

**Women's Reproductive Rights under State Socialism In Hungary:
The Ratkó Era, 1950-1956**

By

Michelle Sawyer

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Supervisor: Professor Susan Zimmermann
Second Reader: Professor Constantin Iordachi

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Abstract:

This thesis aims to illustrate the nature of the Rákosi regime as a failed attempt to establish totalitarian rule through the example of the failed reproductive policies of the Ratkó Era. I argue that what I call ‘functionalist’ approaches to the Era treat it as a case of careful planning and calculated policy changes. These approaches assert that the relationship between the minor baby boom that occurred in 1953 and 1954 and the societal changes that accompanied it can be described as cause and effect, with both occurrences being the direct result of the “Ratkó Law,” Resolution 1.004. Through an examination of reproductive policies, I argue that the Ratkó Era was rather a haphazard and hastily improvised program that did not fully attain any of its stated goals. To demonstrate this premise, I make use of language and rhetoric employed in the popular press as well as in the confidential memoranda circulated between the top party leadership, as this analysis illustrates how the Rákosi regime cobbled together policies after the model (and suggestions) of the Soviet Union. This improvisation was unsuccessful due to a lack of skilled officials, exemplified by Health Minister Anna Ratkó. In claiming that the reproductive policies of the Ratkó Era ‘failed,’ I suggest that not only were the stated demographic goals not achieved, but the regulations were almost immediately relaxed and then repealed. This lack of success was by no means responsible for the inability of the Rákosi regime to establish totalitarian rule, but rather serves as one example of the regime’s flaws.

I apply Foucault’s theory of carceral society and biopower to the Hungarian state socialist regime’s attempt to exert total control over every aspect of life, including what I argue to be most intimate, reproduction. An assessment of theories of totalitarianism is also warranted, and a combination of Foucault and Arendt’s works allows me to formulate a theoretical framework appropriate to the period of attempted totalitarian rule in socialist Hungary.

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Introduction

On February 12, 1953, *Nők Lapja* (*Women's Journal*), official women's magazine of the Hungarian Communist Party's women's association announced the newest step in the continuing improvement of the social protection of women and children.¹ This new legislation, Resolution 1.004, was in fact a ministerial decree and as such did not require Parliamentary approval; nonetheless it was considered to be as serious as a law.² The six paragraphs listed in the resolution contained such reforms as increasing the time allotted for maternity leave, increasing the state stipend per child for families with three children or more, and creating a special tax for childless men and women. The final item, paragraph six, urged all citizens and social organizations to take on the fight to stop illegal abortions and authorized the Minister of Justice to draft stricter sanctions against abortionists and women who perform abortions on themselves.

This legislation became known in popular usage as the "Ratkó Law," after the current Minister of Health, Anna Ratkó. Another common idiom in Hungarian is the eponymous, *Ratkó korszak*, or Ratkó Era, which is used to refer to the period of her service as Minister of Health and alternatively, to the duration of the "Ratkó Law" (officially March 1, 1953 to June 22, 1956). Ratkó's tenure as Minister of Health ended just six weeks after the resolution went into effect, and the act was actually partially alleviated in October of that year. Relaxation measures continued in 1954 and the resolution was officially withdrawn in the summer of 1956. Children born in the period when this legislation was in place were called *Ratkó gyermek* (Ratkó children)

¹ "A Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsának határozata az anya- és gyermekvédelem továbbfejlesztéséről" ("The People's Republic of Hungary's Cabinet Decision on Improving Mother and Child Protection") in *Nők Lapja* (*Women's Journal*) Vol. 5, No. 7, February 12, 1953, pp.1-2.

² Géza Kilényi and Vanda Lamm, eds., *Parliamentarism and Government in a One-Party System* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), pp. 147-148.

and to this day Hungarians born in 1953 and 1954 self-identify as Ratkó children, illustrating the term's social significance. In this study, I use the term Ratkó Era in the broader sense to refer to the period 1950 to 1956; these years encompass Anna Ratkó's appointment to the head post of the newly created Ministry of Health, the establishment of committee-based decisions as to the medical need for abortion, the strict 1953 resolution, its immediate and gradual alleviation, and finally the repeal of the "Ratkó Law" in 1956.

Abortion and control of female reproduction has been an issue of contention for people everywhere, throughout history. Abortion has long existed for many as the primary expedient of birth control, but has been discouraged by religious authorities, medical professionals and governments alike.³ Andrea Pető writes, "In Hungary as elsewhere, the termination of pregnancy has always been a political issue, for it touches upon one of the most fundamental aspects of human rights: has the woman the right to be in control of her own body, i.e., is she considered a responsible citizen?"⁴

Several important points must be addressed when considering the brief period of Hungarian history when the crime of abortion warranted unprecedentedly strict punishment; among these are the issues of morality, a definition of "reproductive rights," and the development of women's rights and legal status in 1950s Hungary. The morality debate and other normative questions about what is 'best' in terms of reproductive policies remain outside the scope of this study, but deserve recognition as central to the abortion problem. Yet it is interesting to note that the issue of moral correctness according to a religious or church doctrine

³ The Papal Bull of Pope Sixtus V of 1588 was the first official Catholic document to prohibit abortion. Hippocrates was known to discourage the procedure, as well, making this perhaps the earliest condemnation of abortion on grounds of health.

⁴ Andrea Pető, "Women's Rights in Stalinist Hungary: The Abortion Trials of 1952-53," *Hungarian Studies Review* 29, nos. 1-2 (2002): p. 50.

is conspicuously missing from the public discourse on abortion in the Ratkó Era; Communist rejection of religious traditions and beliefs can account for the fact that abortion was considered a sin against the building of Socialism and the glory of the Soviet Union rather than a sin against God. However, the prevalence of abortion in Europe as a wartime necessity also may have contributed to a generally ambivalent attitude toward the idea that the practice was a morally reprehensible ‘crime.’ But without the weight of the moral argument and a long history of official condemnation from church and state supporting those determined to abolish abortion in order to increase the population, it is doubtful the issue would have been so contentious.

‘Reproductive rights’ as I use the term entails a variety of circumstances that enable women to freely choose their reproductive destiny. This means roughly that women are free to decide what to do with their own bodies, which connotes a certain degree of respect for women as being capable of making such decisions. As we will see, the rhetoric used once Resolution 1.004 failed had changed ever so slightly to acknowledge the fact that harsh restrictions were no longer necessary because women recognized the ‘right choice’ and did not need coercion to stop them from obtaining abortions. In the context of state socialism under Rákosi in Hungary, it is important to note that women had been ‘emancipated’ according to the Soviet model and theoretically enjoyed all the rights and privileges of men, including the right to work. However, when one understands Soviet citizenship to be contingent upon a person’s ability to do productive (and in the case of women, reproductive) work, it is easier to appreciate the validity of what Gail Kligman calls women’s “double burden,” a term she uses to refer specifically to women under socialist regimes.⁵ This means that women are considered citizens only if the both

⁵ Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 25-32. She writes, “Most important, all citizens were formally categorized as productive or nonproductive members of society. In this

contribute to the workforce outside the home and also contribute to reproducing the future workforce, by conceiving and raising as many children as possible. Thus reproductive rights are especially salient in discussions of women citizens of a socialist regime, as measures including government-sponsored aid and child bonuses were not simply helpful but necessary for women to fulfill both productive and reproductive roles, outside and within the home.

In discussing reproductive rights in 1950s Hungary, I am primarily concerned with legislation restricting access to abortion. Other welfare measures play a large role in the set of rights and privileges that encompass reproductive work under the best conditions, but my study is less concerned with these, even if they are not necessarily less important. I am not ignoring the social welfare issues related to reproductive rights, as these are intertwined with abortion laws; for example, a restrictive abortion policy must acknowledge the subsequent need for a well-developed social welfare network to provide care and resources for the new mothers and their children.

Regarding the legal status of women under state socialism, one must note feminist issues in the Soviet Union in the first half of the twentieth century have often been reduced to “the woman question.”⁶ What has been called the “emancipation of women,” including property rights and suffrage, among other measures, is considered to have been the answer to the “question.” Yudit Kiss writes that

[...] this first, radical change was not followed by other substantial steps. Women were declared equal, on the basis of their social equality with

way, the physical bodies of citizens were instrumentalized for the purposes of the political economy of the state [...] In essence, those who did not or could not labor in the interest of achieving socialism were deemed ‘parasites’ eating away at the healthy, disciplined body of ‘the people’” (pp. 24-25).

⁶ Ildikó Asztalos Morell, “Introduction,” in *Gender Transitions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Ildiko Asztalos Morell, et al. (Eslov, Sweden: Forlags ab Gondolin, 2005) p. 11. The reproductive policies of the Soviet Union are important for my study, as they served as a model for Stalinist Hungary and there has been more research on these than on the policies of Hungary.

men. [...] A wide range of objective conditions—from economic and legal regulation to providing childcare facilities—was created for women to enable them to function as equal to men. But at the same time the whole universe of the particularly female experience and practice, like the constraints of social and family roles, questions of love, sex, friendship, motherhood, abortion, rape, sexual abuse, were never dealt with.⁷

This tendency to ignore many aspects of “the woman question” was perpetuated in Hungary, after the model of the Soviet Union. Of primary importance for this study is the fact that Hungary’s abortion laws and legislation involving women’s reproductive rights followed the Soviet Union’s example, which outlawed abortion in 1936 after a period of unrestricted access beginning in 1919. Abortion laws were only liberalized again after the death of Stalin in 1953.⁸ The Ratkó Era and subsequent debates about abortion embody this inability of state socialism to adequately address “the woman question.”

As a result of my inquiry into the Ratkó Era, I have come to agree with scholars such as Andrea Pető and Michael Pittaway who argue that early state socialism in Hungary was a failed attempt to establish a totalitarian regime. I attempt to tie the above-mentioned issues of women’s reproductive rights together in the context of a failure to establish totalitarian state control and thus include an examination of how the rhetoric and language of abortion and abortion legislation changed over time. This shift in discourse provides an example of the reactions and responses made by the regime concerning abortion and reproductive policies in an effort to adapt to the failures and mistakes made during the attempt to institute total authority over the population. The Ratkó Era epitomizes the improvised measures taken by a government that was unprepared to fully implement policies that would result in a sharp rise in population growth.

Attempts to establish total control over a population are dependent upon a successful

⁷ Yudit Kiss, “The Second ‘No’: Women in Hungary,” *Feminist Review* 39, “Shifting Territories: Feminism & Europe” (Autumn, 1991): p. 50.

⁸ Barbara Engel, *Women in Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 154.

propaganda program, but this propaganda program is also a part of the totality of the government's authority. Control over public discourse about abortion goes farther than prohibiting contradictory opinions, but also involves promoting the 'correct' stance, which is where propaganda comes in. Implicit in totalitarianism is the unyielding acquiescence of the populace to the fact that the government maintains complete control; this is both forced upon citizenry from above through mechanisms of physical control and mental coercion and also through propaganda disseminated by the popular press.⁹

A state attempt to establish control over all aspects of its citizens' lives inevitably requires some thought about gender roles and interactions, both in relation to each other and in relation to the state or government apparatus. How the Rákosi regime viewed the role of marriage and the role of men and women individually in the field of reproduction policies and issues within the larger context of building socialism is an illustration of the attempt to achieve a totalitarian system of government.

Upon considering abortion policies as a tool of attempted totalitarian rule in Hungary in the early 1950s, it is important to keep in mind that at this time a majority of the country's population was rural, the primary industry agriculture, and that once the People's Republic of Hungary was established in 1949, the government was under the direct influence of Stalin's

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1971), p. 341-363. Arendt makes the distinction in "Totalitarianism in Power" between propaganda used before a regime comes to power (in the case of Nazi Germany she reflects on the domination of 'scientific' and racist propaganda) and propaganda employed by 'totalitarianism in power;' I consider the propaganda concerning reproductive policies in the Rákosi regime to be the former type, and thus unsuccessful that it was employed by an ultimately unsuccessful totalitarian regime.

Soviet Union.¹⁰ The period was one of rampant fear and paranoid disciplinarian regimentalization, with all of the above mentioned features of the population combining to create extreme circumstances that provide a wealth of facets to be explored.

When the Rákosi regime came to power in 1948, Hungary was in a very precarious situation. Weakened by war, having lost their bid to regain ‘lost territories’ resulting from a First World War alliance with the Axis powers, occupied by another foreign power and forced to modernize and industrialize rapidly in order to meet the demands of socialist centralized planning, it is not implausible to suggest that the country was in a state of almost unmanageable flux. Concentrating on the plight of women in this period, and particularly on the sphere of reproduction and sexuality, it must be noted that following the Second World War and the invasion of the Red Army, abortion was easily procured and even considered a necessity in dealing with the aftermath of conquest, when rape at the hands of the liberating Russian soldiers was all too frequent.¹¹ However, by 1948, after years in which the punitive anti-abortion legislation inherited from the Habsburg era was ignored or not enforced,¹² reproductive policies following the Soviet model were adopted. Furthermore, a drive to industrialize in the context of the population loss sustained through the treaty of Trianon and later through the Second World War, was doomed to fail unless populations could be increased. However, this is merely a contributing factor to the new reproductive policies, not a fundamental cause, as functionalist arguments hold. Other factors influencing the reproductive program, besides increasing the number of Hungarians, were the desires of the Rákosi government to emulate the Soviet Union

¹⁰ Péter György, “The Mirror of Everyday Life, of the Will to a Period Style” in *Art and Society in the Age of Stalin* ed. Péter György and Hedvig Turai (Budapest: Corvina Books, 1992), pp. 15-26.

¹¹ Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary,” p. 51.

¹² László Kürti, “The Wingless Eros of Socialism: Nationalism and Sexuality in Hungary,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 64, no.2 (April 1991): p. 56.

(often invoked as the best model of statehood for Hungary to emulate), to assert state power and assume totalitarian control by “shaping, controlling and ‘policing’ populations,”¹³ and to emphasize nationhood through reproductive narratives in the relationship between the state and its citizens, “father and sons.”¹⁴

My first chapter will be devoted to the theoretical framework within which this research will be conducted. The purpose is to explain the ideas shaping my understanding of state socialist population policies as they were undertaken in Hungary from 1949 to 1956. I draw from Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and will follow the example of feminist writers such as Susan Gal and Gail Kligman writing about abortion and reproductive rights under socialism in central and eastern Europe. I am also influenced by the debate taken up by Peter Kenez and László Borhi about Soviet influence in satellite states during the Cold War; I argue that the “improvisations” that marked Soviet-influenced social policy in Hungary are clearly exemplified in the changing reproductive policies.

The second chapter begins with an overview of the historical context and specific chronological events in order to frame my study in the appropriate context; I focus on legal documents, internal memoranda and reports circulated among the higher ranks of the government. This section analyzes the legal trajectory of the Ratkó Era, in an attempt to showcase the fluctuation in policies and illustrate the improvised responses of the failed totalitarian regime. The character of the state socialist judicial body will also be discussed, including examples of policies, as this is important for understanding the rise of the bureaucratic

¹³ Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 19.

¹⁴ Kürti, “The Wingless Eros of Socialism,” p. 57.

mechanisms that characterize carceral society and totalitarianism. I do not suggest that Hungary under state socialism in the early 1950s was a carceral society, but many aspects of foucauldian theory regarding carceral society can be applied to the situation, as will be discussed in Chapter One.

Chapter three introduces the argument that the Rákosi regime used rhetoric and language in public discourse as a tool meant to establish totalitarian rule. An analysis of the language and rhetoric of the documents reviewed in the previous chapter along with an assessment of public discourse in the form of newspaper articles and propaganda brochures reveals the significance of the following two points: 1) Discourse in the form of rhetoric and language used to describe abortion, families, and the role of women changed over time and these changes thus reflect how the undeveloped and ill-equipped regime reacted to volatile circumstances. 2) The state's conception of its own role in relation to its citizens as individuals is apparent in public discourse, signaling the paternal pattern of government; an analysis of gender roles and the role of married couples vis-à-vis the state provides further evidence to argue for a failed totalitarian state. This chapter also illustrates the connection between Hungarian and Russian socialism, as the Rákosi regime was simply copying Stalinist policies and political rhetoric. By expanding on the socialist ideal of motherhood, family and reproduction, comparisons of Soviet and Hungarian cases are illuminated.

My final chapter examines the life and career of Anna Ratkó, and the value of her tenure as Minister of Health as politically symbolic for the Rákosi regime. In order to fully understand the reproductive policies that have come to be associated with her name, it is important to examine the woman herself as Minister of Health, Communist politician, and symbolic choice of the socialist government. I argue that Ratkó's identity as a loyal, female Communist Party

member made her an attractive model for the regime to publicize to Hungarian women; women were considered to be a problematic voting demographic for the Communists. However, her ineptitude and incompetence meant that her term as Minister of Health was less successful than may have been anticipated; though she was not responsible for the failure of Resolution 1.004, she served as a convenient scapegoat in the minds of the public at least.

