers, communist policy makers had to respond to the problem of women's perceived natural difference, expressed in popular views about (and interests tied to) women's primary responsibilities in child rearing and the household. In response, they redefined women's widely understood inferiority in two ways. First, rather than as a biological-natural trait, they now described it as socially constructed and changeable. This did not lower the significance of women's difference, but it opened up the distant possibility of its disappearance through educational and political campaigns. In fact, on at least one occasion in 1952, then–party secretary Rákosi argued that women had a better chance of developing a true communist consciousness than men did because they came from the experience of double oppression: not merely on the basis of their class but also on their gender (*Párttörténti Intézet Archívuma* [PIA] 276/53/64, 1950).[4] A similar construction of Muslim women in the early years of the southern republics of the Soviet Union was described by Massell (1974). In Hungary after the late 1950s,

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

however, policy makers tended to agree that women had not quite gained that advantage yet, although they assumed that they would eventually catch up with men in terms of political consciousness.

Second, and more important, in the process of constructing women as subjects (rather than household dependents), policy makers also introduced the idea of women's inferiority within their subject status. Just as in liberal capitalist societies, women's assumed inferiority was tied to their reproductive duties under state socialism too. However, while in liberal political ideology, pregnancy and child-bearing were seen to damage women's rationality and individuality, in Hungary, these were considered to impair women's political devotion and reliability. They tied women's interests and knowledge to local rather than national and international issues. I show that women in state socialist Hungary were seen not as less rational people but as people less able to devote themselves to the communist cause, given that their primary allegiance went to their offspring. As a result, women could never be fully trusted and could never be integrated at equal subject status into the state socialist political system. This proved particularly damaging in a society where the capacity to be devoted to the cause and to be loyal and reliable, rather than the capacity to act rationally, served as the most important criterion for privileged political participation (Jowitt 1987). In sum, the construction of the ideal communist subject was no less male biased than its counterpart in Western liberal ideology, the rational individual; only the source and practice of this bias differed.

Before I introduce the reader to the female communist subject, I would like to describe the context within which her construction took place. To do so, I will explain some of the history and meaning of, as well as the specific answers given to, the woman question, that is, the challenges of women's integration into the labor force and political life in state socialist Hungary.

THE WOMAN QUESTION AND EAST EUROPEAN STATE SOCIALISM

By the time it entered the public vocabulary in Hungary in 1949, the "woman question" could already boast of a long history: Almost all the major communist ideologues (Engels, Bebel, Lenin, Luxemburg, Stalin) had described what they saw as women's appropriate role in a revolutionary communist society. They tended to agree on at least the most basic points, and these opinions later formed the basis of policy making in much of Eastern Europe. Women, communist ideologues argued, were oppressed under capitalism, and the source of their oppression—no different from class-based oppression—was to be found in women's lack of ownership over the means of production and lack of control over the work process and the fruits of their labor. The only way women could overcome their exploitation was to join the ranks of the proletariat and shake off the rule of the capitalist class.[5]

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

This ideological position seemed to fit the political and economic needs of the Hungarian communist party when it gained power in 1949. Hungary, a small, war-torn, agricultural society, was to be industrialized on the fast track with significant Soviet help. This extensive industrialization project demanded a large number of workers; thus, women's participation in paid labor became a precondition of achieving the crucial economic goals of the new regime. A vast campaign targeting the inclusion of women in the paid labor force and in educational institutions ensued with surprisingly fast results. By the middle of the 1970s, practically all women of working age were engaged in full-time wage labor, and the proportion of women at almost every level of the educational system reached that of men (Corrin 1993).

Several scholars argue that the political goals of the new regime were also consistent with the economic need to draw women into the labor force. The communist party attempted to centralize all power in the hands of its leaders. As the paterfamilias of the political family consisting of the whole population, a handful of political leaders attempted to draw everyone under their full paternalistic control (Verderey 1994). To do so, it was important to reduce the control husbands exercised over their wives' bodies and extend the surveillance of the state through the institutions of the labor force to women as well.

Most scholars agree that the key element of the communist emancipation project was women's inclusion in paid work and the education system. This, however, did not mean a reduction in women's domestic and reproductive responsibilities, although the state instituted some measures—inadequate in many cases—to help out. Free nursery and child care centers, paid leave time for mothers of sick children, subsidized meals and laundry services, and generous maternity leave policies did indeed reduce women's burdens, which became even more evident after these support systems disappeared in 1989. However, they did not reorganize the division of labor in the household.

In Hungary, as elsewhere in the region, the key locus of political power rested in the hands of the members of the Politburo. The Politburo devised the goals and set the tone of policy making often down to the minutest details. These policy goals were then elaborated on by other organs of the communist party (such as the Central Committee and its departments and even various state departments, never independent of party control) and disseminated through the propaganda machinery. This article presents an analysis of the documents of the Politburo and other high-level party executive bodies—the discourse of party leaders as well as the written analyses of issues they commissioned or produced themselves to support their policy goals and gender ideology. In a single-party, authoritarian political system where policy-making power is as highly concentrated as it was in Hungary during the state socialist regime, the written or spoken opinions expressed by those in the highest echelons of power are carefully followed and replicated by those lower down in the hierarchy. Open disagreement is not allowed; everyone is supposed to toe the line or else risk the loss of his or her job, even political persecution.

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

The verbatim transcripts of the discussions in the biweekly Politburo meetings and the strictly classified reports used as the bases for these discussions (most often produced by other high-level political officials with the guidance of one Politburo member) are not identical to what is often called the official propaganda, that is, political ideology, party directives, and positions published in newspapers and disseminated at political rallies or through television addresses. While in the former, we find more of the opinions and doubts expressed within the party leadership, the latter is only a summary of the final decisions, much simplified and streamlined for public consumption. A lot of the nuance and reasoning behind policy decisions, as well as alternative propositions and debates, were lost by the time an issue appeared in the public media. For this reason, a study of the actual communication within the highest ranks of the party leadership reveals more of the policy makers' assumptions and ideas.

Political propaganda—in our case, the translation of the ruling gender ideology of party leaders for consumption by everyday citizens—was a crucial form of political control in a single-party authoritarian regime although there were other, less peaceful institutions that served a similar purpose. Yet as several researchers have argued, gender is constructed not merely by powerful party executives but by everyday people in daily interactions on an ongoing basis (e.g., West and Zimmerman 1987). The official propaganda, through its pervasiveness and persistence, influenced yet never completely determined popular constructions of gender, which also varied vastly within social groups and from individual to individual. Unable to grasp this whole spectrum, this article will focus on the gender ideology produced by decision makers.

Even within the Hungarian political leadership, the intensity and content of the construction of the female subject varied over time. The key period when most of the discursive work took place within the party apparatus was between 1950 and 1970. The period before the 1956 revolution that overthrew the Stalinist regime reflects a more radical effort to reorganize gender relations. Much of the focus in this period was on the recruitment of women into paid work and the assessment of the political atmosphere among women workers. After the revolution of 1956, Politburo members spent a decade or so rethinking the role of women in society. They reorganized the women's association and reconsidered its tasks and scope, instituted a generous maternity leave policy, upheld the legalization of abortion, and overall, consolidated the position of women as permanent participants in the labor force. After about 1970, however, the Politburo considered the woman question, or women's integration into communist society, solved. They argued that women were on the (slow, but direct) road of catching up with men, and their attention turned elsewhere, to social problems they considered more pressing at the time. Only concerns about the decline of the population directed attention to women one more time around 1985. As a result, the discussion below best describes the middle period of state socialist Hungary, often considered the time of consolidated state socialism.

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

DATA

In search of the construction of the female communist subject, I explored the archives of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Országos Levéltár, Párttörténti Intézet Archívuma* [PIA]). Most of this work was done in the summers of 1994 to 1996. This archive contains materials from all the departments of the central party apparatus as well as from the Central Committee and the Politburo. The materials filed there include reports, discussions, verbatim transcripts of meetings, statistics, and draft and final versions of various decrees. Most of these were strictly classified and only recently opened up for research.

I collected information from the files of the Politburo, the Secretariat, and the Central Committee, three of the four highest executive branches of the communist party. (The fourth, the Executive Office, did not keep verbatim records, and their written material overlaps greatly with that of the Politburo, as did its membership.) I read through and recorded data from materials in three specific departments of the Central Committee that primarily focused on social issues—the Departments of Propaganda, of Mass Organizations, and of Labor Supply—as well as the files of the Office of the Women's Organization. I chose these departments because they were most likely to deal explicitly with issues concerning women and thus to provide the best exposition of the construction of the gendered subject by party leaders. Naturally, almost any topic may have a gender content. Yet to limit the scope of my research, I focused my attention on the following issues: the role, tasks, leadership, and program of women's organizations; any aspect of women's position in society; social welfare regulations, population policies, and labor force; and social policy in general.

Obviously, the amount of material is so huge that it is impossible to study it all. Yet, because there was substantial communication across departments (not to mention a strict hierarchy and political control), several of the key documents appeared in more than one location; thus, I am fairly confident that I have reviewed and included all the most important documents and discussions that touched on the social status of women in Hungary between 1948 and 1989. I should point out here that while most of the data I present come from actual Politburo discussions transcribed and filed, some are derived from the supporting materials that were prepared by the party apparatus and read by Politburo members before the meetings.

Having selected, then photocopied, all the material wherein one of the above issues was discussed in direct relevance to women, I then read through the data several times for themes and coded the material into eight different thematic categories, which I subsequently combined to form conceptual links and explored in depth, relying on the general methods of content analysis (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Ragin 1994). This forms the basis of my findings below.

A note on the choice of Hungary as my crucial research site is in order. This project was done in Hungary because I had access to this unique data set and had no language difficulties, being a native speaker of Hungarian. Hungary cannot be

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

labeled a typical state socialist society; each East European country experimented with different interpretations of Marxism-Leninism and negotiated its relationship with the Soviet Union in different ways. Nonetheless, despite these specificities, the findings on Hungary should contribute to our understanding of how gender hierarchies are created in state socialist, non-Western societies. Future empirical research must explore to what extent these results can be made relevant in other parts of the region.

FINDINGS

The decrees of the communist party, the rhetoric of its leaders, and the propaganda presented to the public systematically described women as a relatively homogeneous social group. While even the Politburo could not avoid seeing the vast class differences (not to mention divisions by geographic location, marital status, age, or war experience) within the female population, they assumed that women nevertheless shared certain responsibilities and abilities, as well as problems and opportunities.[6] This was no innocent realization of biological differences but rather a highly strategic, political act. Women were thus constructed as a "corporate group,"[7] that is to say, a group of state subjects who were expected to derive their privileges and responsibilities in society from their group membership and were singled out as an identifiable building block of communism. This meant that women's specific, ascribed abilities were acknowledged, but unlike in Western liberal ideology, this acknowledgment did not lead to women's exclusion from the public but rather to their inclusion, if only on a selective and limited basis. Women were made active participants in economic and political life, but not on the same terms as men. They entered by the dubious virtue, and with the unavoidable consequences, of being a woman. Such categorization acknowledged and simultaneously reinforced women's difference and inferiority.

I organize the presentation of my findings to illustrate the above key points. First, I point out elements of the discursive construction of women as a homogeneous social group. Second, I describe the ways in which party leaders characterized members of this group. Finally, I point out the tasks and responsibilities assigned to women, as well as the limitations imposed on their social advancement by the male bias embedded in the discursive construction of their social status.

Tools of Group Construction

Party leaders employed a vast array of tools in the construction of women's separateness and corporate group status. Of these, strictly gender-based political representation and the party mandate for the women's organization to practice unified gender politics, quotas, and various forms of positive discrimination policies as well as secret reports and statistics were perhaps the most important.