Chapter 1: Theory and Methodology

1.1 Abortion and Population Policies: State of the Art/ Literature Review

The study of women's reproductive rights and abortion legislation in socialist central and eastern Europe has gone through several periods of academic attention, both in the national press and consciousness as well as in international publications. The sudden collapse of Communism and change of regimes in the early 1990s marked the beginning of the first period of serious discussion on the topic in former socialist countries; for example, changes in abortion legislation in 1991 prompted a retrospective review of the historical past of abortion in Hungary. Some examples are the *Beszélő* article "A Short History of Abortion in Hungary" by András Mink, an article about the changing situation of women in Hungary by Julia Szalai, and a collection of documents pertaining to population policy from the early 1950s, published by the Central Statistical Office's Population Science Research Institute.¹⁵

A second series of writing came to press at the end of the 1990s, clearly after years of field work that could begin only after access to the subject in the region was made available to researchers. Here I am referring specifically to Gail Kligman's seminal work on abortion in Ceausescu's Romania, *The Politics of Duplicity*, along with other works, such as *The Politics of Gender After Socialism* by Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *Gender Transitions in Russia and Eastern Europe* edited by Ildikó Asztalos-Morrell et al. and *Gender, Equality and Difference During and After State Socialism* edited by Rebecca Kay. With the exception of the works by

¹⁵ *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon (The 1952-53 Population Policy Program in Hungary)*, (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal Népeségtudományi Kutató Intézet, 1992). This is a collection of interior memoranda and other Hungarian Communist Party documents related to reproductive and population policies.

Gal and Kligman, these books are collected volumes of essays written on gender relations under socialism, and for the most part the crux of these relations is reproduction and reproductive policies.

The best-known authors on reproductive policies are perhaps Gal and Kligman, but the work of Andrea Pető is the most important and relevant for my study, as she has examined reproductive policies in Hungary in the early 1950s.¹⁶ While I draw on some of the same data as Pető, I take issue with her functionalist treatment of demographic data as being too simplistic and therefore misleading. I am convinced that there is no simple answer for the failed reproductive policies of socialist Hungary, and in response to functionalist arguments that treat the Ratkó Era as nothing more than a way to increase the population after the Second World War, I offer my analysis and new perspectives; these point rather to inept attempts to emulate the Soviet Union, unsuccessful efforts to establish totalitarian rule, and a desire to create and also present to the world an image of general consensus strong national identity.¹⁷ The poor choice of Anna Ratkó¹⁸ as minister of Health can be added to this list, along with the lack of infrastructure to deal with the increased number of births that resulted from the “Ratkó Law.” Rather than employ a Marxist analysis that focuses on class identity, education and whether or not an individual come from a “stable background”¹⁹ as Pető does, I argue that the unique political and social environment of 1950s Hungary created circumstances which must be approached with the synthesis of gender-sensitive methodological frameworks to follow.

¹⁶ Andrea Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary,” and “Átvonuló hadsereg, maradandó trauma—Az 1945-os budapesti nemi erőszak esetek emlékezete,” (Transiting Army, Lasting Trauma—Memories of Rape Cases in Budapest in 1945”) *Történelmi Szemle*, (*Historical Review*) 54, no. 1-2 (1999).

¹⁷ See Chapter 2.1b.

¹⁸ See Chapter 4 and Conclusion for an analysis of why Ratkó was a poor choice, or in other words, her symbolic role in the Ratkó Era.

¹⁹ Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary,” p. 53.

The difficulties in analyzing data from the early years of Stalinist state socialism in Hungary are many, with unreliable data forming only one aspect of the problem. These complications are compounded by the fact that there is no “theory of abortion” and approaching the abortion question is often problematized by moral dilemmas and debates about normative practices. Thus, I am leaning toward an analytical approach that examines socialist rhetoric about population increase and reproductive policies, the socialist desire to increase the population (and by extension the strength of the nation), and propaganda directed toward women in my assessment of the Rákó Era. In the case of Stalinist Hungary, Rákósi’s model was the Soviet Union, a fact which provides context for this study, as it examines one regime’s failed approach to emulate another.

1.2 Approaches

An especially sensitive approach is required when dealing with as contentious a question as abortion. It seems impossible to write about questions pertaining to women, or reproduction, or individual rights without delving into debates about what is ‘best,’ ‘right’ or ‘correct,’ but I take my cue from authors I admire and those who have written extensively on the subject. I refer mostly to Gail Kligman, who in my mind set the bar extremely high in terms of micro-history dealing with reproductive politics under state socialism. In terms of my attitudes toward and personal beliefs about women’s reproductive rights and abortion, I am influenced by theories of gender justice as espoused by Allison M. Jaggar in “Abortion Rights and Gender Justice Worldwide: An Essay in Political Philosophy.” Jaggar’s essay “reveals that the question of abortion rights is not a self-contained issue of political morality, marginal to concerns about social justice. Instead, abortion rights are integral to fundamental human rights and to the

equality of all citizens.”²⁰ I share this conviction, and furthermore feel that reproductive rights are one of the most important social issue any government can deal with; this personal view is what drives my thesis and influences what I consider to be my composite theoretical narrative. Furthermore, as a woman and a feminist, I am convinced that the study of reproductive rights is relevant to men as well as women, as the far-reaching historical consequences of the Ratkó Era demonstrate.

1.3 Theory and Methodology

In evaluating the abortion legislation of early 1950s Hungary and the reproductive policies of the Rákosi regime, I am using Foucault’s social theory of panopticism and other ideas from *Discipline and Punish* to illustrate the degree to which the state acquired control over the bodies of its subjects. I am also espousing Susan Gal and Gail Kligman’s understanding of reproduction and politics as being reciprocally inclusive, along with their refusal of functionalist arguments as being too simplistic and unhelpful.

1.3a Addressing Functionalism

A functionalist explanation of the Ratkó Era holds that the socialist campaign to increase the population, embodied in the “Ratkó Law” that increased the penalties incurred against abortionists, resulted in a minor baby boom in the early 1950s. Functionalism, put in very basic terms, states that all parts of society ultimately function to serve each other and act as a unified whole. Talcott Parsons wrote in 1961 a further development of his concept of functionalist roles, or personal participation, stating that they can be bound up in collectivities, which are

²⁰ Alison M. Jaggar, “Abortion Rights and Gender Justice Worldwide: An Essay in Political Philosophy” in *Abortion: Three Perspectives*, by Michael Tooley, Philip Devine, Celia Wolf-Devine and Alison M. Jaggar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.120-179.

represented by institutions in some form, and that these act in unison to fulfill the needs of society.²¹

Sylvia Walby, leading gender sociologist in the United Kingdom, critiques structural functionalism in *Theorizing Patriarchy* by calling the approach unsophisticated, saying that it refuses to acknowledge or allow for the changing of institutions (such as the family) over time.²² Walby asserts that serious social scientists are right in their dismissal of Parsonian functionalism, but I would argue that functionalist approaches merit consideration simply due to their utility and seemingly obvious relevance; it *is* true that socialist population policies enforced in Hungary were put into practice in order to increase the population and thus be better equipped to industrialize and “build socialism.” However, in assessing the functionalist argument for reproductive policies that are intended to rejuvenate a population, such as restrictions on abortion, I have found that a structurally functionalist approach is not wholly appropriate for the following reasons: 1) gender plays a large role and thus deserves primary consideration, while functionalism ignores it, and 2) in a discursive approach “functionalist theories are but one set among many other arguments that justify intervention (or restraint) in managing and controlling reproduction. Biological reproduction is not the same as social reproduction, although some social theories have inadvertently collapsed the two.”²³ According to Gal and Kligman, as illustrated by the preceding quotation, reproduction as politics is simply not as simple as functionalist formulae treat it.

²¹ Talcott Parsons, ed., *Theories of Society: Foundations of Modern Sociological Theory* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), p. xxi.

²² Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), p. 63.

²³ Gal and Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay*, p.121 n4.

An approach that must be mentioned here due to its ubiquity in prior research into this topic is a quantitative data analysis. I find arguments that directly relate abortion policy to birth rates to take a problematic functionalist approach, as it takes too much for granted and tends to conclude that the demographic changes were the straightforward result of changes in abortion legislation. I have found fault in the way demographic data is used to exemplify the ‘results’ of the Ratkó Era, by Andrea Pető for example in “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary: The Abortion Trials of 1952-3.” I am hesitant to follow this model of analysis because I fear it doesn’t represent a realistic or true picture of what happened, but I am including statistical data tables below as I feel this information is valid and useful as long as it is accepted as statistical data rather than a methodology.

Table 1. Live Births in Hungary (per month, 1951-1955)

	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
January	16 722	14 590	16 174	18 052	18 050
February	15 868	14 817	15 593	16 728	17 023
March	17 268	10 179	18 275	19 501	19 889
April	15 671	15 609	17 216	19 152	18 969
May	16 497	15 288	17 791	20 344	19 481
June	15 548	14 588	17 087	18 850	17 367
July	16 736	16 042	18 683	20 148	17 867
August	16 951	16 283	18 594	20 106	18 079
September	16 657	16 781	19 192	19 016	17 590
October	15 329	16 124	17 265	17 863	16 736

November	13 383	14 865	15 282	16 619	14 900
December	13 714	14 654	15 774	17 068	14 478
Total	190 645	185 820	206 926	223 347	210 430

Source: Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary,” p. 75.²⁴

Table 2. Individuals Accused of and Sentenced for performing abortions, 1938-1955

Year Sentenced	Number of Accused	Number of Convicted
1938	not available	522
1950	764	447
1951	1025	768
1952	1383	911
1953	1834	1568
1954	797	506
1955	785	476

Source: Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary,” p. 75.²⁵

Table 3. The number of known incomplete pregnancies in Hungary, 1950-1955

Year	Abortions	Miscarriages	Total
1950	not available	not available	36 000
1951	1 687	36 115	37 800
1952	1 717	43 096	44 813
1953	2 777	39 944	42 721
1954	16 281	42 029	58 310
1955	35 598	43 102	78 500

Source: Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary,” p. 75.²⁶

²⁴ “Data provided by György Németh, based on Ministry of Health statistics. The figure in bold represents the first occasion that the number of live births was influenced by the earlier introduction of the regulations limiting abortion.”

²⁵ “Data based on statistics compiled by the Office of the Chief Prosecutor of Hungary, NAH, XX-10 [Hungarian National Archives].”

²⁶ “Data based on statistics compiled by the Office of the Chief Prosecutor of Hungary, NAH, XX-10 [Hungarian National Archives].”

Table 4. Comprehensive Population Data

Year	Live Births	Deaths	Infant Deaths	Natural Increase
1943	178 320	127 760	20 036	50 560
1944	195 868	165 230	20 098	30 638
1945	169 091	211 323	28 601	-42 232
1946	169 120	135 486	19 703	33 634
1947	187 316	117 537	19 975	69 779
1948	191 907	105 780	18 054	86 127
1949	190 398	105 718	17 327	84 680
1950	195 567	106 902	16 759	88 665
1951	190 645	109 998	15 993	80 647
1952	185 820	107 443	12 987	78 377
1953	206 926	112 039	14 647	94 887
1954	223 347	106 670	13 556	116 677
1955	210 430	97 848	12 622	112 582

Source: Hungarian Statistical Yearbook, 1955.

Table 5. Birth-Related Statistics

Year	Live Births	Induced Abortions	Deaths	Natural Increase	Percent Increase
1952	185 820	1 715	107 443	78 377	8.3
1953	206 926	2 677	112 039	94 887	9.9
1954	223 347	16 281	106 670	116 677	12.0
1955	210 430	35 398	97 848	112 582	11.4
1956	192 810	82 463	104 236	88 574	9.0
1957	167 202	123 275	103 645	63 557	6.5
1958	158 428	145 578	97 866	60 562	6.1
1959	151 195	152 404	103 880	47 314	4.7
1960	146 461	162 160	101 525	44 936	4.5
1961	140 365	169 992	96 410	43 955	4.4
1962	130 053	163 656	108 273	21 780	2.1
1963	132 262	?	99 672	32 620	3.0

Source: "The Abortion Problem in Hungary: A Survey" April 7, 1964, RFE/RL Collection in the Open Society Archive's "Digital '56 archive," "Background Report: Hungary," Open Society Archives, Budapest.

Table 6. Report on the development of Budapest's public health situation, with a special look at abortion, premature labor and gonorrheal diseases

Year	Pregnancies*	Births	Registered Abortions/ Miscarriages	Birth to abortion/miscarriage
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		number	percent	number	percent	ratio
1946	24 448	17 182	79	5 062	21	3.4:1
1947	27 791	20 882	75	6 477	23	3.2:1
1948	28 969	21 191	73	7 414	26	2.9:1
1949	38 213	27 404	72	10 387	27	2.6:1
1950	40 132	28 783	72	10 755	27	2.8:1
1951	42 219	30 342	72	11 312	27	2.7:1

Source: “Report on the development of Budapest’s public health situation, with a special look at abortion, premature labor and gonorrheal diseases” in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, p.12, adapted by Michelle Sawyer.²⁷

Pető, for example, argues in relation to the data presented in Table 1:

As of January 1, 1954, abortion for reasons of social difficulties was permitted. It becomes clear from the study of the number of births that, due to the changing political climate, those who became pregnant in the summer and fall of 1952, would not have been able to apply for abortion (see Table 1 of the Appendix). What also becomes evident from the Table is that desire to have or not to have children was independent of regulation—those who did not want families found the way to have an abortion, regulation notwithstanding.

While Pető’s reasoning seems logical at first glance, she does not allow for other factors that might have attributed to the fluctuations in birth rates, such as the number of women of childbearing age. It is true that a general correspondence between Resolution 1.004 and the statistics does seem apparent, but Pető fails to provide a convincing argument supported by sophisticated demographic review.

1.3b Foucault

In my analysis of the Ratkó Era I am relying on the theory of carceral society developed by Foucault. This is not to suggest that 1950s Stalinist Hungary was a carceral society by any means, but rather that this concept allows one to glean a better sense of what population policies and surveillance meant in this period. In understanding Anna Ratkó’s role as Health Minister in

²⁷ The original table lists in column 2 all “birth events” which include extra-uterine pregnancies (which are always fatal to the fetus), live births and spontaneous miscarriages and abortions. To simplify the terms I have simply labeled the total number “pregnancies.”

the Rákosi regime, I am using the aspect of carceral culture known as ‘bureaucracy’ to describe how an individual becomes a cog in the bureaucratic machinery; I say this in light of evidence that points to Anna Ratkó simply serving as the body that filled the Ministerial chair at the time a totalitarian population-growth program was instituted. I discuss Anna Ratkó’s ineptitude as Minister of Health below, in chapter 1.3d as well as in chapter 2.1b and Chapter Four.

It is perhaps problematic to apply the idea of carceral society, which is traditionally reserved for discussion of Nazi Germany, to a relatively milder period, or at least one in which terror was not institutionalized and systematized to the extent to which it was undertaken in national socialist Germany. Here I am referring to a study by Gisela Bock, “Antinatalism, maternity and paternity in National Socialist racism” which addresses the question of Nazi Germany’s population policies, arguing that it was a decidedly antinatalist regime that forced abortions and sterilization on “undesirable racial elements.”²⁸ This article explains the larger degree to which the National Socialist regime discouraged and prevented pregnancy rather than encouraged it (among the wrong and right elements, respectively). Bock’s foucauldian approach is one I would like to parallel, though of course with some modifications. The Hungarian situation was not nearly as dramatic in terms of sheer brutality, but some of the same concepts apply, particularly the desire to increase the population. This aspect of totalitarian societies, the interest in expanding the population along with measures enacted to take control of the most private aspects of individuals’ lives, is consistent to both fascist and socialist regimes. Bock demonstrated the application of panopticism in the form of surveillance to the Nazi regime; Foucault’s theory is also relevant for state socialism in Hungary. I find this to be particularly true

²⁸ Gisela Bock, “Antinatalism, maternity and paternity in National Socialist racism” in *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare State, 1880s-1950s*, ed. Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 234-235.

of medical panopticism: “The registration of the pathological must be constantly centralized. The relation of each individual to his disease and to his death passes through the representatives of power, the registration they make of it, the decisions they take on it.”²⁹

Under totalitarian rule, citizens are subject to the total control of the regime; subjects cannot even claim to own their health or illnesses, as these are also under control of the state.³⁰ Rákosi’s reproduction politics are not the most extreme example of “natalist”³¹ policies, as an examination of Nazi policies or those of Ceausescu evinces. Nazi Germany is an extreme example of a totalitarian regime (or in the case of Hungary under Rákosi, one that strives to be considered as such) deliberately pursuing particular policies that continue the “race” or the nation, but is a good reference point for my study, providing a better known example, and one that has been studied extensively.

Despite the fact that Foucault’s writings have focused exclusively on the nineteenth century, he has shaped much thought on totalitarianism and control of the body through his theory of biopolitics and biopower in the twentieth century. In the first pages of *Discipline and Punish* in the chapter entitled “Torture,” Foucault described the “technology of power” known as “sovereign power,” and which is the pre-modern use of extreme violence against a subject group.³² In *Society Must be Defended*, “sovereign power” is updated in the modern period (though only supplemented, rather than replaced³³) to consist of “discipline” and “bio-power,”

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 304.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ I simply use the value-neutral term “Natalist” as opposed to pro- or anti-natalist to convey that what perhaps was intended to be pro-natalist resulted in rather the opposite effect. See Gisela Bock, “Antinatalism, maternity and paternity in National Socialist racism,” p. 234-235.

³² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 3-31.

³³ Mark G. E. Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 43.

the latter referring to the state's concern for fostering the life and growth of its population. Bio-power centered on the body "as an object to be manipulated [...] The basic goal of disciplinary power was to produce a human being who could be treated as a 'docile body.' This docile body also had to be a productive body, a criterion necessary for citizenship under the Soviet socialist system."³⁴ The technology of discipline developed and was perfected in workshops, barracks, prisons and hospitals."³⁵ This type of control over bodies and populations is unquestionably tied to the rise of capitalism, according to Dreyfuss and Rabinow, but I would agree that the context of rapid industrialization and an attempt to firmly establish a socialist, totalitarian dictatorship/regime is also an appropriate setting for the use of bio-power as it is exhibited through mass control via health campaigns (in this case a reproductive campaign).³⁶

1.3c Totalitarianism

I find that a relatively easy segue can be made between my use of Foucault's social theories and the work of Hannah Arendt, the connection being totalitarianism. I agree with Andrea Pető that the Rákosi regime represents a failed attempt to establish totalitarian rule in Hungary,³⁷ with reproductive policies serving as a means to achieve that end. However, my use of "totalitarianism" and what I later refer to as the "totalitarian nature" of the People's Republic of Hungary after 1948 (from roughly 1949 to 1953) warrants some definition:

The word "totalitarian" has its origins in Italian Fascism, but has been applied to dictatorships and regimes as ideologically diverse as Nazism and Communism. It was coined by

³⁴ Mark Pittaway, *Brief Histories: Eastern Europe 1939-2000* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), ch. 4 "A society based on productive labor", pp. 87-108.

³⁵ Hubert L. Dreyfuss and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 134-135.

³⁶ Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, p. 43.

³⁷ Pető, "Women's Rights in Stalinist Hungary," p. 50.

Italian journalist and politician Giovanni Amendola in 1923, but was used as a term of disdain, meant to criticize the Fascists' militarized politics used to gain a power monopoly in Italy. By definition a totalitarian regime controls every aspect of its citizens' lives and is in this way 'totalizing.' Giovanni Gentile and Benito Mussolini defined totalitarianism at the ideological level in "The Doctrine of Fascism" in the 1920s, as the ultimate ends, the ultimate means, the all-embracing reality. The use of this term has expanded to include other regimes, on the basis that these represent a 'new' kind of politics, in that they aspire to create a revolutionary and original kind of society in which everything was dictated from above, thus ensuring success and efficiency in every aspect of the nation's population. However, as I discuss in chapter 4.3, and as has been addressed in the introduction, this new kind of politics required a propaganda campaign to be accepted by the population, along with the extreme measures that imposed the will of the dictator from above.³⁸

While measures are enacted to impose totalitarian rule on a given population, the foundation for building a totalitarian society lies within the realm of reproduction. Control over such an intimate³⁹ area of personal life, one which is wholly determined by individual choice under ordinary circumstances, has a twofold importance for a totalitarian regime: first, establishing control over what is arguably the most personal sphere makes it clear that the state (or party, as the case may be) has control over *everything*; when the most important stronghold has been captured, the rest of the conquest is much easier. Secondly, reproductive policies (along with accompanying educational and propaganda programs) can serve as a type of insurance

³⁸ György, "The Mirror of Everyday Life, or the Will to a Period Style," p.15.

³⁹ Pető, "Women's Rights in Stalinist Hungary," p. 50. Pető quotes the January 17, 1949 meeting minutes of the National Health Council, when gynecological expert Pál Kiss asserted that "the gravid state is an intimate matter" in response to the possibility of new regulations concerning abortion.

against an uncertain future. If a ruler can be assured that new generations will be numerous, and will be indoctrinated to accept totalitarian rule, the internal security of the nation is slightly more certain.

Because I consider Stalinist Hungary to be an attempted totalitarian state, I argue that in this “totality” the body is viewed as just as accessible as any other part of society and thus there is no private sphere. According to Arendt, reproduction becomes a practice of the state.⁴⁰ But this is an easy acquisition for a totalitarian regime, or any other patriarchal government, as women have already been subjugated by tradition and history for uncountable years. Women’s bodies have traditionally also been the explicit property of men, and this is just another manifestation of power; in this case, male domination over women mirrors the state’s domination over reproductive freedom, as women are considered core loci of reproduction (not simply in the biological sense but in the sense that a mother is responsible for educating and raising her children). Thus the patriarchal state socialist government did not encounter problems in imposing restrictive reproductive policies but rather in sustaining them.

1.3d Biography as Context

My examination of the Ratkó Era would be sorely lacking a crucial element if I were to neglect to mention the woman herself, Health Minister Anna Ratkó. I embarked upon my research with the suspicion that Ratkó’s legacy was unfairly assigned her; everyone in Hungary knows her name because it is synonymous with an unpopular ministerial decree thought to have caused “an abnormal demographic pattern [that caused] dramatic peaks and recessions in births every twenty years—and the consequent cycles of shortage and abundance in the labour force

⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 126.

and human infrastructure, jobs, flats, hospitals, crèches, schools.”⁴¹ I was convinced that the true story of Anna Ratkó had been neglected in favor of the image that had become publicly reviled. However, research into Ratkó’s biography and career proved her to be as boorish, unpopular and poorly chosen for the Health Ministry post as popular opinion holds. Internal documents illustrate Ratkó’s unsatisfactory work and the discussions leading up to her replacement in 1953, though the problems were noted more than a year earlier.⁴² A carefully researched work by Piroska Kocsis acknowledges that Anna Ratkó had absolutely nothing to do with the “Ratkó Law” except sharing her name with it in colloquial usage.⁴³ Her agency as Minister of Health was not actually that at all; in an interview from 1979 Ratkó recalled that Rákosi told her, upon appointing her to organize the Welfare Ministry into the Ministry of Health, that it was not up to her to decide what was to be done, but rather, what the Party needed.⁴⁴

Thus it turned out that Anna Ratkó’s most important role was not as Minister of Health in the Rákosi regime, but as a symbolic figure who was used to represent a certain attitude and the Communist ideology. Kocsis writes of the deliberate choice of a woman for Minister of Health (and future messenger and signatory of reproductive measures) in order to convey an image of a compassionate and sympathetic Ministry of Health that would benefit society.⁴⁵ In *Art and Society in the Age of Stalin* Péter György writes of Hungary, that “the effort made to change the visual landscape of everyday life and to establish a new system of symbols was part of the wish for a period style, that is, part of a series of programmes also interpretable as a manifestation of,

⁴¹ Kiss, “The Second No: Women in Hungary,” p. 54.

⁴² “A leváltáshoz vezető út” (“The Road Leading to Replacement”), collection of six documents from the Hungarian National Archives, available at <http://www.archivnet.hu/old/index.phtml>, last accessed June 4, 2010.

⁴³ Piroska Kocsis, “A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig,” (“From The Loom to the Ministerial Chair”), www.archivnet.hu, last accessed 1 June, 2010.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

or will to, power.”⁴⁶ Thus Ratkó’s term as Health Minister, in light of the unsuccessful reproductive measures and poor performance reports, can be viewed as part of the symbolic politics of socialism that were meant to lend themselves to the public perception of a powerful, totalizing regime.

⁴⁶ György, “The Mirror of Everyday Life, or the Will to a Period Style,” p. 15.

Chapter 2 Legal and Policy Developments

2.1 Historical Legal and Policy Developments and their Contexts: 19th and 20th Centuries

To focus exclusively on a very brief period containing the most drastic changes in population policy in Hungary, 1953 to 1956, is to focus too narrowly on a very small part of the story of reproduction policies in Hungary. The Ratkó Era needs to be put in context through a brief history of abortion and abortion legislation in Hungary. However, it is important to understand these legislative changes regarding abortion in the Ratkó Era in and of themselves, simply as means of manipulating (or attempting to manipulate) the population and birth rate. In the following I describe the legal history of abortion in Hungary, with particular attention to the 1950s and reproductive rights under the Rákosi regime in the context of the inherited penal code from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, later on, in the context of Sovietization and the influence of the Kremlin.

After the invasion of the Red Army in 1945, while various political parties clamored for control of the country, the contemporary law in force concerning abortion and its consequences was inherited from the penal code of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, from 1878. Andrea Pető's extensive research on the subject has resulted in estimates that anywhere from 50,000 to 200,000 Hungarian women were the victims of rape at the hands of the Soviet Army in 1945. The authorities' response was to make abortion legal and free of charge; a temporary suspension of the 1878 law that criminalized abortion under all circumstances.⁴⁷ Before this suspension, the

⁴⁷ Pető, "Átvonuló hadsereg, maradandó trauma—Az 1945-os budapesti nemi erőszak esetek emlékezete," pp. 86-89.

legal code that had been kept intact for more than half a century had not been very strictly enforced; abortion was the primary form of birth control for most people,⁴⁸ particularly during periods of hardship and during wartime. According to Statute V, paragraph 284 of the Hungarian Penal Code of 1878, the intentional “driving out” of a fetus or infant⁴⁹ was a punishable offence, with sentences varying in accordance to the mother’s marital status. In addition, categories of punishment were created for induced abortion carried out by the mother alone, with the aid of a second party, and in the case of the mother’s unintentional death, which warranted the most severe punishment of fifteen years in prison.

Hungarian abortion legislation in the nineteenth century, in comparison to that of the twentieth century, contains language that is more inclusive of a variety of circumstances or actions. For example, paragraph 285 does not provide a degree of difference between abortion and infanticide: “A mother who, outside of marriage, has a child and intentionally kills the child before birth or immediately after will be punished with five years in prison.”⁵⁰ There is no such mention of a time sequence (“before or after birth”) in amended abortion regulations in my period of study that might connote a correlation between abortion and infanticide, or even a correlation between abortion and murder. In fact, abortion until the twenty-eighth week (the seventh month, which falls into the realm of third-trimester abortion, which is considered a crime in most places with liberal abortion laws) was acceptable for medical reasons in this period.⁵¹ I argue that the shift from the nineteenth century inclusion of abortion and infanticide under the

⁴⁸ Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary,” p. 50.

⁴⁹ The statute uses both words ‘fetus’ and ‘infant,’ indicating a relationship between abortion and infanticide that will be discussed below.

⁵⁰ 1878 Büntető Törvény XVIII. Fejezet, Cikk 284 “Az ember élete elleni büntettek és vétségek” (1878 Penal Code, Chapter 18, paragraph 284 “Punishment for offences against human life and birth”), *Magyar Törvénytár: 1877-1878. évi Törvények (Hungarian Law: Law Articles 1877-1878)*, (Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, Magyar Irod. Intézet és Könyvnyomda, 1896), p. 145.

⁵¹ Ibid., paragraph 285.

same penal measures to the Ratkó Era abortion legislation that does not include infanticide whatsoever indicates that infanticide is no longer considered to be in the same category of crime. The legal implications of these language discrepancies could point to the fact that the criminality of abortion as it is construed under state socialism is *not* based on the taking of a life, or murder. András Mink writes that the 1878 penal code classified abortion with homicide,⁵² whereas the legislation of the Ratkó Era makes no such claim. What is implied instead, is that the most serious criminal aspect of abortion is the ‘subversive’ act of undermining the socialist plan to increase the population

The officially strict anti-abortion laws, in place since 1878 but not actually enforced,⁵³ remained in place through the turn of the century and into the tumultuous events of the first half of the twentieth century. However, while it is clear that illegal abortion was a common occurrence, particularly during war, this was a practice ignored by authorities until after 1945, when the commonplace rape resulted in public outcry. Andrea Pető explains:

At the time the government made abortions permissible at health care facilities free of charge, if authorized by a medical officer. During this revamping of the abortion laws, in order to prevent unavoidable emotional outbursts in the domestic political arena, Hungary’s rulers deliberately created a judicial uncertainty about the issue. The communist-dominated Ministry of Health did not want to exacerbate the daily in the ranks of the country’s coalition government with a new issue; instead the matter was regulated through direct ministerial orders.⁵⁴

Pető explains that abortion legislation after 1945 was handled through decrees that were not put before parliament in order to avoid conflict. I would add that in the Ratkó era legislative changes were put in effect by direct and specific ministerial decrees (which carried the same weight as a

⁵² András Mink, “Kis magyar-abortusztörténet,” (“A Short Hungarian Abortion History”), *Beszélő (Speaker)*, November 30, 1991, p. 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary,” p. 51.

parliament-approved measure) to avoid conflict but also to impose the party's will on the people in a furtive and incontestable manner.

Concerning the wave of abortions and sexually transmitted diseases left in the wake of the Red Army's "sexual lust, revenge, and [...] desire to demonstrate power,"⁵⁵ Peter Kenez acknowledges the Communists' desperation and dismay at the Russian soldiers behavior, writing that rape committed by the soldiers of the Red Army was considered taboo as long as the Communist regime existed, and no one spoke of it.⁵⁶ Rákosi wrote for help to Moscow, citing that the Communists' struggle to gain credence in the eyes of the Hungarian people was made even more difficult by the "bad behavior of the soldiers of the Red Army for which we are blamed."⁵⁷ Despite this, the Communist Party's popularity and influence grew tremendously in the immediate post-war period, until the official communist take-over in 1948.

After the Communists took power in 1948, the abortion policy was changed to mirror that of the Soviet Union since 1936, when abortion was re-criminalized after a brief period of legality.⁵⁸ In response to Stalin's call for an increase in the work force, required for the quick and efficient industrialization of the nation, family allowances were increased repeatedly in order to encourage family growth. However, the People's Welfare Council was very much swayed by the strong demand for a relaxed regulation of abortion as early as 1947. Agitation for abortion reform grew, though "the law itself was easily cheated" as women could simply gain the

⁵⁵ László Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War, 1945-1956* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), p. 56.

⁵⁶ Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 44.

⁵⁷ Henrik Vass, ed., "Dokumentumok Rákositól—Rákosiról." *Múltunk* nos.2-3 (1991): 247, quoted in Kenez, p. 45.

⁵⁸ Engel, *Women in Russia*, p. 154.

cooperation of the required internist and gynecologist through bribery or some appeal to human compassion.⁵⁹

2.1a Chronology: The Ratkó Era

For the purposes of this study, which is concerned with the reproductive policies of Stalinist Hungary, a period otherwise known in common usage as the Ratkó Era, I am narrowing my focus to the years 1949 to 1956. This is considered the Ratkó Era in the broadest of definitions; Anna Ratkó became the first female minister in Hungary as Minister of Welfare in June of 1949, which is where I begin my study, and the ministerial decree known as the “Ratkó Law” was officially repealed in the summer of 1956, with the very last vestiges of the decree lasting until January 1, 1957. This period represents an atmosphere of extreme turmoil and rapid turnover in the sphere of reproductive rights, and is deserving of attention as an example of the totalitarian nature of early state socialism in Hungary. Thus a chronological description of events is necessary.

Ratkó’s years as the Minister of Health are the most important for our purposes, though her role in the Communist women’s organization, Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége (Hungarian Women’s Democratic Alliance, or MNDSZ), in 1945 is worth mentioning. Ratkó helped found the magazine *Nők Lapja* (*Women’s Journal*), which still exists today, though in a dramatically different form, as it is no longer politically affiliated. It was originally formed as the official mouthpiece of the MNDSZ, and parlayed official party news as well as advice on homemaking and motherhood. This was the primary source for party news and as such was the primary source for women to learn about ‘mother and child protection’ measures in the form of

⁵⁹ Ferenc Szabó, *Az abortuszkérdés és a magyar társadalom századunkban*, (*The Abortion Question and Hungarian Society in our Century*), (Budapest: Magyar Napló, 1999), p. 28.

increases in maternity leave, medical care during pregnancy, and the increased punishment for illegal abortion in Resolution 1.004.

Anna Ratkó served as Minister of Welfare (the ministry was initially created in 1945) immediately after the communist take-over in the newly formed István Dobi government, from June 11, 1949. It was proposed that this Welfare Ministry be reorganized into a ministry of public health on November 23, 1950, following the example set by the Soviet Union.⁶⁰ Despite having no medical training and no higher education outside of party courses and textile technician certification, Ratkó was chosen to lead the Ministry of Health during its transformation from welfare department to public health agency for her proven powers of organization.⁶¹ The Ministry of Health's existence became official on January 1, 1950, but work did not start until mid-way through the year, with Anna Ratkó taking the helm officially on December 16.⁶² It should be noted that simply the lack of an official Health Ministry before 1950 does not indicate that matters of public health were not administered under the Welfare Ministry, as they indeed were.

I consider the Ratkó Era to be more than just the period connected with Ratkó's term of office; in colloquial usage and the minds of Hungarians the Ratkó Era is comprised of everything having to do with measures restricting reproductive freedom (which includes access to contraceptives as well as access to abortion, in other words, the freedom to prevent unwanted pregnancies) in the first few years after the Communists came to power. Minutes from a January 1949 meeting of the country's senior-most doctors reveal a discussion about the distribution and

⁶⁰ Kocsis, "A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig."

⁶¹ Mrs. Gyula Králl, Ratkó Anna visszaemlékezése életútjáról. (Interjú, 1979. január. Politikatörténeti és Szakszervezeti Levéltár.) [Ratkó Anna reminiscences about her path of life. (Interview, 1979. January. History of politics and Szakszervezeti Levéltár.)], quoted in Kocsis, "A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig."

⁶² Kocsis, "A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig."

advocacy of use of contraceptive devices. Not surprisingly, the doctors give their professional opinion that contraceptives should only be prescribed by a physician when it is proven that a pregnancy will endanger the woman's health or life.⁶³ Dr Losonczy makes it clear that contraceptive devices are only suitable for those who are unable to carry a pregnancy to term without considerable risk to life and limb, thus implying that sex without the intention of conception is not normal, unhealthy, or otherwise against the norm. This attitude toward reproduction, as being not only a national obligation, but the sole object of sexual relations, was shared by many, and entered public discourse well before the Ratkó Era, as the minutes from 1949 show. Not surprisingly, Health Minister Anna Ratkó shared this view, and stated in a 1974 interview that "a marriage is worth nothing without a child."⁶⁴ The population loss sustained in World War II was compounded by the newly reigning socialists' desire to industrialize rapidly and "build socialism," a campaign which would need more and more workers to be realized.