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Political representation. The single, centralized, party-controlled women's organization served as one of the most important tools in the construction of women as a separate group. Only one such organization existed at any point in time in Hungary, although its name and elements of its tasks were modified a few times through the period.[8] The women's organization (referred to as the Women's Council hereafter) was designed to monitor the situation of women and to transmit the party's policies to them. Party leaders encouraged the Women's Council to practice what they called "unified gender politics" (*egységes nőpolitika*). By this, they meant that unlike the party, where only the best and the most devoted were welcome, the Women's Council had to open its doors wide and strive to achieve a membership that would include all social strata of women, even those considered politically unreliable and usually excluded from other forms of political participation (PIA 288/5/36). The task of the Women's Council was then to provide a uniform political education and representation for all women and to prepare a select few for membership in the organizations of the communist party. The president of the Women's Council was an ex officio member of the Central Committee, where she talked authoritatively about issues concerning all women.

After 1970, all important matters, by law, had to pass through the Women's Council, and its opinion had to be heard, even if it was often not listened to. It was the council and its subcouncils that had exclusive rights to organize a celebration on March 8, the International Day of Women, where a male member of the Politburo was delegated to greet the other gender.[9] The council represented Hungarian women abroad through membership in a few carefully selected international women's organizations. Most research on gender was channeled through the Women's Council because of its right to dispense research grants, select the appropriate researchers, and publish the results of their study. In fact, the Women's Council served as the major publishing house for publications directed explicitly at women. Between 1983 and 1988, for example, they published some 40 books on a wide variety of topics ranging from an edited volume on women in the workforce, a number of self-help books on divorce and child rearing, to cookbooks and publications on skin care. By far the most important and profitable publication of the council, however, was a weekly magazine that was initiated to aid the quest for a unified gender politics. *Nők Lapja* (Women's Journal) was a successful magazine that achieved the highest circulation rate of all the weeklies in the country since it was read—as its publishers hoped—by all strata of women. No other major women's journal targeting a more specialized audience was published until 1989.

Quotas and positive discrimination. Explicit, written quotas for the inclusion of women in work or politics existed in Hungary only before 1956, and even then their enforcement was haphazard and weak. However, on the discursive level, these quotas, as well as the less formal positive discrimination decrees and the critique against them, contributed to the construction of women as a meaningful social group in Hungarian society. Positive discrimination took different forms. Politburo members sometimes reminded each other, and through party decrees and speeches

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

reminded the whole population, about a remark by the all-powerful general secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party: "Comrade Kádár said that all else being equal between two people, the woman should be promoted" (PIA 288/5/140; PIA 288/21/72/28). In this vein, no party decree could be passed that did not at least pay lip service to the issue of women's underrepresentation. Here is an example from a decree in the 1970s:

> The party executive bodies should be more systematic in their efforts to promote women. This should be an integral part of their cadre recruitment work, and they should not just do it . . . before the elections, to improve the statistics. (PIA 288/5/234)

In such instances, even when members of the Politburo questioned whether lower-level party leaders were genuinely interested in promoting women through political quotas, they wittingly or unwittingly talked about women as a separate and somewhat homogeneous group, one in need of centralized assistance. György Marosán, one of the most powerful members of the Politburo, in a rare moment of self-criticism after the crisis of the 1956 revolution, described the practice of the selection of female parliamentary representatives during the earlier Stalinist era: "We were only interested in having the right number of women in folk costumes in Parliament" (PIA 288/5/24). Clearly, the representation of women as women seemed more important than achieving real gender equality. In this context, when the political will to promote women seemed relatively weak, local resistance easily sabotaged the expressed party goals. Politburo members complained openly about this—which also reinforced the conceptualization of women as a homogeneous pool of candidates for high positions. The following are examples from various Politburo reports and discussions between 1959 and 1973:

> Executives promote women not out of their internalized conviction but only because this is the policy of the party. (PIA 288/21/59)

> There are situations when husbands—who are otherwise good representatives of the party's gender politics in their workplace—consciously hinder the promotion and career building of their wives. The reason for this is either their traditional attitudes or to secure their own personal comfort. In the recent years a number of women could not be appointed because their husbands obstructed this. (M5ZMP Hadĵu–*Bihar megyei bizatsága jelentése*, April 1973)

> There is a party secretary in the Budapest apparatus who refused to even talk to the women's representative. He passed down this responsibility. He did not understand the political significance of this at all. (György Marosán, PIA 288/5/140)

Quotas and positive discrimination policies contributed to the construction of women as a separate social group, which was seen as worthy of continuous statistical attention, thereby simultaneously creating and reinforcing the categorization. Starting in the mid-1950s, practically all reports to the party executive bodies on social, political, and labor force matters contained a breakdown by gender. In fact, very few variables were used: Apart from gender, only class background, educational level, and age were even included.

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Statistics and secret reports. Party and state authorities amassed an amazing amount of strictly classified, statistical data and kept a close watch on the proportion of women in the communist party, at universities and in vocational training, in the labor force, in positions of authority, and in a number of other social situations. At least a sentence on the evaluation of the situation of women, accompanied by the usually meaningless explanatory phrases, were required to be included in the discussion of most topics, ranging from the social position of the working class, to that of the *Roma* (Gypsy) population, to the students at party schools or the cadre pool.

In addition, even the highest party organ, the Politburo, spent long hours discussing various aspects of women's position in a communist society, passing decrees and requesting information on a regular basis. This was especially true for the period between the mid-1950s and late 1970s. In this period, the Politburo had issues directly concerning women on its agenda 27 times. This may not seem like a frequent event since the Politburo met officially every two weeks and focused on two to six items each time. But in essence, this meant that with a few exceptions, the Politburo had a major review of women's issues at least once a year between these two time points. These discussions were always preceded by months of data gathering, reports, and debates in supplementary party bodies such as the Secretariat or the Organizing Committee. A separate group was established within one of the Central Committee departments (*Párt és Tömegszervezetek Osztálya*), overseeing the affairs of women and the Women's Council, which also gathered data and consulted on all issues concerning women.

Not only statistics were gathered. Secret reports were filed on the political atmosphere among women working in various factories or living in a given city—regardless of their age, class, or educational backgrounds (PIA 288/21/1958/24). These reports were taken to reflect women's specific opinions about particular policies of the regime, from minor issues such as the availability of cheap shoes for children to major ones like the cold war and military spending.