Besides measures undertaken to limit the availability of contraceptive devices, the first action taken to decrease the number of abortions (and thus increase the number of live births) was order 81/34/1952, signed by Ratkó on May 29, 1952.⁶⁵ This mandate stated that an abortion would be allowed by the state in the first twenty-eight weeks of pregnancy if a woman's life or health would be endangered, or if the fetus has undergone damage or has a hereditary disease that would affect its life if it were carried to term. In the case that either of these conditions were

⁶³ Minutes of January 3, 1949: "Fogamzásgátlószerek forgalombahozatala," "Distribution of Contraceptive Devices," Documents of Ministry of Health, XIX-C-9 15th box, Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives, hereafter MOL), Budapest.

⁶⁴ Endre Várkonyi, "Múlt idők tanúi, Ratkó Anna: Tizenheten az asztalnál, Egy 'törvény' története" ("The Witnesses of the Past, Anna Ratkó: Seventeen People at the Table, the Story of a 'Law'") in *Magyarország (Hungary)* 39, (1974) p. 21.

⁶⁵ "Az egészségügyi miniszter 81/34/1952. Eü.M. számú utasítása a terhesség megszakításának szabályozása tárgyában," ("Ministry of Health Order No. 81/34/1952 concerning the Regulation of Procured Abortions,") in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, pp. 19-21.

met, the order provided for the creation and organization of two classes of medical committees to hear a woman or her doctor's petition for an abortion. If the first commission ruled against abortion, the petitioner could appeal the decision to the second committee, which held the power of final decision. In a period when abortions for medical reasons were easily procured,⁶⁶ this mandate made the process much more difficult. The bureaucratic process was made much longer and therefore decreased the chances a woman could complete all the necessary steps to have her abortion carried out, unless it was really considered a medical emergency. This was intended to weed out cases where the woman was perhaps incorrectly convinced her pregnancy would be dangerous, or cases where the woman was simply unwilling to have a child for financial or monetary reasons.⁶⁷

According to official reports and information circulated within the highest levels of the party, all measures concerning reproductive rights (such as increasing paid maternity leave, and known as *anya- és gyermekvédelem*, or mother and child protection) and especially concerning abortion were enacted in order to fight population decline. A report from 1960 claims, "In Hungary between 1936 and 1952 the birth rate vacillated between 18.5 and 21 percent. In 1945 to 1946 the lower rate of 18.7 percent decreased the average of the years 1947 to 1950, making the birth rate 20 percent. In 1951 to 1952 the birth rate returned to the average of 1938 to 1944 (19.6 percent)."⁶⁸ The report outlines the major changes in reproductive rights legislation, beginning with Resolution 1004/1953, known colloquially as the *Ratkó Törvény*, or "Ratkó

⁶⁶ Pető, "Women in Stalinist Hungary" p. 52.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "Jelentés: a születésszám alakulásáról hazánkban," "Report: On the State of the Birth Rate in our Homeland," 1960, Ministry of Health, 00158/1960," Documents of Ministry of Health, XIX-C-2-S, 2. Doboz I.1 1947-1963, MOL, Budapest.

Law.”⁶⁹ Among Ratkó’s ministerial decrees that are included in this study, the “Ratkó Law” is the second, and included a measure for increasing penalties against abortionists, complementing the decree of 1952, which provided for the creation of committees to determine if an abortion would be allowed for health reasons.

This resolution included six items that were intended to “continue the increase of mother and child protection measures,”⁷⁰ with the last item calling for the restriction of abortion on an unprecedented scale. The baby boom that occurred after Resolution 1.004 was enacted was a palpable increase that reached its highest level in 1954, according to the official report from 1960, and other statistical data. The increase of the birth rate to pre-war levels was responsible for the overcrowding in nurseries and schools that was observed in the following years.⁷¹ “The classical ‘fifties’ period of pre-1956 Stalinism was dominated by a strict and anti-humanist population policy which forced the birth of each and every foetus;”⁷² thus Resolution 1.004 was unpopular, and after the shock of Stalin’s March 5th death had subsided over the summer, actions were taken to relax the restrictions in October. A confidential order went into effect on January first of 1954, officially creating committees that would hear petitions for abortions on social grounds, such as lack of housing.⁷³

The new Imre Nagy government took more steps to relax the anti-abortion regulation,

⁶⁹ Resolution 1.004 was given the nickname “Ratkó Law” by contemporary Hungarians, the legislation in spite of the fact that it was rather a ministerial decree, not a law; under the parliamentary rules of the day a ministerial decree could carry the same weight as a law, according to Kilényi and Lamm in *Parliamentarism and Government in a One-Party System*, p. 147.

⁷⁰ “A Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsának határozata az anya- és gyermekvédelem továbbfejlesztéséről,” in *Nők Lapja* (1953), pp.1-2.

⁷¹ Kocsis, “A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig.”

⁷² Julia Szalai, “Abortion in Hungary” in *Feminist Review* 29, (Summer 1988), p. 98.

⁷³ Pető, “Women in Stalinist Hungary,” p. 52. Kocsis, however, says that October 10, 1953 marked the first alleviations of the resolution.

and the mini baby boom came to an end, with the Ministry of Health report stating that the birth rate had dropped to 19 percent by 1956. The strictest period of abortion restriction had lasted scarcely seven months, and after June 24, 1956, the law became much more liberal, even comparable to the period following the end of World War II. The summer of 1956, a period of increasing tension, and that led up to the October revolution (called a counter-revolution by the Hungarian Communist Party and Soviet Union) witnessed the enactment of Ministerial Decree 2/1956, which allowed women to apply for abortions within the first three months of pregnancy.

2.1b Communism: The Take-Over, Legal System

This section examines the ways in which Hungary was influenced not only by practices and policies of the Soviet Union, but also by direct instruction (for example, the appointment of Imre Nagy, and the relaxation of the abortion restrictions were mandated by authorities in Moscow, to be discussed below). This is useful for understanding the degree to which the failed attempt of the Rákosi regime to install totalitarian leadership was due to inept imitation, shortsightedness or blindness caused by ideological zealotry, and simple inability to assert proper control.

At the time of the Communist take-over, and as the 1950s progressed, Moscow's influence in Hungarian affairs were increasing, despite the official sovereignty of Hungary as a political entity under Soviet control. According to László Borhi, "intervention took a variety of forms ranging from military intervention to political consultations in Moscow or even Soviet participation in the deliberations of local decision-making organs."⁷⁴ He continues, asserting that the purpose of this intervention between 1953 and 1955 (after the death of Stalin) was to "induce moderate or radical changes" in domestic policy. Hence Imre Nagy's rise to the post of minister

⁷⁴ Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War*, p. 10.

of interior, and the subsequent reform government were instigated by the Kremlin.⁷⁵ However, it must be stressed that the reforms of Imre Nagy and others were “autonomous ideas,” and not reactions to commands from Moscow.⁷⁶ Yet before the end of Rákosi’s reign in 1954, there was considerable influence from Moscow as well. It must not be forgotten that the major players of the Hungarian Communist Party, including Rákosi, Revai, Gerő, and Farkás had all spent long years in Moscow, were tied directly to the Kremlin, held nothing sacred save Communist ideology⁷⁷ and were in this way to a certain extent alienated from the Hungarian people. Furthermore, they were also all Jewish, adding to their outsider status.⁷⁸ The “Sovietization” process that was taking place was imposed from above, and even the Hungarian agents of this process were thoroughly Sovietized.

The Soviet influence in its satellite territories has been interpreted as either a response to actions from the West, and therefore a set of improvisations that had to be adapted depending on the situation, or, conversely, according to the so-called totalitarian paradigm, as the controlled

⁷⁵ Ibid. Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War*, pp. 10, 37, 77, explains the “Soviet interference that helped [him] to power in 1953”: “Voroshilov [Chairman of the Allied Control Commission, which ‘operated as an organ of the Soviet military command and was subordinated to it’] was instructed to renegotiate the government positions for the HCP [Hungarian Communist Party] to get the Interior Ministry [...]. Voroshilov and Pushkin [Allied Control Commission political advisor] took the matter into their own hands. They had an unexpectedly easy time in convincing the Smallholder leaders of the need to accept the Communist proposal. Finally the Communist Imre Nagy took the Interior Ministry; while Szakasits, whose allegiance to Moscow was easily as strong as Rákosi’s, was appointed deputy prime minister.” Pittaway also comments on Soviet pressure for the appointment of Imre Nagy in *Brief Histories*, p. 64.

⁷⁶ Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War*, p. 10.

⁷⁷ Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, p. 23 explains “They [Rákosi, Gerő, Farkas and Revai] had no lives or interests outside of the Communist movement.”

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 22-24. Kenez writes that “Georgii Dimitrov, the ex-leader of the defunct Comintern [...] suggested to Rákosi that, in order not to call attention to the unfortunately very large role that Jews played in the Hungarian Communist Party, the ‘Jewish Comrades’ should be employed in jobs, such as editorial work, that did not have direct contact with the masses” Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések, 1940-1956*, vol. 2, pp. 924-925, quoted in Kenez, pp. 23-24.

and calculated machinations following precise blueprints.⁷⁹ I agree with Kenez's argument in *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets* that "What happened in Hungary was decided elsewhere, primarily in Moscow. Soviet policy was a series of improvisations, and it developed gradually between the end of the war and the imposition of complete Communist control,"⁸⁰ though I would argue that this improvisation continued after the Communist power grab, and that this is nowhere better exemplified than in the changing reproductive policies. It is interesting to note that Kenez calls the tendency to place blame for the expansionist politics of the Soviet Union the "totalitarian paradigm." Proponents of this paradigm, such as Hugh Seton-Watson, for example, claim that a finely structured plan was implemented and carried out in stages, in an attempt to establish an ever-growing sphere of Soviet influence. Yet the failure to establish and maintain totalitarian rule in Hungary shows a different side of the communist take-over; specifically, as far as reproductive policies are concerned, the short-lived⁸¹ abortion restrictions of the early 1950s illustrate the inadequacies of the regime and its policies.

After the Second World War, the Communist Party was the first to organize in Hungary, and was able to take advantage of the internal divisions plaguing the other parties; the question remained, was it better to "recognize that there was no alternative to cooperation with the Communists and seek the least damaging compromise, or should one resist them every step of

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.2 n2. Kenez uses the phrase "so-called totalitarian paradigm" to refer to those who assumed that "the expansionist politics of the Soviet Union were responsible for the deterioration of East-West relations."

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

⁸¹ Kürti, "The Wingless Eros of Socialism," p. 58. Kürti calls the "economic and ideological incentives" provided by Resolution 1.004 "successful," because he posits that they were directly responsible for the "population boom." I argue that this approach takes too much for granted. Further, Kürti writes that the "perverse 'number crunching' strategies deployed by both the factory and the womb served the state's utopian goal: the creation of a communist nation-state of Hungary" but does not acknowledge the totalitarian aspect of its creation, a strategy that ultimately failed. The laws were eventually repealed due in part to lack of proper planning and infrastructure to handle the population growth.

the way?”⁸² This struggle for power was marked by the manipulative efforts of the communists to make sure their future success would be secured. According to Borhi, the communists did not consider the election part of the democratic process but more along the lines of an all-important showdown, a “‘struggle’ which would decide who was to rule not for a temporary period of time, but for the rest of history.”⁸³

The Communist dictatorship that began in 1948 was certainly colored by the power struggle and manipulations of the immediate post-war years, thus it is appropriate to discuss the political heritage of this dictatorship. In 1946 “parliament was a fig leaf that concealed the true scope of Communist influence. Its powers were severely limited and the nation was governed by decrees discussed at inter-party meetings *a posteriori* sanctioned by a select legislative body, the Political Committee.”⁸⁴ The communist idea of democracy was revealed by actions taken in the period leading up to the election, with price manipulation and controlling the supply of consumer goods. It was determined in this election that Hungary would adopt the Stalinist model of the Soviet Union. This model was taken on in both a formal and bureaucratic sense, though Borhi points out that the “political system in Hungary in the early 1950s amounted to not much more than the rule of Rákosi and perhaps two more of his political associates.”⁸⁵ The 1988 *Parliamentarism and Government in a One-Party System*, intended to educate other nations about the nature of socialist forms of government, even acknowledges “the fictitious role of parliament” when “the socialist pattern institutionalized in the Soviet Union and [...] Eastern

⁸² Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, p. 81.

⁸³ Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War*, p. 125.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 203.

European countries.”⁸⁶ This gives credence to Kocsis’s assertion that Anna Ratkó, whose signature backed the infamous abortion legislation of 1953 and whose name has forever been associated with that decree was in fact not responsible for writing or even conceiving of the regulation.⁸⁷

In Hungarian, the words *törvény*, *rendelet*, *határozat* and *utasítás* denote the different degrees of formal significance of legal measures, with a rough translation into English being, respectively, Law, Decree, Decision and Order, with the last two terms being more or less synonymous. According to *The Hungarian-English Legal Dictionary (Magyar-Angol jogi szótár)*, *törvény* is an “act, law, statute; statutory law, Act of Parliament.”⁸⁸ This is the highest degree of legislation, bearing parliamentary approval. *Rendelet* is a “decree or order”⁸⁹ and can act as a law, but does not require parliamentary approval, instead being issued by the government. *Határozat* (“resolution, decision or verdict”⁹⁰) and *utasítás* (“directive, instruction or precept”⁹¹) refer to specific mandates issued directly from ministerial chairs, circumventing parliamentary approval and requiring instead simply the signature of the Minister of, for example, Health.

⁸⁶ Kilényi and Lamm (eds.), *Parliamentarism and Government in a One-Party System*, p. 57. The Parliament in the early 1950s is described further: “Parliament, practically speaking, had but one function: to demonstrate through its existence and operation the national unity of the people—the general consensus of the entire nation—for the whole world to see” (p. 58).

⁸⁷ Kocsis, “A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig.” I will discuss this legislation and the role and agency (or lack thereof) of Ratkó specifically in Chapter 3.

⁸⁸ Imre Móra, *Magyar-Angol jogi szótár*, (*Hungarian-English Legal Dictionary*), Budapest: Műszaki Fordító Vállalat, 1992, p. 235.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 202.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 240.

2.2 Legal and Policy Sources—An In-Depth Analysis

The following documents represent the major legal changes concerning women's reproductive rights in the Ratkó Era. I have included the internal memoranda and reports, as well as actual published laws, in *Rendeletek és Törvények Hivatalos Gyujteménye (The Official Collection of Laws and Ordinances)*, published yearly.

The first document to be addressed is Minister's Directive 81/34/1952, signed on May 29, 1952 by Minister of Health Anna Ratkó. This *utasítás* was a directive of the Health Ministry undertaken to discourage abortions through thirteen rules which delineate the legal time frame and reasons for terminating a pregnancy, and then determine the scope of organization for the committees which are set up by this order to rule whether or not an abortion will be permitted. Rule number one allowed abortions to be performed in the first twenty-eight weeks of pregnancy⁹² if the mother's health or life was in danger, or if the fetus was at risk for birth defects or hereditary disease that would seriously compromise its life. The rest of the directives concern the election, jurisdiction and composition of the abortion committees.

This directive was issued in order to regulate abortion,⁹³ namely to reduce the numbers of abortions performed under circumstances of legality such as they were in 1952, when the 1878 law criminalizing abortion was still in place. This is made explicit in the directive when it mentions that abortions seriously endanger "the pregnant woman's life, health, ability to work

⁹² This is equivalent to seven months, and means that late-term abortions were permissible for health reasons, granted that a team (or two teams, depending on whether or not the woman appeals her first refusal) approves the abortion. Note that in 1954, when social reasons were allowed considered valid reasons to request an abortion, the time limit was restricted to the first twelve weeks, or the first trimester.

⁹³ The title of the order confirms this: "Az egészségügyi miniszter 81/34/1952. Eü. M. számú utasítása a terhesség megszakításának szabályozása tárgyában," ("Health Minister's No. 81/34/1952 Directive with the Object of Regulating Abortion"), in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, pp. 19-21

and future fertility on the one hand, and the establishment of the number of the births on the other hand.”⁹⁴ The following enclosures establish medical committees to determine if a woman will be granted permission for an abortion on medical grounds, making the process much more difficult, and imposing more and more criteria for permission. Given that women were confronted with teams of doctors who would determine definitively her state of reproductive health, it is likely that women who might have been able to convince their private physicians of their medical problem (when in reality none existed, but the pregnancy was unwanted) and thus gained permission according to the legislation in force⁹⁵ would, under the new directive, be unable to procure an abortion. The directive would thus discourage women who were not legitimately eligible for an abortion for health reasons to apply, as the prospect of navigating the bureaucracy and confronting committees of unknown persons with a personal problem would act as a deterrent. Thus, the mechanisms of carceral society as introduced in chapter one, subchapter “Foucault” were drawn tighter around a woman’s body.

According to the directive, the first-degree medical committee would be composed in the following manner:

Section (1) of the present decree requires the use of a first-degree commission to determine the judgment, which must be organized in a health institution. The commission must have a leader who will be a permanent member and who is required to be an obstetric gynecologist. The city council and the health division of the county council will choose the leader as well as the commission’s second member, who is to be an internist; these two standing members will be chosen/replaced every three years according to Budapest city council terms of office. The commission leader will choose the commission’s third member from among specialists of the pregnant woman’s disease.

According to these provisions for the organization of the medical abortion committees, the most knowledgeable experts in the field of obstetrics and the given disease would be responsible for

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

⁹⁵ Pető, “Women in Stalinist Hungary” p. 51.

the woman's care, meaning that an abortion would surely not be permitted unless it was absolutely necessary. However, there was a degree of leeway around these regulations, as has been attested to by Ferenc Szabó in *The Abortion Question and Hungarian Society in Our Century*.⁹⁶ The limited success of the directive creating these abortion committees, along with a host of other factors and declining statistical trends, led to the drafting of numerous reports on the need to stimulate the population growth⁹⁷ and led ultimately to a 'solution' as embodied by Resolution 1.004/1953, which went into effect less than one year later.

The next document is the published resolution 1004/1953, signed February 8, 1953 and officially enacted on March 1. In six paragraphs, the resolution laid out the measures that would be taken to improve conditions for mothers, children and families, thereby encouraging reproduction. The Resolution goes on at length about socialist values which proclaim that man(kind) is of greatest importance, and that the "increased protection of marriage, family, motherhood and children is the common cause of our nation."⁹⁸

The three aims of this resolution were to increase the number of births, tax the income of childless adults, and prosecute illegal abortion with relentless vigor. State-provided medical care for pregnant women, improvements in maternity leave (which was a combination of increased time off from work along with an increase in financial relief) and expanded family allowances for families with three children or more were all part of the scheme to encourage population

⁹⁶ Szabó, *Az abortuszkérdés és a magyar társadalom századunkban*, p. 28.

⁹⁷ "A népszaporodás emelkedéséhez szükséges intézkedések," ("Necessary Measures for Increasing Population Growth,") July 8, 1952, in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, p. 25.

⁹⁸ "1.004/1953. (II.8.) számú minisztertanácsi határozat az anya- és gyermekvédelem továbbfejlesztéséről," ("Minister Council's Resolution No. 1.004/1953 about the Improvement of Mother and Child Protection") in *Rendeletek és Törvények Hivatalos Gyűjteménye 1953 (Official Collection of Laws and Ordinances 1953)*, (Budapest: Jogi és Államigazgatási Könyv- és Folyóiratkiadó, 1953), p. 173.

growth. A special tax was created for childless men (age twenty to fifty) and childless women (age twenty to forty-five), comprising roughly 4 percent of an individual's annual income, the rationale being that it is unfair to those who must bear the expense of raising children to do so when unproductive couples and individuals spared this expense and were not contributing to the building of socialism.⁹⁹

Paragraph six is more important for my purposes, as this is the section dealing with abortion, titled "The Fight Against Abortion." Because the law from 1878 was still technically in place there was no need to draft a new law, as abortion was technically illegal despite its frequent occurrence during and after wartime. Thus the "Ratkó Law" was an effort to take a creative and innovative path to supplement the existing law to make it more effective. Not only was the Department of Justice (the Attorney General's Office) called upon to come up with harsher punishments against doctors, midwives and sham doctors who performed abortions, but organizations such as the Hungarian Red Cross, the Hungarian Women's Democratic Alliance and the Trade Union Council were enlisted to join the war on abortion.¹⁰⁰ The resolution, while not making any legal changes, simply encouraged stricter sentencing and a community-based effort to prevent illegal abortion. However, what this translated into, given the contemporary atmosphere of systemic paranoia induced by the Communists' consistent practice of tapping telephones and enlisting local spies,¹⁰¹ was an implicit warning; illegal abortion would not be tolerated and furthermore a network of attentive citizens would be watching each other for signs of subversive acts against the people. If this were not enough to discourage the practice, then one could be sure that unspecified but extremely strict sentences would be handed down for those

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁰¹ Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War*, p. 124.

caught (and caught they would surely be). One can imagine that this ambiguously worded and vague resolution might inspire more fear and therefore caution and compliance due to the unknown consequences of actions that were very clearly being listed as unacceptable. An analysis of this rhetorical tool, along with other language-based methods of persuasion and exposition will follow in the next chapter.

The following three documents represent the government's reaction to the apparent failure of Resolution 1.004/1953, and indicate the extent to which the reproductive policy of the Rákosi regime was poorly organized and lacking a sufficient infrastructure. These include a memorandum (dated August 6, 1953) reporting on sentences against abortion in the first six months of 1953, a proposal for adjusting Resolution 1.004 to rectify the "excessive and severe" sentencing practices in force, and an accompanying draft decree (both dated October 7, 1953). The first item, issued by Attorney General Kálmán Czako to Comrade Rákosi and other top party officials reveals the dire legal situation created by the too-harsh punishments doled out for performing abortion. According to the report, and illustrated by statistics, harsher sentences were handed down to doctors and midwives, than to sham doctors, despite the fact that sham doctors generally pose a greater threat to the woman's health as they lack medical knowledge and are therefore more criminally culpable. The report acknowledges the success of the harsher punishments in bringing more abortionists to justice, but there is no mention of whether or not abortion numbers have decreased. The memo from the attorney general quite naturally would be more concerned with punitive measures and rates of arrests than with abortion numbers. While police investigatory work and arrest records are lauded, the implicit message is that the

legislation has backfired, if the people being punished the most are not necessarily the most deserving.¹⁰²

The next items in the chronology of the Ratkó Era are from October 7, 1953, just eight months after Resolution 1.004/1953 was signed, and seven months after it became active. A proposal from the office of the Attorney General and a corresponding decree (*rendelet*) from the Minister President's council acknowledge that the courts "did not understand the sense of the restrictions properly"¹⁰³ and therefore misinterpreted the power allotted them by Resolution 1.004/1953. This 'misunderstanding' was manifest, according to the proposal, in unsubstantiated harassment and excessive sentences, making it necessary to "reformulate the punishment for abortion," and in such a way that the new legislation is able to become a conviction among lawyers, doctors and the whole public."¹⁰⁴ Thus it is formally acknowledged (yet not publicly) that there have been miscarriages of justice regarding the rights of the courts to persecute with impunity against those who perform abortions. Note that the blame is laid not on the legislation, but how it was (mis)understood. This misunderstanding is what accounted for the disproportionate number of acquittals for doctors, as well as the maximum sentence being handed down to the majority (seventy-five percent) of doctors who were not acquitted.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² "Feljegyzés Rákosi elvtárs részére a magzatelhajtás büntette miatt 1953. év első hat hónapjában folytatott rendőri és ügyészi munkáról, valamint a bíróságok ítélezéséről," ("Memorandum to Comrade Rákosi's division about continued police and prosecutorial work and court judgment because of the crime of abortion in the first six months of 1953"), August 6, 1953, in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, p. 119-122.

¹⁰³ "Javaslat a Politikai Bizottsághoz a magzatelhajtás büntetésének rendezésére," ("Proposal to the Political Committee Concerning the Directive of Punishment for Abortion,") K/11/D/613/1953, in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, p. 125.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

The proposal lists the underlying principles on which the corresponding decree (which is not given a number in the accessible documents; it is possible the decree was never made official or never endorsed by the Ministry of Health) is based:

1. Regarding the pregnant woman's punishment, this draft reduces the punishment to 6 months for repeat offenders, and to public judicial censure for the first offense, as opposed to the current one. In cases of pregnancy outside of marriage, the sentence is 2 to 3 years. As for the suspension of punishment or in a justified case, a fine is allowed by the general criminal rules.
2. The current decree proposes a perpetrator without a medical qualification will be punished with three years, while a doctor will be punished with 2 years. This draft establishes reduced penalties based on different aggravating circumstances (repeated offenses, or if the abortion is performed for monetary gain, or if the abortion was executed under dangerous or harmful circumstances, resulting in the serious violation of the woman's health).
3. This draft allows the deliberate interruption of the pregnancy in order to rescue the pregnant woman's life, to protect her from an increase in her serious illness, or in special cases when the pregnancy is determined to be dangerous outside of reasons mentioned here, by the permission of the health minister.
4. This draft eliminates the present criminal practice, which meant that the doctor or midwife would be held responsible and accordingly punished for the abortion not only according to the referring penalty, but also according to the penalties of endangering life and limb.
5. The draft sets milder penalties compared to the present practice. The proposed punishments do not concern cases with special circumstances (repeatedly risking health and corporal integrity, or performing abortions for financial gain).¹⁰⁶

Given these principles, the proposal goes on to suggest that the Minister of Justice submit the enclosed decree to the presidential cabinet council, that the Minister of Health publish a new instruction for the punishment of abortion, with modifications according to the circumstances, and that the new decree be propagated and made to be understood by all jurists and doctors.¹⁰⁷

There is no evidence to show that these suggestions were enacted, or that the decree was ever promulgated. As documents illustrating the bureaucratic legislative process in state socialist

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 125-126.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 125.

Hungary, these show the difference in factual details and information between internal reports that were never intended to be seen outside the small circle of controlling political committee members, and drafts of decrees that would be made public. The proposal discusses in detail the number of arrests and sentences handed down for abortion offenses during a given period, noting that the inconsistencies in sentencing and suspension are due to the courts' incorrect understanding and utilization of the law, while the corresponding decree draft makes no mention of the problems that have resulted from the stricter abortion penalties. The introductory lines of the draft extol the improvement of conditions for mothers in Hungary, mentioning the newly built nurseries, kindergartens and maternity homes that will serve the growing population. "Because improving mothers' protection is in the interest of our whole nation, the presidential cabinet council declares abortion to be a crime which warrants serious punishment."¹⁰⁸

The draft decree addresses the problem of too many doctors being sentenced too severely, as indicated in the proposal by delineating precisely what punishments shall be given to different abortionists (including the pregnant woman herself) according to medical training, but without mentioning this issue directly. In paragraph two, six punitive categories are listed along with the recommended sentences: "A doctor who performs an abortion with the woman's consent will be given a sentence of six months to two years in prison; if however, a person with no medical skills deliberately performs the abortion with the woman's consent, the sentence will be one to three years in prison."¹⁰⁹ The decree distinguishes between doctors and those "not having medical skills," yet this is an ambiguous difference, as there is no separate category for medical students (who would not technically be considered doctors but arguably do have "medical skills"), for

¹⁰⁸ "A Népköztársaság Elnöki Tanácsának 1953. évi ... számú törvényerejű rendelet a magzatelhajtásról," ("The 1953 People's Republic's Presidential Cabinet Council Decree No. ... about Abortion") in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, p.127.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Paragraph 2, items 1 and 2, p. 127.

example, as there is in the proposal urging this decree draft. It is clear, however, that this distinction refers to the difference between doctors and back alley abortionists or sham doctors. There is also explicit mention of when the punishment would be the same for doctors or non-doctors, as when the procured abortion resulted in the woman's later inability to conceive or carry children.¹¹⁰

Perhaps the most important step taken in this draft decree is to formally retract the legislation from 1878; Paragraph 5 explicitly states that "Paragraphs 285 and 286 of the 1878 penal code lose their effects."¹¹¹ These items make the distinction between abortions performed on women who are married or single, and between abortions performed with or without the woman's consent.¹¹² The proposed decree would have effectively replaced the 1878 legislation in force, alleviating prison sentences slightly and distinguishing among doctors and non-doctors, but altogether eliminating any mention of marital status. This is an important change, particularly in light of the infamous quote from Anna Ratkó: "To give birth for a woman is a duty, but for a maiden, glorious!"¹¹³ Furthermore, this proposed change in legislation implies a different attitude of the state toward not only marital relations, but gender roles and norms as well. I will address the issue of the state's control and monitoring of marriage in the context of the birth rate in the following section, "Legal Analysis—Implications."

¹¹⁰ Ibid. Paragraph 2, item 5, p. 127.

¹¹¹ Ibid. Paragraph 5, p. 128.

¹¹² *Magyar Törvénytár: 1877-1878. évi Törvények*, p. 145. According to the 1878 Büntető Törvény XVIII. Fejezet, Cikk 285 "Az ember élete elleni büntettek és vétségek:" "If the pregnant woman who deliberately drives out her own fetus, or destroys it by some other means, became pregnant outside of marriage can be punished with up to 2 years in prison. However, in the opposite case, she can be punished with up to three years in prison. The same punishment is for a criminal who performs the abortion with the woman's consent, however, the punishment is up to five years if the abortion is done for monetary gain. According to Paragraph 286: "Whoever performs an abortion without the woman's consent will be punished with up to 5 years in prison. If however, the woman dies as a result of the abortion, the punishment is 10-15 years in prison."

¹¹³ Kürti, "The Wingless Eros of Socialism" p. 58.

The last document requiring attention is the so-called abortion law from June of 1956. In the “Cabinet Council’s Decisions” section of the *Official Collection of Laws and Ordinances: 1956* appears “1.047/1956 (VI. 3.) Cabinet Council Decision: Questions Relating to the Rules and Punishment of Procured Abortions.” There is no narrative introduction to this decision, and no mention of statistics, or of the vast improvement in the situation of mothers and children. Instead, the very short decision (*határozat*) contains just three brief points:

1. Abortion can only be performed in a hospital with proper permission, which can be obtained from the designated committee which works in every hospital, and regionally. Abortion is permitted in cases where medical reasons dictate, or if special social circumstances require it. Besides giving permission for abortion, the committee is responsible for persuading against abortion, if the application appears unjustified. *In as much as the petitioner insists on the abortion in spite of the committee’s advice, the commission will give permission* [emphasis added]. The committee will decide if a medical expert’s advice in favor of abortion is valid. If an abortion is permitted for non-medical reasons the petitioner must pay the appropriate fees herself.
2. Contraceptive devices will be readily available for distribution, and at a low price.
3. This decision goes into effect immediately, and the Health Minister’s regulations as described in point one (1) above apply to all applications for abortion made after this decision. Simultaneously, the contrary provisions listed in paragraph six of Resolution 1.004/1853 (February 8) lose their effect.

Thus the abortion law makes defunct the specifications of the “Ratkó Law” that dealt with the punishment of abortion, and urging all citizens to join the fight against illegal abortion. The most important aspect of this legislation, however, is highlighted above. Regardless of a woman’s health or social situation, if she wanted an abortion, she would be able to get permission for it if she were able to pay the appropriate fees, and after hearing the arguments of the hospital-based regional abortion committee.

2.3 Legal Analysis—Implications

The trajectory of the above decrees, drafts, resolutions and internal reports from the Rátkó Era in Hungary maintained a restricting tendency in which circumstances and context were not specified or ignored, resulting in the failure of the Resolution 1.004, followed by the very strong liberalization of abortion legislation. As has been argued by Kenez, Soviet interference in its satellite states, including Hungary, during the Cold War was simply a matter of reactions to unexpected circumstances and economic developments as well as actions from the United States and the West, thus making the policies of the Hungarian Communist Party a series of spontaneous improvisations. For example, the process of de-Stalinization, but even more the unexpected death of Stalin, or the installation of Imre Nagy in 1954 were some of the factors that influenced social policy changes.¹¹⁴ The legal trajectory of abortion legislation shows this, as the rapid retractions and repeal of various resolutions and decrees illustrates.

The changing course of abortion regulations in this period is also indicative of the state's relationship to its subjects. According to Foucault's theory of biopolitics in the context of the state's power to discipline, population control was a biological and scientific approach to asserting power and authority.¹¹⁵ In this context we can understand the value of functionalist arguments such as those of Pető, Kürti, Szalai and others that focus on the simple building of socialism and desire to industrialize rapidly that drove pro-natalist policies such as the "Rátkó Law;" there was indeed a very strong and prominently verbalized desire to increase the population after the Second World War. However, there are more facets to be explored in terms of reasons driving the changes in abortion law; the idea that a population increase would be

¹¹⁴ Pittaway writes, "The limited de-Stalinization initiated by the new-course policies had generated serious political crisis by 1956. In Hungary, the appointment, under Soviet pressure, of Imre Nagy as prime minister initiated a power struggle between reformists and allies of Rákosi that split the Hungarian party. Intellectuals, incensed at the 'crimes' committed by the regime during the early 1950s, weighed in on the side of the reformers." *Brief Histories*, p. 64.

¹¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 308.

facilitated by an abortion ban is only one side of the story. Another approach, utilizing ideas from *Discipline and Punish* as well as work on totalitarianism by Hannah Arendt and others, considers the Ratkó Era and accompanying legal changes concerning reproduction to be an instrument of totalitarian rule. In this way we can understand the paternalist, all-controlling nature of the Hungarian state as a tool of totalitarianism, with the general goal being one of total domination of all aspects of life, resulting in the manipulation at will of, for instance, the population.

An important component of this attempt at totalitarian control is the attitude assumed by the state in regard to the idea and status of marriage as being significant to population growth. In the nineteenth century, when Hungary was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, abortion law was differentiated based on the marital status of the pregnant woman. Punitive measures prescribed for unmarried women who had abortions were less than for married women, implying that an unmarried woman is ever so slightly justified in her desire to have an abortion. According to a 1956 article in *Nők Lapja* (the mouthpiece of MNDSZ) discussing the new abortion legislation, which would allow for abortion under almost any circumstance, the attitude of the past, before the communist take-over was one of “hypocritical morals.” This hypocrisy allegedly made pariahs of women who had children out of wedlock, but would also punish them severely for attempting to “solve the problem” through abortion.¹¹⁶

After the communist take-over, no mention was made of the woman’s marital status either in the measures before 1953 or in the “Ratkó Law;” instead, an implicit connection is made between the growing marriage rate and the corresponding growth of the birth rate in the introductory paragraphs of the 1952 Commercial, Planning and Financial Commission report

¹¹⁶ “A szülők döntenek el: egy fontos határozat margójára” (The Parents Decide: Onto the Margin of an Important Resolution” in *Nők Lapja* vol.8, no.23, (June 8, 1956,) pp.1-2.