Specific reports on the social status and integration of women—a much hated exercise—were requested from and produced by political, economic, and social organizations of every conceivable level and type. Between 1970 and 1980, approximately 110 reports were produced as a result of a 1970 decree discussing the situation of women in Hungarian society. Party secretariats of each of the 19 counties as well as larger cities separately, numerous large economic institutions, various state departments, the youth movement and agricultural cooperatives, universities, the police force, the military, the national trade unions, the Statistical Office, and the editorial board of several daily papers, among others, submitted more than 5,000 pages of written discussion of the woman question in their field of expertise. The social position of, the political interests of, the participation level of, the most efficient propaganda to be employed with, and the life chances of women were discussed in these pages. While most were quite simpleminded in their efforts to toe the party line and even copied much of the jargon the original party document propagated, the reports nevertheless produced some useful information and, even more important, reinforced the notion of the existence of women as a separate social

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

entity. There were only two similar, decade-long information campaigns in the almost 40-year history of the Politburo: One was designed to assess the situation of the working class and was started in the late 1950s; the other one concerned young people and ran parallel to that of the situation of women.

It is important to note that in these decrees, reports, and discussions, the category "woman" was rarely broken down into substrata. While the Politburo seemed keenly interested in finding out the proportion of working-class students at universities, it was never interested in the proportion of working-class female (as opposed to male) students. Except for an occasional mention of homemakers or mothers with several children, women as a group were seen as a relatively homogeneous unit. A good example of this is the Bureau of Labor Supply (*Munkaerő Tartalékok Hivatala*), which in the 1950s produced volumes of statistics about the source of potential new workers to be recruited for extensive industrial production. Four categories were identified from which the new labor force was to be drawn: "agricultural laborers," "the youth," "workers from small private shops," and "women" (PIA 276/53/39). Here again we see women as a separate and seemingly homogeneous category, which is placed alongside, and not in interaction with, age-, class-, or occupation-based groupings. While most of the women the documents referred to were urban, middle-class homemakers, the female labor supply also included poor peasant women working on their family-owned plots as well as wives of rural landlords. The reports often failed to mention the vast differences in their expectations, experience, or attitudes because the political aim was to establish and homogenize the group rather than point out variations or solve real-life problems.[9]

In sum, efforts to incorporate women using gender quotas and positive discrimination statements, following up with reports and statistics, and creating women's organizations that strictly channeled political representation served to establish the presence of women as a separate and rather uniform entity in state socialist society. The next section addresses the characteristics that members of this special group were presumed to share.

Characteristics of the Group of Women

The one trait with which women were associated with most often in the documents of the Hungarian communist party is political backwardness. Party leaders depicted women as politically naive, less reliable, and less loyal than their male counterparts (see also Pető 1994 for the period up to 1956), and they attributed these qualities to women's lack of experience in the labor force and in the pre–World War II underground communist movement from which many of the early communist leaders were recruited. As reports to various party organs complained, "women, who did not previously participate in public life . . . are in many ways *backward* and do not feel capable of making use of their newfound rights and obligations" (PIA 288/21/58/15, emphasis added), and "with a few exceptions, most women—because of their household responsibilities—cannot keep up with men in terms of

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

political and professional education and in taking on managerial responsibilities" (PIA 288/21/57/12).

Another report by the propaganda department of the communist Youth League discussed how young women should be approached through indirect political means, such as book clubs, rather than through explicitly political lectures. But, the report continues, "it has often been observed that the girls do not always understand the political lesson from the book; they are more concerned with the story itself" (PIA 288/21/61). Especially in the early periods of state socialism, such chastisement of women (as well as other social groups) was quite commonplace. Later, more subtle discursive techniques were applied.

Political leaders, not only at the highest levels, assumed that women's political capabilities were highly limited. The following is a quote from a document in which the head of the Department of Propaganda explained the reasons for the techniques they employ to target women.

> Our women are fighters, but their determination is often wasted on the wrong issues. They get excited by a few words and are willing to go to war against their own interests. . . . Our task is to teach them when and where to fight, what to do for the workers' state and for peace. (PIA 276/89/273)

Women, according to this party official, were a highly excitable bunch; thus, their energies must be channeled toward the proper causes by outside (male) forces.

Since they were less educated, women needed help understanding the everyday political events around them, and who better to help in this effort than their husbands? The following is a report from a conference of homemakers written for the eyes of Politburo members only:

> Some women talked about husbands, who helped their wives understand the events around her. Their husbands would read them out from the newspaper or a book and he would *explain the stories too, as she was ironing or mending clothes*. (PIA 288/21/59, emphasis added)

Note the traditional division of labor in this family, which is often cited as the source of women's lack of political consciousness. The primarily male party leadership was unwilling to commit sufficient resources to the socialization of "nonproductive" household work and essentially left the division of labor within the household unchanged. This, however, did not stop the leadership from reproaching women for spending time at home instead of busying themselves in more worthy political activities.

Importantly, because women were seen as less politically aware, they were also considered less reliable and trustworthy, and more easily influenced by the enemy, especially in times of political crisis:

> The ideology of the counterrevolution [in 1956] is still influential among women. . . . There are many who are easily influenced by the enemy, by foreign propaganda

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

> intended to create confusion. If there is some international tension, women immediately start worrying about a war. Religiosity is more popular among women, and this has an effect on the youth as well. (PIA 288/5/140)

In addition, party leaders argued that women had more difficulty understanding the most important communist goals. Politburo member Károly Kiss stated,

> I visited the county of Szolnok . . . [and found] that the fight in the co-operative movement was more difficult to carry on among women [than among men]. Peasants said to me that "my wife still blames me for joining the co-op." (PIA 288/5/140)

Women, party leaders complained, cannot even appreciate the benefits the regime has brought. A Politburo member visited a party cell in the late 1950s and recounted the following story to describe the experience:

> They said that mostly women work in the factory, but it is usually men who participate in the party meetings. I asked why. They said very interesting things. These women lived and worked under capitalism, much harder than now, and still believe that it used to be better. There are a lot of them, who are against our regime. (PIA 288/5/36)

These quotes illustrate that the Politburo, the most powerful political organization in Hungary, described women as men's inferiors, particularly in political issues. Women were considered more difficult to mobilize and slower to understand political initiatives. This phenomenon certainly bears similarities to the ideology of classical liberalism, where women are described as dependent, emotional, and generally incapable of rational action. But if the conditions for citizenship in a liberal democracy include rationality and ownership rights, the analogy of this in communist discourse is devotion to the party and its teachings. It is this devotion that qualifies a person to become an accepted member of the community. But can women achieve full devotion? Is it possible to be fully devoted to the party and to a man and one's children at the same time?

Alexandra Kollontai, for one, did not think so. It is exactly for this reason that the Soviet revolutionary and Commissar of Social Welfare in Lenin's government encouraged women to stay single, to not let passion blind them and "becloud [their] analytical minds" (Kollontai 1971, 64). One of her examples was Theresa, an ideal "new woman," for whom love was "only a brief respite on life's path." The aim of her life, its content, was the party, the communist cause, agitation, and propaganda work (Kollontai 1971, 6-10).

Kollontai did not argue for free love on moral grounds or because she believed, as her modern-day feminist sisters would, that women should have a right to take ownership of their bodies and their sexuality. These words and the concept of rights were clearly not part of her revolutionary vocabulary. Rather, she advocated sexual freedom because she believed that love bound a woman to local and personal matters, consumed her energies, and took her time away from more important chores. In the words of Genia, the heroine of Kollontai's novel, *A Great Love*,

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

> I give myself without falling in love. . . . One must have time to fall in love, but I have no time. Our activities in the district have complete hold over us so that none of us have had time to think of anything else, of personal matters. (1981, 113)

Neither did Kollontai's main opponent on this matter, Lenin, reject her ideas based merely on moral or puritanical considerations. Instead, he acknowledged that marital, monogamous, possessive love may reduce women's energies and contributions to the party, but he argued that free sexuality would more adversely affect men's concentration. This, in times of an ongoing communist revolution, was unacceptable. In an interview with Klara Zetkin, published in 1934, Lenin argued,

> The revolution demands concentration, increase of forces. . . . It cannot tolerate orgiastic conditions. . . . The proletariat is a rising class. It doesn't need intoxication [from sex] as a narcotic or a stimulus. . . . It needs clarity, clarity and again clarity. (Zetkin 1934, 50)

Both Lenin and Kollontai, therefore, agreed that there were problems with women's sexuality and reproductive responsibilities that might endanger the revolution, even though their solutions to the problem were radically different. Kollontai recommended an end to traditional families and committed relationships. But it was Lenin's more conservative position, giving priority to the clearheadedness of male revolutionaries, that prevailed. Following him, Hungarian state socialists never seriously questioned the patriarchal sanctity of the family. Women's reproductive work proved still cheaper and in many ways more comfortable than the complete reorganization and socialization of household chores. In due course, women's sexuality was reined in. But the consequences Kollontai predicted could not be avoided: Women's attention had to be shared between family and community issues. A wonderfully revealing example of this is the following quote, in which a Politburo member complains explicitly about women's inability to see the world in ways more familiar to him and his fellow party leaders: "Women do not judge the technological development of the Soviet Union through rockets, but through the availability of labor-saving devices. If they find a fault, they blame the whole system immediately, not just the concrete problem" (PIA 288/21/7).

Yet, while it was women's reproductive responsibilities that allowed both Marxist-Leninist and liberal ideologues to construct them as inferior, there was one important difference between the two major schools of modern Western political thought. Hungarian party leaders saw women's disadvantage as temporary, a result of the combination of traditional attitudes and a lack of sufficient organization and money invested in labor-saving devices. As one Politburo member argued in 1959, "someone mentioned that motherhood is still a disadvantage [for promotion]. This will be so for maybe another 20 or even 50 years" (PIA 288/5/140). Or as Károly Kiss claimed with respect to the cooperative movement mentioned earlier, "I also saw [in the countryside] that fewer women participate in the cooperative movement. By the way, I see this as a temporary phenomenon" (PIA 288/5/140). Here, the argument is that as soon as communism develops to its full potential, these

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

problems will be solved. Given, however, that this particular area was given low priority, otherwise usually overly optimistic Politburo leaders did not expect this to happen in the twentieth century.

Since women were labeled slow but educable, the central task of the Women's Council was to provide the necessary tools for women to catch up with the rest of society:

> The aim of the political-educational work of the Women's Council is to develop the political consciousness of women, to widen their horizon, awaken their desire for self-education and culture. With all this we intend to transcend *the cultural backwardness of women* and help them become good soldiers for the progressive cause, and thus secure the conditions for emancipation. (PIA 288/5/36, emphasis added)

But according to leading politicians, women needed education in more mundane areas as well:

> I think one of the tasks of the Women's Council is to teach women how to live their lives in our society. There are a lot of unused opportunities in the field of culture and sports as well. For example, they could discuss issues about how to balance the household budget. (PIA 288/5/140)

This was perhaps an exaggeration. In fact, while party leaders agreed that women's emancipation had not been fully realized, they praised women for the vast steps they took in the "right" direction.[11] The following quote from a 1970 party decree on the situation of Hungarian women congratulates them on the road they traveled, although it acknowledges their failure to become fully equal to men. A somewhat underhanded compliment follows: "While women were mostly attracted to the regime through their emotions and intuitions, now many are conscious devotees" (PIA 288/5/551).

In sum, party leaders considered women to be politically inferior to men: more likely to be religious, less experienced in the labor movement, and more prone to dangerous outside influences. In a society where political reliability served as the most important criterion for social advancement, such conceptualization proved understandably damaging for many women's careers. Unlike some liberal theorists, however, communist party executives did not blame women's inborn or natural abilities for this lack of political devotion. Rather, women's reluctant devotion to the party was seen as a result of their (socially assigned) child-rearing duties and their consequent lack of political experience and training.