“Necessary Measures for Raising the Population Increase” and Resolution 1.004.¹¹⁷ Appeals in favor of the new legislation are made in the name of family values, defining a “norm for fertility practices” as follows: “every conceived child had to be born, and the women who had a sex life had to have a husband.”¹¹⁸ The state thus assumed a paternalist attitude towards its “children,” and references to both Rákosi and Stalin as “fathers” exemplify this. László Kürti writes:

Both the Hungarian party chief Mátyás Rákosi and Stalin were idolized as ‘fathers,’ inspiring numerous novels, poems, films, songs and posters that described their heroic deeds for the ‘socialist patria.’ According to one slogan, *Rákosi a legjobb apa, szereti is minden fia* (‘Rákosi is the best father to all his country’s sons’). A common joke during the height of Rákosi’s reign targeted the succession of conjugal systems: first there was matriarchy, then patriarchy took its place, and in communist society both are replaced by the communist secretary.¹¹⁹

Yet there was a contradictory side to this as well, as evinced by the infamous slogan attributed to Anna Ratkó, “for a married woman to bear a child is obligation, for a girl, it is honor”¹²⁰ as referred to above in chapter 2.2, note 109. This quote can be found frequently in the literature on reproductive policies in Hungary during state socialism, and the continued propagation of the quote as shocking and unconventional for the time indicates that this was an unorthodox recommendation. That this encouragement in favor of children born out of marriage was incongruent with traditional and contemporary values is evident in the exclamatory statement of Kocsis: “[...] propaganda was continued in the interest of increasing the number of births—even out of wedlock!”¹²¹ Contemporary rhetoric used in order to encourage reproduction and population growth in the popular press used the word “family” and conjured images of

¹¹⁷ “A népszaporodás emelkedéséhez szükséges intézkedések,” in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, p. 25.

¹¹⁸ Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary” p. 70.

¹¹⁹ Kürti, “The Wingless Eros of Socialism” page 57.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 56.

¹²¹ Kocsis, “A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig.”

married couples and nuclear families, suggesting that the normative reproductive practice took place within marriage.¹²²

¹²² Articles from *Nők Lapja* and MNDSZ propaganda pamphlets (see chapter 3.3d) use this rhetoric of “family,” “marriage,” and the significantly pluralized “parents” consistently in this period (from 1948 to 1956), supporting my claim that having children in the context of marriage was a mainstream value.

Chapter Three—Rhetorical Analysis

3.1 The Usefulness of Rhetorical Analysis

Attempting language and rhetoric analysis of Hungarian sources provides several challenges in English, and requires some explanation of the linguistic idiosyncrasies of Hungarian. I will discuss the implications of the various terms used for ‘abortion’ in chapter 3.2 but presently another salient example can serve as an illustration that language is not neutral, and often conveys more than the denotative definition. The example is *terhes*, the most common Hungarian expression for ‘pregnant.’ The word is usually translated into English as ‘pregnant’ but actually means ‘encumbered,’ or ‘burdened,’ referring to a woman carrying the weight or burden of a child in her body. There are other ways to express ‘pregnant,’ such as *áldott állapotban van* (in a blessed state), *gyereket vár* (waiting for a child), or *gyermekáldás* (blessed with childbirth), which have more positive connotations, but these are significantly absent from the public and internal Communist Party discourse of the Rátkó Era. In fact, just one source uses *gyermekáldás* rather than *terhes*, and this is done ironically, referring to the fact that before the Communist take-over life was harder, and pregnancy was not actually a blessing at all.¹²³

Along with and other examples from the popular press, my analysis includes confidential internal memoranda issued within the highest government offices. These record the internal discussion about the ultimately unsuccessful abortion measure, and allow for a fruitful comparison with public documents. The most pertinent of these secret communiqués regarding abortion legislation and reproductive rights were gathered together and published in a single

¹²³ “A szülők döntenek el: egy fontos határozat margójára” in *Nők Lapja*, (1956), pp.1-2. The following quote comes from the section entitled “Hypocritical morals:” “Let us only remember what frequently ‘being blessed with childbirth’ meant in the old world. The children came one after the other and poverty increased.”

volume by the Political History Institute in 1991.¹²⁴ What follows is a rhetorical analysis of these documents, which were specifically chosen as relevant representations of the reproductive policies of socialist Hungary, along with other documents from the National archives, and newspaper and magazine articles. Two points will emerge as being of primary importance: 1) The language and rhetoric used in these documents changed over time, reflecting adaptations in accordance with contemporary attitudes and events; and 2) The rhetorical tools employed in these works differ greatly depending on the intended audience. The point I argue in stressing these two aspects of the written material concerning abortion policy in socialist Hungary is that these tools of totalitarianism, rhetoric and propaganda,¹²⁵ failed to convince the population of the greater good of the measures, and thus contributed to the overall failure of the totalitarian Rákosi regime.¹²⁶ I further argue that the reasoning behind the changes in legislation as given in these secret memoranda is incongruent with both reality and the reasoning offered in the press, thus belying an attempt to manipulate public opinion.

An analysis of socialist rhetoric proves valuable in providing a unified theme through which to evaluate the totalitarian aspects of Hungarian society in the fifties. By looking at the stylistic tools employed in different works concerning the abortion legislation (about the change in legislation and accompanying benefits, about the need to change the legislation, about punitive measures or propagandizing) I can show the different tactics taken by the leading officials, and that they were largely improvised, an argument favored by Peter Kenez.¹²⁷ Propaganda is not known for the light of truth it shines on social matters, and so a specific case study in which the

¹²⁴ See Chapter 1.1. I refer to *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*.

¹²⁵ György, "The Mirror of Everyday Life, or the Will to a Period Style," p. 15-26.

¹²⁶ See "Introduction" and chapter 4.3 for more on totalitarianism's need for an effective propaganda program.

¹²⁷ See chapter 2.1b.

truth is twisted in two opposing directions by socialist propaganda is a particularly salient example of the attempts of Rákosi's regime to control society and social cognizance. In the following chapter I will examine the documents considered above, in Chapter Two, as well as the following four published items: A brochure from 1948 or 1949: "The Working Woman is a Good Mother," a February 1953 two-page spread in *Nők Lapja* about the changing legislation (two articles), an interview with current health minister József Román about the changing law in *Szabad Nép* dated May 27, 1956, and a June 1956 two-page spread about the virtues of motherhood and changing legislation (again, two articles) in *Nők Lapja*.

The importance of rhetorical style cannot be ignored in an instance when it is fundamental to the success of a particular regime's propaganda, as in the case of Stalinist Hungary in the early 1950s. However, an essential element necessary for the success of a propaganda program (and in this case, responsible for the partial success of the rhetorical strategies of the Rákosi regime) is the compromised circumstances of a given population, making the public eager to accept propaganda. Péter György explains:

People in Hungary had hardly come to terms with the shock caused by the havoc of the Second World War and the trauma associated with the destruction of their social patterns when, concomitantly with the building of the new society between 1947 and 1949, additional blows were delivered to a public consciousness torn asunder. The programme devised to invalidate and annul the common sense necessary for everyday life brought about the confusion and disorientation which served as an indispensable condition for the establishment of the new totalitarian society.

3.2 Legal Definitions and Language

When I refer to the conscious, deliberate attempt to expel a developing fetus from the mother's body, I will use the English term "abortion." In English usage, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the terms "abortion" and "miscarriage" both refer to the natural or

“spontaneous” expulsion of a fetus by the woman’s body independent of any action taken by the mother or a third party. Under the definition 1.a. of abortion in the OED is the following: “In modern general use the unmodified word generally refers to induced abortion, whether caused by drugs or performed surgically, and the term *miscarriage* is used for spontaneous abortion.” As for miscarriage, definition 4.a. contains: “The spontaneous expulsion of a fetus from the womb before it is viable; an instance of this. *Spontaneous abortion* is the term preferred by the medical profession, but in popular use *abortion* is associated chiefly with deliberate termination of a pregnancy.”¹²⁸ The word “abortion” in English comes from the Latin *abortio* or *aboriri*, as does the Hungarian cognate *abortusz*, which is used in the same sense as definition 1.a. above.

However, there is a greater number and variety of terms used to refer to abortion in the sense I use the word in Hungarian than in English. These include *terhesség megszakítás*, *magzatelhajtás*, and *(művi) vetélés*. Each term means abortion, but has different connotations if translated literally; thus *terhesség megszakítás* means “pregnancy interruption,” *magzatelhajtás* means “fetus expulsion,” and *vetélés* indicates a miscarriage, with *művi vetélés* referring to a procured, deliberate miscarriage, or abortion in common usage (see definition 4.a. of the Oxford English Dictionary, above). The *Magyar-Angol jogi szótár* (*Hungarian-English Legal Dictionary*) contains only the term *magzatelhajtás*, as this is the term used for the crime of abortion.¹²⁹ Because there is just one term used to denote the crime of abortion, all other words simply refer to the act of terminating a pregnancy, but not necessarily to the legality (or morality) of this act. *Terhesség megszakítás* is a polite term, but not a euphemism; it is rather a more

¹²⁸ Oxford English Dictionary on-line, last accessed October 17, 2009. Definition for abortion: http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50000605?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=abortion&first=1&max_to_show=10. Definition for miscarriage: http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00310973?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=miscarriage&first=1&max_to_show=10

¹²⁹ Móra, *Magyar-Angol jogi szótár*, p. 159.

official medical term than *abortusz*, though sometimes the Latin is used in medical discourse, *Abortus artificialis*.

3.3 Rhetoric-based Source Analysis

In each document analyzed here (there are six items from the popular press and six legal and policy documents, some of them confidential) I will be looking at language, at common rhetorical elements, and in the instance of newspaper articles and propaganda, at how the same idea is conveyed differently than in the official party records in order to convey what specific message. Differences, changes and contradictions also figure prominently in my analysis; I have found that explicit details of considerable significance are often ignored or omitted in cases where that aspect of the truth (reality) is unimportant to the audience. E.g., women reading *Nők Lapja* would not be so interested in the criminal aspect of abortion or a detailed description of the penal code; it is enough to mention that the fight is now stricter than ever, give party-based ideological reasons and instead mention the benefits they would receive. This is one aspect of what I call audience-appropriate propaganda, which will be discussed in its own subchapter, 3.3b.

3.3a Changes over Time

The change in discourse reflects both the attitudes held by leading officials at the time of writing as well as the newly adopted propaganda strategies that reflected these attitudes. The standard practice of the “Rákosi propaganda machine,” as Péter György calls it, was to constantly stress the positive aspects of life after the Communist take-over by comparing it to the hardships of the “old world.” This remains constant in newspaper and magazine articles, that the reader is reassured and reminded that the situation of Hungary is much better in the hands of the

Communists than it was ‘before;’ the changing variable is how this ‘good news’ is applied to the present legislative tack. For example, in a *Nők Lapja* article from 1953 discussing the newly issued Resolution 1.004, the positive spin given to the contemporary standard of living is posited as the springboard from which ‘mother and child protection measures’ can be improved. The Resolution is extolled for its increase in benefits for women and children, and the increased encouragement of socialist family life.

Three years later, the same magazine featured an article about the repeal of this law. Positive images were stressed: “women gain equal rights,” “the government ensures family protection,” “medical care improves the conditions of pregnancy and childbirth,” “Hungary’s birthrate rose in the international ranking,” and “the infant mortality decreased by half.”¹³⁰ These images describe the period *before* the implementation of Resolution 1.004. The resolution is criticized for being too rigorous and inciting “understandable discontent.”¹³¹ A resolution that is stricken from the books after three years of unrest would understandably withstand condemnation from the issuing authorities; this is a self-preservation method. Yet the more insidious tactic lies in the misleading language employed in the article. Concerning the 1954 alleviations of Resolution 1.004 it states that “birthrates developed healthily despite the alleviations.”¹³² In attempting to persuade the reader of both the government’s administrative aptitude and the steadily improving conditions engendered by the government, the article focuses on the birth rate, as opposed to the abortion rate.

Changes are apparent in confidential memoranda as well. The focus of Hungary’s population policy shifts from health concerns to criminal ones. The titles of documents included

¹³⁰ “A szülők döntik el: egy fontos határozat margójára” in *Nők Lapja* (1956), pp.1-2.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

in the collection published by the Political History Institute reveal a change in priority from health reports, medical statistics and population growth measures in the period before February 8, 1953, to penalties and sentencing practices for the crime of abortion in the period after Resolution 1.004 had proven its failure (as early as August 1953). It should also be noted that the pre- “Ratkó Law” documents use *abortusz* and *terhesség megszakítás* to refer to abortion; this means that abortion is discussed in medical, not criminal terms.¹³³ The three documents after Resolution 1.004 is enacted all use the term for crime of abortion, *magzatelhajtás* in their titles.¹³⁴ However, after 1956, medical terms are used once again, in the May 10 1956 “Proposal to the Cabinet Council” and in decree 3401/VI.5./1956 about questions related to abortion (*terhesség megszakítás*) from June 2, 1956. Thus it is apparent that the attitudes about controlling reproductive policies changed over time, reflecting the trial-and-error method characteristic of improvised solutions.

¹³³ Two documents refer to abortion in the title, “Report on the development of the Budapest public health situation, with a special look at abortion, premature labor and gonorrheal diseases” (“Jelentés Budapest közegészségügyi helyzetének alakulásáról, különös tekintettel az abortuszra, koraszülésre és gonorrhoea megbetegedésekre”) and “Health Minister’s Order Number 81/34/1952: in order to regulate the interruption of pregnancy” (“Az egészségügyi miniszter 81/34/1952. Eü.M. számú utasítása a terhesség megszakításának szabályozása tárgyában”) in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, pp. 12-13, and pp. 19-21, respectively.

¹³⁴ These are “Memorandum; To Comrade Rákosi’s division on the continued police and prosecutorial works, and court judgments of the crime of abortion in the first six months of 1953” (“Feljegyzés: Rákosi elvtárs részére a magzatelhajtás büntette miatt 1953. év első hat hónapjában folytatott rendőri és ügyészi munkáról, valamint a bíróságok ítélezéséről”), “Proposal to the Political Committee about the direction of punishment for the crime of abortion” (“Javaslat a Politikai Bizottsághoz a magzatelhajtás büntetésének rendezésére”) and “People’s Republic of Hungary 1953 Presidential Cabinet decree number ... about the crime of abortion” (“A Népköztársaság Elnöki Tanácsának 1953. évi ... számú törvényerejű rendelet a magzatelhajtásról”) in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, pp. 119-121, and pp. 127-128, respectively.

3.3b Audience-Appropriate Propaganda

Given the different meanings and levels of connotations inherent in the words themselves, as discussed in chapter 3.2, an analysis of their usage in public press and propaganda in order to achieve specific ends confirms the thesis that different language and rhetorical tools were used for different audiences. In analyzing the language used in internal cabinet, ministry of justice, or ministry of health memoranda and ministerial decrees, as well as articles published by the major communist newspapers, *Szabad Nép* and *Nők Lapja*, I paid close attention to which words were used when and for what purpose. I counted the number of times the four different terms for abortion defined above in chapter 3.2 were used in official as well as in journalistic writings, particularly in titles of legal decrees and headlines; my aim was to find a pattern or trend that could lend credence to my ideas about language and propaganda employed by the Rákosi regime. As mentioned above in chapter 3.3a, I found that in the internal memoranda and secret party reports the terms *abortusz*, *terhesség megszakítás* and *vetélés* were the dominant terms before 1953, and then were replaced by *magzatelhajtás*, which refers to the criminal act. The change is particularly relevant when looking at party publications, as these conveyed the leadership's preferred terminology.

This was also the case for the four published sources, but the situation is slightly different. Public discussions of reproductive rights were rare, if not completely absent before 1953, though the actual public, printed discourse in the magazine *Nők Lapja*, (the organ of the Communist Party's women's association¹³⁵) began in 1956. The summer of 1956 marks the beginning of the explicit discussion about abortion, though the article "The Parents have

¹³⁵ The Hungarian Women's Democratic Alliance (Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége or MNDSZ) was formed in 1945 and was meant to function as an organization outside of the Communist Party. This was not the case in practice, however, and especially after the founding of *Nők Lapja*, the primary disseminator of Party news and information for women.

Decided: Onto the Margin of an Important Resolution” (“A szülők döntenek el: egy fontos határozat margójára”) contains many euphemistic phrases, not only in the title. The discretion and euphemistic or polite terminology and language regarding abortion are standard in this period; the approaches of newspapers and magazines toward abortion in cases where it would be warranted for medical and (after 1954) social reasons are especially discrete, by not referring to abortion in titles or headlines, and by talking ‘around’ the subject and using vague synonyms such as “mother and child protection” and “mother’s choice.” The implication is that abortion, even under ‘legitimate’ circumstances and sanctioned by the state, is still not to be discussed publicly. However, when discussing the crime of abortion, as in the *Nők Lapja* articles from 1953, “A Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsának határozata az anya- és gyermekvédelem továbbfejlesztéséről” and 1956, “Magzatelhajtók—A Dolgozó Nép Ellenségei” (“Criminal Abortionists—Enemies of the Working People”) the legal, criminal terminology is used, and there are no polite or discreet exclusions of these criminal terms from headlines or titles. This indicates that abortion as a crime is considered a more public matter than medically or socially warranted abortion, which remained private and not suitable for discussion.

Information about policy changes filtered down to the masses through the means of party publications and through the newspapers—official organs of the Hungarian Communist Party such as *Szabad Nép* (*Free Nation*). Discussed in chapter 2.1a, MNDSZ, was intended to be “outside” the Communist Party and therefore appeal to women as being free of the party agenda, and therefore having no ulterior motives.¹³⁶ A document published by MNDSZ in the late 1940s exhibits their maternalist attitude: “A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya” (probably 1948). This pamphlet

¹³⁶ Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, p. 191. Kenez calls MNDSZ a “typical Communist front organization.”

details, with emphatic Communist rhetoric, exactly how much mothers suffer under the capitalist system (especially under the old regime, that of Miklós Horthy).