Women's Tasks and the Limits to Women's Advancements

According to party leaders, women, as a group, had not only specific characteristics but also clearly defined tasks and a related social position distinct from those of men. While they were expected to participate in the labor force and in political life, they were assigned specific functions because of their gender. In a discussion

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

about women's new social role after the 1956 revolution, Politburo member György Marosán expressed the common sentiment:

> There are a number of tasks, outside state and party politics, that we can only get women to carry out. . . . *Local politics is women's task.* They should visit the hospital, check to see if there is a good road in the village, if they have child care centers, what the schools are like, how well the food store is supplied. (PIA 288/5/24, emphasis added)

As a rejoinder, another member, Lajos Fehér, added,

> For years, the women's organization was organized on the pattern of the party. We must avoid such mistakes in the future. The women's movement should pay more attention to family issues, . . . to the protection of children, schooling, education and should employ methods like tea parties and sewing or cooking courses. It should focus on *trivial chores.* (PIA 288/5/24, emphasis added)

Trivial chores, indeed. As these and numerous other documents testify, local politics, caring work, education, and child care were the tasks assigned to women in the public sphere, as well as in the household. Previously, we saw how women were depicted as less fit for political participation but certainly educable. These "trivial chores" were designed to provide this education both for them and for the next generation.

Thus, even though women were expected to be full participants in the public sphere, there was a clearly delineated set of tasks they were supposed to carry out: Segregation rather then integration was to characterize their presence. As Rezső Nyers, another long-time, powerful party executive suggested at a Politburo meeting in 1970,

> in our society, there are a number of tasks we can safely assign to women. . . . *[Women] are particularly adept at social welfare jobs.* Of course, they don't have a good view of the whole picture. . . . I think women should be entrusted with more of the upbringing of children. And of course, the management of the household. . . . I believe women are better at these struggles. (PIA 288/5/509, emphasis added)

Note again the linguistic tools for describing a group distinct from one's own: the use of the personal pronoun "we" as it stands in opposition to "women" in the above quote. Clearly this and droves of other similar instances show that members of the Politburo thought of women (and passed decrees about women) as an entity at once homogeneous and different from themselves.

Women's interests were to be represented by a single political organization, the Women's Council. The Politburo held the Women's Council directly responsible when women did not behave according to the plans, when the gender quotas could not be filled, when women did not produce enough children or did not seem enthusiastic enough about attending party schools or obtaining vocational training. But the task of the Women's Council was also clearly separated from that of the leaders

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

of the party, indicating the presence and the values attached to the gap between women's and men's responsibilities:

> The Women's Council should explore [the tasks mentioned earlier by Comrade Komócsin].... For example, they should strive to achieve issues, such as that [female] ticket vendors and other service personnel should behave *more politely* toward the customers. Then *we* [the predominantly male party leadership] will fight on their behalf, so they would not be abused [by the also predominantly male management of the given enterprise]. (PIA 288/5/140, emphasis added)

Here György Marosán makes the division of labor between the male communists and women even clearer. Women are encouraged to work on smiling; men will then do the fighting. This is assumed to be in everybody's best interest, given women's political ignorance and naivete.

To summarize, women were assigned specific tasks in society, much in accordance with their duties in the household and their assumed inexperience in the field of politics and labor. Not surprisingly, the functions women were supposed to fill were not only different but also inferior to those carried out by men. The particulars of this division of labor will be familiar from the feminist literature in Western Europe and North America (see, e.g., Reskin and Padavic 1994). But in developed capitalist countries in the same time period after World War II, women's perceived inferiority led policy makers to discourage women's participation in the sphere of work. Therefore, Western women's experience could best be characterized as exclusion from paid work rather than the legally enforced inclusion characteristic of state socialist Hungary. It is this centrally regulated and strictly controlled integration that is perhaps unique to the region we label Eastern Europe.[12]

There are several indications that the Politburo intentionally set limits to women's integration in some key areas of paid work and politics. For example, the quotas for women's participation in the party, as well as in positions of authority, were set at around 30 percent of all positions. This is far from equality. In an interview, a top-level female party executive argued that the goals described in the Central Committee Decree of 1970, whose aim was to achieve women's equality in positions of authority, were realized by 1980 because about 30 percent of leadership positions in the party and state apparatus were then held by women. Based on decades of experience in the party apparatus, she considered this perfectly satisfactory and felt it fulfilled the goal of women's emancipation (Mrs. Orbán, personal communication, 1995).

The highest council of party leaders shared her position. The annual reports on the social composition of party membership showed that the proportion of women never exceeded a third of all party members; while the Politburo occasionally agonized over the low representation of workers or young people among the members, women's participation was never considered at length, and a general satisfaction was often expressed.

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

In a number of documents, top-level party cadres identified the limits to which women were allowed to participate on the political scene. Here is an example from a 1953 Politburo meeting:

> The proportion of *women is too high in certain fields* and in some positions. For example, 46 percent of all party instructors, 65 percent of all instructors in three- to six-months-long courses, and 40 percent of the employees at local party apparatuses are women. (PIA 276/53/116, emphasis added)

Interestingly enough, 40 to 46 percent women in a position was already considered overrepresentation. A similar concern erupted in the late 1980s when the proportion of university students majoring in legal studies and economics exceeded 50 percent.

Limitations on how far women could proceed and when they could do so were evident not only in cadre recruitment, but also in the labor force. In 1960, during the discussion of the Second Five-Year Plan—the backbone of centralized economic and social planning in Eastern European societies—when the possibility of unemployment was raised, János Kádár, general secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, made it clear that of the two groups most likely to be threatened by joblessness, women and the youth, it was women who should be disadvantaged (PIA 288/5/182). He claimed that it was "theoretically [read politically] necessary" that young people should have priority over women; women's participation in the labor force was conditioned on the abundance of jobs. Similar threats to women's labor force participation—otherwise cherished by Politburo members—resurfaced every time there was a danger of excess labor.