“A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya” declares the model mother to be a worker, who internalizes and strives to achieve the ideals set out by the exemplary women and mothers of the Soviet Union. The Soviet example is extolled as the “best teacher”¹³⁷ and repeatedly called on as a marker against which Hungarian mothers must measure themselves. As in all of MNDSZ’s publications including *Nők Lapja* until 1956,¹³⁸ motherhood is assumed to be the ultimate goal of every woman, and a goal that is desired not simply for a woman’s own reasons, but for furthering the cause of socialism and continuing the nation. The object of the pamphlet “A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya” is to teach by example and show women how lucky they are now, that their work inside and outside the home is made easier by the policies and measures of the Communist Party. Every effort is made to acknowledge the hardships formerly endured by mothers in the period preceding the then ongoing Communist take-over: “from the first minute, [couples] had to weigh the potential joy of raising a child against the heavy weight of family allowances, working class motherhood, and poverty.”¹³⁹ This statement implies that capitalism and lack of socialist values in the old regime had corrupted the concept of family in that the ‘natural’ tendency of married couples (having as many children as possible) was subordinated to financial concerns. A natural certainty (the reproduction of the nation) was transformed into the burdensome possibility to choose material prosperity (or mere subsistence) over having children.

This change in official attitudes toward abortion is particularly relevant for my study when we reflect on the difference between the first legal restrictions dealing with abortion and

¹³⁷ “A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya,” (“The Working Woman is a Good Mother”), pamphlet (Budapest: Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége, ca. 1948), p. 10

¹³⁸ Chapter 3.3b discusses *Nők Lapja*’s acknowledgment of the abortion question.

¹³⁹ “A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya,” p. 2.

what they evolved into in the twentieth century. Termination of a pregnancy changed from an unmentionable “one-time sin”¹⁴⁰ (roughly until and during the enactment of the 1878 laws) to a choice based on financial or material criteria (the interwar period until the Communist take-over), to a strictly prohibited and severely punishable crime against the socialist state (during the years of the “Ratkó Law,” 1953 to 1956), and finally back to a choice. However, after 1956 this choice was made possible through the mechanism of a socialist state that claimed to be compassionate in acknowledging that their female citizens, now educated about the “glory of motherhood,”¹⁴¹ were capable of making the ‘right choice.’ “A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya” illustrates the beginning of the attitude shift toward the punitive measures meant to discourage abortion and thereby increase the birth rate. This was first done in 1948 until Resolution 1.004 was enacted in 1953 (and after, as well) through positive reinforcement that extolled the glory and virtues of motherhood and mothers. Second, propaganda sought to convince women about the benefits of socialism, the through repeated references to the old regime as being marked by hunger, constant searching for food, disease, unhappiness and early death, thereby discouraging any act which would harm the nation (implicitly, not having children). The completed shift to a punitive stance was taken in 1953, with the enactment of the “Ratkó Law.”

“A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya” asks two important questions: “How did the working mother raise her children?” and “How should the working mother raise her children?”¹⁴² While the pamphlet pieces together a number of examples of happy, fulfilled Hungarian working mothers who are of coincidentally also party members, no explicit mention is made of the Communist Party’s role in their success, it is merely implied. The traditional ideals of motherhood are still

¹⁴⁰ “The Abortion Problem in Hungary: A Survey” April 7, 1964, Fond 33-1-25, Hungary 1956-65, Population Policy, Birth Control: Open Society Archive, Budapest.

¹⁴¹ “A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya,” p. 1 ff.

¹⁴² Ibid., pp.2, 9.

valued, but at the same time women are held to the same standard to which male workers were held, which reflects the Soviet criteria for citizenship: (re)production.¹⁴³

3.3c Popular Press and Internal Documents: A Comparison

In an issue of Women's Journal from February of 1953, just as the new legislation was made available to the public in the other Communist Party newspapers, such as *Szabad Nép*, a full two-page center spread is devoted to informing the readership about the new legislation, which would affect everyone. Under the headline, "The People's Republic of Hungary's Cabinet Decision on Improving Mother and Child Protection" the article describes the newest decision made by the government to increase measures that are intended to encourage couples to have children and help women and their offspring. No specific legal details are given about the new resolution; this might be expected in a women's magazine, where the use of legal jargon and style would not be appropriate taken up, but there is not even a mention of the official title of the resolution, Resolution 1.004. However, the article and the actual text of the resolution are quite similar, and actually mirror each other; the general tone of each document is optimistic and full of confidence in socialism.

The article opens with 'good news:' according to the introduction of this new resolution, infant mortality rates have decreased to their pre-war level, while marriage and birth rates have continued to increase ever since the "elevation of the standard of living for our working people." This refers to the triumph of the Communist Party and establishment of the People's Republic of Hungary in 1948 and 1949. Both the article and resolution begin with these encouraging facts,

¹⁴³ See Introduction for a description of Gail Kligman's use of "double burden" to reflect the status of women under the Soviet system who were required to work "two shifts," outside and within the home.

and in fact the article offers an abbreviated summary of the resolution, though it doesn't claim to do this in so many words.

I would argue that this use of synecdoche (part representing the whole) in the quote above is intended to create a sense of community for the reader, as she would recognize what is being referred to and identify with that phrase as pertaining to her country's recent history. Further, this emphasis on the positive by opening the article with achievements and success is a way of capturing the reader's attention and even convincing her that what follows is true and perhaps even necessary for the continued success of the nation. But by this reasoning, then the resolution itself must also necessarily be trying to "capture attention" and assert the necessity of the prescribed measures. Because the success of Resolution 1.004 partially depended on how well it was received,¹⁴⁴ it is credulous that a rhetorical style would be employed to manipulate reader opinion; this is visible in the propagandistic tone of the introduction, which sounds very similar to an article describing it for a popular magazine; the article was merely a layman's version.

However, neither article nor resolution offers proof in the form of numbers or statistics to support statements of encouraging birth rates. Demographic analysis would perhaps not confirm the suggestion that these increases have been achieved as a result of the communist take-over, but the article simply states, "that marriage rates and birth rates have increased significantly with (alongside/as a result of) the elevation of the standard of living."¹⁴⁵ According to Table 4 in

¹⁴⁴ See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday, 1959) for more on the relationship between establishing totalitarian rule and propaganda chapter 4.3.

¹⁴⁵ "A Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsának határozata az anya- és gyermekvédelem továbbfejlesztéséről" in *Nők Lapja* (1953), pp. 1-2. A translation reads, "The introduction to the Cabinet's resolution shows that, with the elevation of the standard of living for our working people, the marriage and birth rates increased, and the infant mortality rate decreased to what it was before the war."

chapter 1.3a, this information is factually correct, but what the sentence implies is that the rise in the standard of living is a direct result of and even equivalent with the rise to power of the Communists. One could argue that, regardless of any measurable change in Hungarians' standard of living or average income, marriage rates and birth rates may have increased for any number of reasons, the end of World War II being perhaps a decisive factor.

What is immediately noticeable to the reader, is the organizational style of the article, which included italicized phrases meant to attract particular attention and the spacing of some sentences to denote sub-sections or paragraph headings. These are helpful for my analysis, as it shows the author's prediction of what information readers should find most valuable. Further, a comparison with the text of the resolution (1.004/1953) shows that the article closely follows the text of the resolution in terms of division of text into separate paragraphs, and the order in which they appear. In favor of readability, the article does not provide the same text of the resolution verbatim, but paraphrases it.

It appears to me that certain words and phrases are italicized for two reasons. First, when a group of complete sentences are italicized this is to convey an important message. Thus, in the first paragraph, what is most important is that marriage and birth rates have increased, and that infant mortality has decreased to its pre-war average. In the other case, only selected words are italicized, emphasizing a certain aspect of an idea, as when we learn that women are now forbidden to work in any job that is hazardous to their health. This entire concept is emphasized, per the description I provide above; the following sentence shows an example of the second kind of emphasis, where it is written, "In these types of jobs, women must be moved *to a different type of job* by the end of July 1953." This selective emphasis makes it clear that a woman will be

able to continue working, presupposing that it may be misunderstood that women will have to leave their jobs, with no other potential for earning money.

The article goes on to explain the six paragraphs of the resolution, ending with what has proven to be the most memorable part of the “Ratkó Law,” the restriction on abortion. However, as has been discussed previously, this ‘law’ (besides not even being a law) did not actually restrict abortion in so many words. The truth is that abortion had been illegal all along, or at least since 1948, when the communist government made efforts to re-enforce the legislation (that had technically though not practically been in force since 1878) after a lenient post-war policy was adopted in order to address the frequent occurrence of rape in Hungary by soldiers of the invading Red Army.¹⁴⁶ What is quoted directly from Resolution 1.004 in the *Nők Lapja* article is just one section of chapter six, “The Fight against Abortion:”

This decision expresses strongly that everyone in every area has to fight very strongly against abortion in the widest area of social life because it is dangerous for the mother’s as well as the whole people’s health and destroys morality and family life. The Cabinet council called on the trade Union Council, the Hungarian Women’s Democratic Alliance, the Hungarian Red Cross and other social organs to increase the fight against abortion. In our instructive work we emphasize that a woman who has someone perform an abortion or who performs her own abortion must be punished too, and that further the fight against abortion is the duty of every citizen, to ensure the family has a healthy and happy life.¹⁴⁷

The article in *Nők Lapja* quoted above uses one paragraph of Resolution 1.004, quoting it without mentioning the source or indicating a direct quote.

The article on the lower half of the two-page spread contains the testimony of Hungarian women about the new resolution, and displays even more rhetorical strategies one could liken to propaganda. Three women offer their stories, which are peppered with what today might be

¹⁴⁶ Pető, “Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary,” p. 51.

¹⁴⁷ “A Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsának határozata az anya- és gyermekvédelem továbbfejlesztéséről,” *Nők Lapja*, 1953, pp. 1-2.

called “folksy” idioms and sayings, and the bottom line is that life is better now than it was before, the women are grateful for what they have and thank Comrade Rákosi with earnestness and loyalty. These stories are typical party praise and paint a positive picture of life under the Rákosi regime, which is an attitude to be expected. What is a bit surprising, however, is the layout and choice of illustrating photograph to accompany this collection of testimonies; an absolutely indiscreet attempt to manipulate the emotions of readers is seen when the headline for the article is a quote taken from one of the women’s stories: “I am truly glad to be alive today, I am glad to be a mother.” Below this quote is a picture of a little girl laughing, and the juxtaposition is such that one is given the impression that the following story is about the little girl pictured. Adding to this emotional manipulation is a poem entitled, “My Daughter, flowery branch”¹⁴⁸ adding to the initial impression that the lower section of the page is devoted to a specific story about someone’s daughter. This faux-feminist rally cry is in fact a deceitful attempt to generate a sense of community, or in this case, sorority.

Yet a magazine founded and run by the communist party’s women’s organization would naturally be expected to create propaganda and produce manipulative articles and illustrations.

¹⁴⁸ Béla Vikar, “Lányom, Virágos Ág,” (“My Daughter, Flowery Branch”), *Nők Lapja* (1953), p. 2. The poem’s first stanza, reproduced below, invokes a happy image of a young girl caring for her ‘children,’ dolls and toys. Iambic tetrameter in a consistent ABAB rhyme scheme is used to illustrate a scene in which a girl is learning the value of large families and the role of women. A mother with many children is compared to a flowering branch through metaphor:

Lányom, lányom virágos ág:
altatja a hajasbabát,
betakarja, lefekteti,
máris egy dalt dúdol neki.
Az egyikkel, ahogy végzett,
jönnek sorba a testvérek.
Hét baba, hét ágy áll körbe,
köztük ni, mackó meg törpe.
Mily nagy család! Az övé mind,
és egy szánkó is hever kint.

My daughter, my daughter, flowery branch:
soothes the doll,
covers it up, lays it down,
immediately hums a song for it.
With one completed,
the siblings come into a row.
Seven babies, seven beds stand round,
between them, look, a teddy bear and a doll.
What a big family! All hers,
also the sledge lying outside.

This is rather the result of improvised decisions intending to control the population (in this case through reproductive regulations). And herein lies that most noticeable difference between internal documents and popular press: the most obvious and manipulative strategies are only implemented in news sources, though both the secret documents and published ones share a number of rhetorical elements that serve to manipulate reality as well as reader opinion. The reproductive restrictions proved to be difficult to implement, unpopular and divisive, and the abortion restriction known as the Ratkó law was extremely short-lived, thus the regime was forced to respond quickly to public reaction and this resulted in tactics and public relations that are contradictory, and deliberately manipulative.

An example of this is an editorial article from the same women's magazine, *Nők Lapja*, after the summer of 1955. At this point the Ratkó Law has been alleviated but still stands.¹⁴⁹ Plans are made to repeal the law completely, and *Nők Lapja* reports on the decision. The style is similar to that of the article from three years earlier, but "The Parents have Decided" contains an added sentiment about the poor women whose needless suffering was brought about by the hypocritical morals and harsh restrictions of the past. An emotional tack is taken, with images of outcast women and children living in terrible conditions brought up to invoke pity and sympathy.¹⁵⁰ Another strategy employed in this article to convince readers about the appropriateness of Resolution 1.004's repeal is to laud the example set by the Soviets.¹⁵¹ These women, who are to be admired and emulated by Hungarians, are educated and aware enough of socialist principles to recognize the glory of motherhood as well as the wisdom of the party

¹⁴⁹ Kocsis, "A szövöszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig."

¹⁵⁰ "A Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsának határozata az anya- és gyermekvédelem továbbfejlesztéséről," *Nők Lapja* (1953), pp. 1-2. See chapter 3.1, note 1, above.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., The Soviet Union's Health Minister, M.D. Kovrigina is quoted about „the good example of the Soviet Union,” which includes the women's good health, high self-awareness and high education."

leaders, and thus do not need abortion restrictions to dissuade them from bringing more children into the Soviet Union. A dichotomy is formed; on one side are the poor women who are not educated and cannot make the proper choices due to various circumstances and on the other side are the women who shoulder the ‘glorious burden of motherhood’ as their duty, being dedicated to the Communist cause. This use of the Soviet example is similar to that used in an MNDSZ pamphlet entitled “A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya” (“The Working Woman is a Good Mother”), examined in chapter 3.3d, below.

The rhetorical skills exhibited in this article from 1956 may be more sophisticated (there is less obvious pandering and the language is not as patronizing, but the font used and image chosen to illustrate the article are still indiscreet stylistic manipulations), but obviously faulty reasoning and contradictions are still apparent. First, in praising the work of the government since 1948, the article states that benefits are increasing for mothers and that there are more schools, nurseries and day-care centers with each passing year. Three paragraphs later, in working to discredit the unpopular abortion restriction of 1953, decree 1004, the article states that:

We do not talk about those glaring cases when older women who already have grown children are practically forced into having abortions, or when young girls take a heedless step, the serious consequence of which is to cradle their baby. Decree 1.004 did not reckon with, among other things, that there are not enough maternity homes, hospital beds, or day nurseries to accommodate such an increase in the population. It would have been possible to look ahead several years and see that our schools will be overcrowded in a manner hindering education.¹⁵²

This contradiction seems to be the inevitable expression of years of frustration and dissatisfaction with the previous legislation.

¹⁵² Ibid.

An emotional strategy which focuses on the consequences for women and families is in line with the tactics employed in unpublished documents from 1956; a return to using the official and medical terms for abortion, rather than the criminal term marks this shift of method.¹⁵³ However, the terminology is less emotional, with mention being made only of medical or social reasons, but without explicit descriptions and examples of individual cases. Thus similar occurrences of emotional themes are expressed in different ways, illustrating the specifically designed and calculated propaganda strategies of the Rákosi regime.

The appearance of an article in *Szabad Nép*¹⁵⁴ (*Free Nation*) in May 1956 demonstrates the presence of discourse on reproductive policies in the more mainstream Communist newspaper. Minister of Health József Román, who succeeded Anna Ratkó, is interviewed for a brief history of abortion in Hungary and the significance of a change in legislation. In the article the medical term for abortion is used, and in the Minister's optimistic re-telling of Hungary's abortion history he, not surprisingly, omitted some important facts while focusing on others. He claimed that birth rates "grew auspiciously" after "our liberation," but that while birth rates grew in the early 1950s, so did abortion rates. Strict measures were effective in bringing these numbers down, he claimed, but punishments were inconsistent, thus warranting the new legislation, which will make abortion more accessible. He claimed that birthrates did not

¹⁵³ These documents include "Tárgy: A terhesség megszakításával kapcsolatos kérdések szabályozása, Előterjesztés a Minisztertanácshoz," ("On the questions related to the rules for abortion, Proposal to the Council of Ministers") and "A Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsának 3401/VI.5/1956 számú határozata a terhesség megszakításával kapcsolatos kérdések szabályozásáról és a magzatelhajtás büntetéséről szóló 1047/956/VI.3.sz. határozat kiegészítése," ("The People's Republic of Hungary's Council of Ministers Resolution No. 3401/VI.5/1956 about questions relating to abortion regulations and criminal abortion punishment, after supplementary resolution 1047/956/VI.3") in *Az 1952-53. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon*, pp. 167-170 and p. 173, respectively.

¹⁵⁴ "Hogyan enyhítik a terhesség megszakításával kapcsolatos eljárást? Beszélgetés Román József egészségügyi miniszterrel," ("How can abortion procedures be made easier? A discussion with József Román, Health Minister"), *Szabad Nép*, vol.14, (May 27, 1956).

decrease considerably after the restrictions of Resolution 1.004 were alleviated in 1954, and this thus proves that the “majority of women were predominantly sacrificing themselves for their families and their children. This joyful act is enough to let us leave the decision of motherhood to women themselves.”¹⁵⁵ There are many, obvious similarities in the rhetoric of the official organ of the Communist Party, *Szabad Nép*, and that of *Nők Lapja*, the mouthpiece of MNDSZ, the woman’s organization ostensibly outside the Party’s control.

3.3d The Construction of Gender

We have seen how the changes in abortion legislation in the period indicate the state’s relationship to its subjects in terms of gender roles and normative reproductive practices in Chapter 2.2a including Communist legislation such as the Family Law of 1952. Yet this analysis is incomplete without a discussion of how men and women were constructed in the context of the discourses and policies of the state socialist regime. It is clear that before Resolution 1.004 was enacted the Communists promoted the normative family model and tried to encourage married couples to have more children. The wording of the resolution refers to “families” in general, but only to “women” and “mothers” in contexts where it is clear that only the mother would be involved (e.g., prenatal medical care). Yet the words attributed to Anna Ratkó, “to give birth for a married woman is obligation, but for a girl is an honor!”¹⁵⁶ imply that children were needed, and thus wanted, even if they were born outside of marriage. This temporary suspension of traditional norms and values is indicative of the frantic attempts to encourage population growth, and shows a willingness to adopt non-traditional or socially disfavored models of reproduction if

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ László Kürti, “The Wingless Eros of Socialism” p. 54. Also, Piroska Kocsis, “A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig.”

the ultimate goal (totalitarian rule and an industrialized, socialist society, in this case) were then made feasible.

Fathers' and men's rights and duties in reproductive behavior and within families are mentioned nowhere in either the secret communiqués of the top party leadership or in the publications *Szabad Nép* and *Nők Lapja*. The closest mention of fathers or men is in the reference to "family" in the broad terms "family protection;" fathers are not mentioned at all in the section of Resolution 1.004 delineating how much time off a woman can take for childcare (for children up to fourteen years of age, meaning that only women are considered to be the ones who provide childcare even when they are not needed specifically to nurse, for example).¹⁵⁷ One can connect the encouragement for single mothers to attain the honor and glory of motherhood, attributed to Ratkó, to the wording of Resolution 1.004. Under these "family protection" stipulations, a mother could theoretically function autonomously if she were not married. By not mentioning the role or duties or rights of the father, the resolution makes it possible for women to not only imagine but also perform motherhood on their own, with Rákosi acting as "the best father to all his sons."¹⁵⁸

The maternalist attitude of the Communist Party (and by extension, MNDSZ which was responsible for disseminating and promoting the preferred model of womanhood) was apparent in the propaganda extolling the virtues of working motherhood (see 3.3d, above, "A Dolgozó Nő Jó Anya"). True citizens of state socialist regimes were workers, those who could labor productively for the good of society. Women were doubly burdened with this duty, as their work

¹⁵⁷ "1.004/1953. (II.8.) számú minisztertanácsi határozat az anya- és gyermekvédelem továbbfejlesztéséről," ("Minister Council's Resolution No. 1.004/1953 about the Improvement of Mother and Child Protection"), chapter I, paragraph 2, in *Rendeletek és Törvények Hivatalos Gyűjteménye 1953 (Official Collection of Laws and Ordinances 1953)*, (Budapest: Jogi és Államigazgatási Könyv- és Folyóiratkiadó, 1953), p. 173.

¹⁵⁸ László Kürti, "The Wingless Eros of Socialism" p. 53.

entailed caring for children, husband and home along with participation in the public workforce. The contradiction implicit in the assignation of these two roles to a single body lent itself to the unpopularity of the reproductive policies. Kürti writes that the “demographic changes during the early 1950s are instructive indices of Stalinist redefinitions of gender roles and the ways in which these patriarchal tendencies simultaneously undermined and elevated the status of women.”¹⁵⁹ He uses the term “demographic changes” quite vaguely, but I support his premise only if this term indicates the rise and fall of the birth rate as being a reflection of public assessment of the shifting regulations.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

Chapter 4—Anna Ratkó: Biography, Symbolic Politics

4.1 The Ratkó Era's Absent Namesake

The first female minister of Hungary, Anna Ratkó, is the person after whom the eponymous Ratkó Era, focus of this study, was named. She is a familiar figure to most Hungarians, especially those born in the 1950s, as she is generally held responsible for the overcrowding in schools that many considered to have resulted¹⁶⁰ from the small baby boom after Resolution 1.004 was enacted in 1953. Yet, those who know what the Ratkó Era is, and even those who voluntarily identify as “Ratkó children” know very little about their namesake, as there is a dearth of information about Ratkó, and the information that does exist is not widely disseminated. Ratkó is not considered a remarkably important figure in Hungarian history; even a work devoted to female Hungarian politicians mentions her in one sentence only.¹⁶¹ A biographical portrait in a 1974 issue of *Magyarország (Hungary)* opens with:

Mrs. Károly Bíró, née Anna Ratkó is today retired and lives in her tenement flat on one of the busiest roads in Buda. The encyclopaedia—if it mentions her at all—would say more or less this: She entered the labor movement as a young person, took part in the organization of strikes and demonstrations between the two wars and as a result was blacklisted. After our liberation she held various Party trade union and women's movement positions. From 1949 until 1953 she was the Welfare, then Health Minister and a member of Parliament; from 1954 to 1956 she became the secretary of the trade union council (SZOT), and up until her retirement she was an associate of the National Peace Council. An interesting person's life hardly fits into the catchword entry of an encyclopaedia however.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ As has been addressed in chapter 2.1a, it is unlikely that the “Ratkó Law” was the sole cause of the birthrate increase and subsequent overcrowding of schools and nurseries, measurable phenomena that are popularly thought to have been the direct result of Resolution 1.004.

¹⁶¹ Andrea Pető, *Women in Hungarian Politics, 1945-1951* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 2003), p. 88.

¹⁶² Endre Várkonyi, “Múlt idők tanúi, Ratkó Anna: Tizenheten az asztalnál, Egy „törvény” története,” p. 21.

Paradoxically, I think that more can be gleaned from the dearth of information about Ratkó's life than from her biography. Ratkó's missing presence from the pages of history books may be indicative of something besides a simple lack of information; a lack of interest on the part of Hungarian historians may also play a role.¹⁶³ However, the lack of information and primary sources in the archives is perhaps another story. In looking through fonds pertaining to the Ratkó period, particularly statistics and reports about the years 1952 to 1954, significant numbers of document lists were stamped, *kiselejtezve*, which can be translated as "discarded," or "weeded out." I found again and again that in a list of statistics for the years 1938 to 1962, for example, that only the "Ratkó years" were "weeded out." While I cannot claim to have embarked on a systematic comparison of all document lists in the Hungarian National Archive, what I experienced throughout my research of this particular topic and period indicated the planned, methodical excision of information pertaining to reproductive rights. This absence might mean, among other conclusions, that documents concerning reproductive policies and Ratkó's role were not considered to be worth preserving, or that these documents were not considered to be worth preserving because they pointed to the failure and repeal of Resolution 1.004. Other possible explanations exist, including attempts to conceal the ongoing discussion and research into the reproductive policies and their consequences. Regardless of the reason behind this removal of documents, I would argue that the legacy of the Ratkó Era, which includes the legal precedent set by the repeal of Resolution 1.004, is more significant than the policies implemented during her tenure as Minister of Health.

¹⁶³ With this statement I am not dismissing the work of historians such as Pető and Kocsis, who obviously do consider the importance of Ratkó's role in this period. I am referring more to general history texts which completely omit any mention of the woman.

Anna Ratkó's professional career began as a factory worker, trade union representative and then union secretary; she first joined the Hungarian Communist Party at the age of twenty-four, in 1927. It is difficult to gauge public opinion about Anna Ratkó at the time she was Minister of Health, but attitudes of today dismiss the woman as being uncharismatic, boorish and arrogant. Her name is sometimes equated with Stalinism in early 1950s Hungary,¹⁶⁴ and she is best known for Resolution 1.004, which was linked with her name in unofficial discussion. The era is also named for her, as well as the age cohort born in 1953 and 1954. Yet these associations say less about the woman as a person and as a politician than they do about the nature of popular discourse and the need to assign 'blame' or agency to a particular person, and in this case to one in a minor position of power. It has been suggested that the "Ratkó children" be named instead "Rákosi children" after the true architect of the reproductive policies of the early 1950s, Mátyás Rákosi.¹⁶⁵

Few authors have carried out an in-depth examination of the role of Health Minister Anna Ratkó, her legacy, and the politics behind both her appointment as the first female Hungarian Minister and the decisions made while she was in office. Yet at least one detailed examination of Anna Ratkó has been made,¹⁶⁶ indicating that perhaps it is a lack of awareness about Ratkó's role in the Rákosi regime that has led to her being left out of major discourse. Before engaging in a discussion of the value of Ratkó as a symbolic figure for state socialism, it is worthwhile to define exactly what her legacy is and how it was created; a brief biographical study is important in order to gain perspective on her life and understand Ratkó as a symbol.

¹⁶⁴ Pető, "Women's Rights in Stalinist Hungary," p. 49.

¹⁶⁵ "The Abortion Problem in Hungary: A Survey" April 7, 1964, Fond 33-1-25, Hungary 1956-65, Population Policy, Birth Control: Open Society Archive, Budapest.

¹⁶⁶ Kocsis, "A szövöszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig."

4.2 Biography: Life and Career

Through the use of the Hungarian Biographical Lexicon, a number of articles published while she was living, and a study of Anna Ratkó's life and career written in 2002, a fairly complete picture of her life can be drawn. The few articles about Ratkó written before 1989 treat her as a sort of representation of the value of hard work under state socialism. She was born as the eleventh of thirteen children in a working-class family in modern-day Slovakia. Her story is indeed one of triumph over adversity, as she rose to the highest ranks of government from a very humble beginning. After six family members were called simultaneously to military service Ratkó began working in a factory at the age of twelve and quickly moved through the ranks to become a high-ranking worker and then union representative.¹⁶⁷ Her devotion to trade unions and socialism was perhaps ingrained in her at an early age, as her father was the founding member of the trade union of iron tool and machine fitters in Párkányán.¹⁶⁸

Ratkó became the Minister of Welfare and the first female Minister in Hungary's history in June of 1949, after the Communist take-over and formation of the István Dobi government. After the Welfare Ministry's foundation in 1945, Erik Molnár was the first Health Minister, followed by Károly Olt and then Anna Ratkó. According to Piroska Kocsis, the high number of invalids requiring public health care justified the transformation of the Welfare Ministry into the Ministry of Health in 1950, expanding the duties of the Ministry to include administration of social policy concerning public health. This may have been the real reason, but the official rationale behind the dismantling of the Welfare Ministry was that poverty no longer existed in the 'new world' and thus welfare and the Welfare Ministry were no longer necessary. In a 1974 interview, Ratkó explains that she was chosen to organize the Welfare Ministry into the new

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Ministry of Health because she had proven herself, through her years as the secretary of the Trade Union Council, to be a “good organizer.”¹⁶⁹ However, in her thoroughly-researched and detailed study of Ratkó’s life and career, Kocsis asserts that Ratkó’s appointment had more to do with her loyalty to the Party; as Minister of Welfare Ratkó saw to it that doctors and medical personnel who were members of the rival parties, the Smallholders and Social Democrats, were more severely punished for minor offenses, and were even dismissed from their posts due to their party affiliation.¹⁷⁰ In addition to Ratkó’s obviously tough stance on party loyalty, Rákosi probably chose her to head the Ministry of Health because she was a woman and would appear sympathetic, Kocsis writes.¹⁷¹ Yet this was inconsistent with the truth, because Ratkó proved again and again to be dismissive and devoid of empathy for the plight of those who reached out to her for assistance.¹⁷²

It seems to follow from Ratkó’s 1974 quote about her role in forming and organizing the new Ministry of Health where she says “Comrade Rákosi said that I may not choose what I want to do and how I want to do it, but rather that I have to do what the Party requires,”¹⁷³ that she blindly took orders and instructions, fulfilling them without further question or thought on the matter. Kocsis takes pains to illustrate this in her recounting of several of Ratkó’s more notorious actions as Health Minister: her refusal to let 800 orphans in the care of the state leave the remand

¹⁶⁹ Várkonyi, “Múlt idők tanúi, Ratkó Anna: Tizenheten az asztalnál, Egy „törvény“ története,” p. 21.

¹⁷⁰ Kocsis, “A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig.” This is also corroborated by an American newspaper editorial from 1952, concerned with the resident status of a Hungarian diplomatic delegate, Emil Weil, who was said to have assisted Ratkó gain the appointment, along with other “unqualified Communists,” see below, note 21.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid. Kocsis writes of workers, disabled veterans and families of refugees that applied to Ratkó directly for aid but were answered with letters that were meant to educate them about the virtue of hard work under socialism, but dismissed their petitions for help nonetheless.

¹⁷³ Várkonyi, “Múlt idők tanúi, Ratkó Anna: Tizenheten az asztalnál, Egy „törvény“ története,” p. 21.

homes in order to be raised by individual families. Dr Miklós Kun recalled in an interview that thus “Ratkó had crushed the child protection system which had been rebuilt after the war.”¹⁷⁴

Already in 1952, after Ratkó had served as Minister of Health for less than a full year, reports of the deficiency in leadership and work undertaken by the Ministry were lodged, but not yet with the aim of removing Ratkó from office. Reasons for the appointment of Ratkó to the post of Health Minister for her proven abilities to organize have been discussed in chapter 4.2 above, but one is prompted to question the importance of party loyalty over medical experience in choosing an appropriate Minister of Health. Numerous reports of Ratkó’s ineptitude and even arrogant displays of ignorance in front of qualified medical personnel and doctors¹⁷⁵ lend credence to theories that Ratkó was appointed to the office largely because she was a woman and would give a positive impression about the Health Minister’s sensitivity and sympathetic nature. However, her Party affiliation was also a factor; being both a Communist and a woman made Ratkó an exemplary figure, and one which could provide useful publicity. Ratkó’s ineptitude and the fact that she had no medical knowledge or training is the basis on which claims have been made that her appointment to Health Minister was largely for symbolic reasons; this will be discussed further in chapter 4.3, below.

Anna Ratkó’s role in drafting the resolution that bears her name in common usage was minimal, if it even involved more than the signing of her name (by her secretary).¹⁷⁶ She abdicated from the Ministerial chair just six weeks after Resolution 1.004 went into effect,

¹⁷⁴ Kocsis, “A szövőszéktől a miniszteri bársonyszékig.”

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. For example, Ratkó admits in a 1979 interview, when discussing a visit of top medical doctors in honor of her appointment to Minister of Health, “what the professors said, I understood not one word. Let them take notice of the fact that I was a textile technician, let them speak my language.”

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. Kocsis writes that Ratkó’s secretary was the one who most often stamped Ratkó’s signature on documents, indicating that the Minister herself was less directly involved with the process of authorizing various measures.

claiming poor health. A medical examination performed at the end of March 1953 concluded that the illness was psychosomatic, leading to speculation that Ratkó was simply trying to escape from her duties as Health Minister.¹⁷⁷ Ratkó had a history of being reprimanded by her superiors, and a confidential memorandum from 1951 carries Rákosi's endorsement of the opinion that Ratkó was responsible for the poor organizational development of the Health Ministry.¹⁷⁸

4.3 Ratkó's Ministerial Term as Symbolic Politics

The questions that follow from the internal communication that reveals Ratkó's problematic tenure as Minister are related less to why an unqualified "textile technician" (to use Ratkó's own words) was appointed to head the Ministry, but why she was kept on board after numerous problems and mistakes as early as 1951. The confidential memorandum show Rákosi's acknowledgement of Ratkó's unsatisfactory performance record. While there is no way to prove that Ratkó was retained as Minister of Health in light of these problems in order to serve as the symbolic champion of what turned out to be a controversial and unpopular population policy regarding abortion, this document shows at the very least that Ratkó was a problematic Minister.¹⁷⁹ Reasonable speculation might imply that Ratkó was kept on as Health Minister in

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ "A leváltáshoz vezető út" ("The Road Leading to Replacement"), collection of six documents from the Hungarian National Archives. These documents are: "Weil Emil feljegyzése a minisztérium munkájáról," ("Weil Emil's Memorandum about the Work of the Ministry"), "Ratkó Anna kapcsolata munkatársaival, Jelentés az Egészségügyi Minisztérium munkájáról," ("Anna Ratkó's contact with her colleagues, a Report on the work of the Ministry"), "Feljegyzés az Egészségügyi Minisztérium vezetésében és munkájában tapasztalt hiányosságokról," ("Memorandum concerning the deficiencies experienced in the health ministry's leadership and work"), "Ratkó Anna pártbüntetése," ("Anna Ratkó's punishment from the Party") and "Ratkó Anna egészségügyi miniszter leváltása," ("The replacement of Anna Ratkó as Minister of Health").

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. In the memo, addressed to Comrade Rákosi, Emil Weil (Hungarian minister to the United States from 1951 to 1953) called Ratkó inefficient, claimed she squandered energy on unimportant matters and that her leadership was unsatisfactory. Weil went on to say that in spite

order to serve as a scapegoat for the failed reproductive policies of 1953, but since she left the Ministry well before the negative effects had been assessed, it might also be the case that Ratkó was kept on despite her poor work in 1952 simply