In addition, women were not necessarily entitled to well-paid or highly skilled jobs, and they were expected to be satisfied with whatever was available, even if that was second rate and would have been insufficient for men:

> We often receive requests from various rural cities that they need help establishing a factory where a lot of women could find work. Unfortunately, only very few of these requests can be granted. But we should definitely start thinking about what kind of work we could provide to rural women, *work that is not very high quality* but would still provide a living. (PIA 288/5/140, emphasis added)

Here, a member of the Politburo, Károly Kiss, explicitly argued that the jobs the state should provide for women did not need to be either well paid or particularly rewarding. Women were obliged to work outside the household and participate in paid work and politics if the opportunity arose, but their inferior, second-class position in these contexts was taken for granted. This was particularly true for young women, which contrasts sharply with the high hopes vested in young male cadre prospects.

> We are having a lot of problems with the youth nowadays. We have talked about shop assistants and other people involved in retail jobs. They say that the wages are too low.

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

> But in my opinion it does not have to be much higher at all. Rather, perhaps we should introduce a system where young women, between 15 and 20, who have no particular skills or qualifications would come and work in retail for four to six hours a day. They would work here for a while, and then they are replaced by another bunch of young women. *They will never make as much here as in the mining industry.* (PIA 288/5/394, emphasis added)

Here, the party's top political figure, General Secretary János Kádár, acknowledged that women's work did not pay as much as that of men (e.g., in the mining industry). But such wages were seen as sufficient for women, especially young women who were likely to start having children at the same time.

Hungarian women were nevertheless encouraged, even obligated, to participate in paid work, and this was seen as part of their political education process as well as an economic necessity. However, just like in capitalist countries, they obviously could not do so on the same terms as men: Segregation was not only acceptable but encouraged and centrally legitimated. Ultimately, it was clearly the Politburo that had final authority over how far women could venture: "The state upholds the right to appoint exclusively party members to certain positions. . . . *Similarly, we uphold this right with regard to the nomination of men*" (PIA 288/5/140, emphasis added).

CONCLUSION

This brief review of the ways in which powerful members of the Politburo and other high-level party leaders discussed women and women's role in society reveals much about the gendered construction of the communist subject, which in turn had a significant influence on men's and women's life chances and opportunities in state socialist Hungary. In sum, I argue that women could participate in paid work and could claim authority under state socialism, not as free or rational individuals but through their membership in the social group of women. This practice was not unique to the category of women but a characteristic pattern of the social organization of state socialist societies. As members of this corporate group, women were not considered as reliable and devoted as men; in particular, their political "backwardness" and their concern with "trivial matters" were often pointed out. Importantly, the latter was not only a reason for, but also a consequence of, women's secondary status as subjects. This practice thus guaranteed women's participation in paid work and politics, but in a strictly controlled manner that reproduced and reinforced their segregation into inferior positions.

What does this analysis of state socialist gender ideology offer to feminist research? First, I widen the theoretical notion of patriarchy not merely to include but also to specify and understand the experience of women outside a capitalist context. Second, it is significant that elements of this construction of women linger on even after the collapse of state socialism, not just in Eastern Europe. The inclusion of women into paid work is one area where the example of Eastern Europe has traveled west. State socialist societies experimented with the novel concept of women's

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

inclusion into work, politics, and education not as assimilated, not-quite-perfect men but as women with gender-specific needs and abilities. This effort, in state socialist Hungary, resulted in a decrease in overall gender inequality in many areas but also a simultaneous segregation of women, as well as a reinforcement of their reproductive functions outside of paid work. As quotas, affirmative action policies, and government offices for women's affairs proliferate in the admittedly different historical and political contexts of postindustrial Western capitalism, this East European case might direct us toward danger signals and areas where the limitations of such policies, if applied without careful thought, may become most apparent.

NOTES

1. Several feminist scholars have touched on the construction of the female communist subject in their work (see, e.g., Corrin 1993; Einhorn 1993; Gal and Kligman 2000; Kligman 1994; essays in Moghadam 1994), and my research builds on their observations. My work, however, is unique, in establishing the analogy between the communist subject and the liberal individual based on a systematic analysis of previously unavailable data.

2. I will be referring to the political-economic regime of Hungary between 1949 and 1989 as state socialist and to its ideology as communist. This distinction reflects the difference between the dominating ideology—which was sometimes more concerned with describing the future than providing solutions for the present—and the everyday reality people shared. In addition, I will capitalize Eastern in "Eastern Europe" to emphasize the fact that the region represents a political and social entity rather than just a geographical location on the map.

3. Watson (1997) argued that no gender differentiation is possible in political citizenship under communism because political citizenship itself did not exist: No one participated in political decision making—no one had a voice. Indeed, citizenship in this sense did not exist under communism. Yet political participation—albeit of a different kind—was not only possible but in fact required of communist subjects (everyone and especially those who desired a career), and here gender differentiation was profound. Watson (1997) used a very specific and, in many ways, Western/liberal–biased definition of "political participation," which is why she does not find this concept relevant in Eastern European communist societies.

4. The numbers in the parentheses indicate the location of the document within the unit archives storage. Therefore, the numbers uniquely identify exactly which piece of paper I am referring to. The first number refers to the larger organization, then the department, then the document number.

5. While all major communist ideologues agreed on this much, they had some disagreement about the transformation of reproductive work. Their recommendations on this issue ranged from the abolition of the bourgeois family (Engels, Kollontai), to leaving everything the way it was, to loading additional burdens on women's shoulders (Lenin, Stalin). The latter position was implemented throughout the state socialist period.

6. In reality, women in Hungary, as in any society, were far from homogeneous in a number of obvious respects. Significant class differences could be found among them (ranging from poor peasant women to wives of upper-class aristocrats and upper-middle-class professionals), as well as differences in geographic location (many lived in tiny villages; others in the capital, a large metropolis), religion, war experience, family status, and so forth. Racial differences—while real—were less relevant, since the only sizeable racial minority, the *Roma*, constituted less than 3 or 4 percent of the society. State socialist policy makers, while no doubt aware of these differences, assumed that women shared certain gender-specific characteristics and interests and chose to focus on the similarities rather than the differences. In fact, before the mid-1950s, policy makers aimed to abolish women's gender-specific position, but they more or less rescinded this goal in practice by the late 1950s.

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

7. Thanks to Gil Eyal for calling my attention to this term.

8. The first one, established in the late 1940s, was called the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women (*Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége*), which in 1956 was reorganized and renamed the National Council of Hungarian Women (*Magyar Nők Országos Tanácsa*). I will be referring to both as the Women's Council hereafter because, even though there were some differences in their activities, they both were meant to represent all Hungarian women, a fact that did not change during the 40-odd years of state socialism.

9. The Politburo made a point of sending a male member to these celebrations (even though there was always at least one woman who could have participated) or to the opening ceremonies of the congresses of the council to represent the political leadership of the country. They considered it polite, as evidenced by a discussion in the 1960s about "a man to greet the Women's Congress," another subtle reinforcement of the us—men—versus they—women—separation.

10. There are a few exceptions to this formulation. In some instances, the documents singled out housewives or urban housewives as potential sources of labor supply. In most instances, however, they referred to the group simply as women. The Women's Council was sometimes an exception to this rule, and after the 1970s, even top-level party organs changed their position somewhat. In several of the council's documents, the need for separate programs and propaganda for women of different strata is mentioned. Still, the Women's Council prided itself on its unified gender politics (*egységes nőpolitika*), which expressed its desire to "help the friendly communication and understanding between all women: peasant women in the co-ops, factory workers, white-collar women, as well as housewives" (PIA 288/5/36).

11. To be precise, the document says "married women" (*asszonyok*), which was the way the council usually referred to its members, even though Politburo documents usually used the term "women" (*nők*). *Asszonyok* was perhaps seen as more friendly, less official sounding, and certainly less feminist, which is the last ideology the council would have wanted to support. The emphasis on married women rather than all women reflects the failure of Kollontai's position to take hold even among those officially representing women in Eastern Europe.

12. This article is not concerned with describing the actual, long-term outcomes of this Eastern Europe–specific construction of gender relations. Suffice here to note that forced and limited integration had its perks, and gender inequality was, in fact, lower in state socialist Hungary than in Austria, a comparable capitalist society throughout the twentieth century (for more details on an explicit state socialist–capitalist comparison, see Fodor forthcoming).

REFERENCES

Blum, Linda M. 1999. *At the breast: Ideologies of breastfeeding and motherhood in the contemporary United States*. Boston: Beacon.

Bruszt, László. 1988. "Without us but for us": Political orientation in Hungary in the period of late paternalism. *Social Research* 55 (1-2): 43-76.

Coffey, Amanda, and Paul Atkinson. 1996. *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Corrin, Chris. 1993. *Magyar women: Hungarian women's lives 1960s-1990s*. London: St. Martin's.

Daniels, Cynthia R. 1993. *At women's expense: State power and the politics of fetal rights*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Einhorn, Barbara. 1993. *Cinderella goes to market: Citizenship, gender and women's movements in East Central Europe*. London: Verso.

Eisenstein, Zillah. 1988. *The female body and the law*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fodor, Éva. Forthcoming. *Gender regimes and authority in state socialist Hungary and capitalist Austria*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Gal, Susan, and Gail Kligman. 2000. *Reproducing gender: Politics, publics and everyday life after socialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Gomez, Laura. 1997. *Misconceiving mothers: Legislators, prosecutors, and the politics of prenatal drug exposure*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Graham, Ann, and Joanna Regulska. 1997. Expanding political space for women in Poland: An analysis of three communities. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30 (1): 65-82.

Jones, Kathleen B. 1993. *Compassionate authority: Democracy and the representation of women*. New York: Routledge.

Jowitt, Ken. 1987. *New World disorder: The Leninist extinction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kligman, Gail. 1994. The social legacy of communism: Women, children, and feminization of poverty. In *The social legacy of communism*, edited by James R. Millar and Sharon L. Wolchik. New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press.

Kollontai, Alexandra. 1971. *The autobiography of a sexually emancipated communist woman*. New York: Herder and Herder.

———. 1981. *A great love*. New York: Norton.

Konrád, György, and Szelényi Iván. 1989. *Az értelmiség útja az osztályhatalomhoz* (The road of intellectuals to class power). Budapest, Hungary: Gondolat.

Markens, Susan R. 1997. Conceiving conceptions: Surrogacy struggles in two states. Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles.

Massell, Gregory J. 1974. *The surrogate proletariat: Moslem women and revolutionary strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Moghadam, Valetine. 1994. *Democratic reform and the position of women in transitional economies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pateman, Carole. 1988. *The sexual contract*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Pateman, Carole. 1989. *The disorder of women: Democracy, feminism and political theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Pető, Andrea. 1994. As he saw her: Gender politics in secret party reports in Hungary during the 1950s. Working paper, History Department, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary.

Phillips, Ann. 1991. *Engendering democracy*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Ragin, Charles C. 1994. *Constructing social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

Reskin, Barbara, and Irene Padavic. 1994. *Women and men at work*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

Verderey, Katherine. 1994. From parent-state to family patriarchs: Gender and nation in contemporary Eastern Europe. *East European Politics and Societies* 8 (1): 225-55.

Walder, Andrew. 1995. Career mobility and the communist political order. *American Sociological Review* 60 (3): 309-28.

Watson, Peggy. 1997. Civil society and the politics of difference in Eastern Europe. In *Transitions, environments, translations: Feminisms in international politics*, edited by Joan W. Scott, Cora Kaplan, and Debra Keates. New York: Routledge.

West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. Doing gender. *Gender & Society* 1:125-51.

Zetkin, Klara. 1934. *Reminiscences of Lenin*. New York: International.

Éva Fodor is an assistant professor of sociology at Dartmouth College. Her work focuses on gender inequality and social change in state socialist and post–state socialist societies. Her book, Gender Regimes and Authority in State Socialist Hungary and Capitalist Austria, *is being published by Duke University Press. Fodor's current project explores the feminization of poverty and the gendering of post–state socialist welfare states.*

This content downloaded from 141.35.40.184 on Tue, 19 Apr 2016 17:34:53 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms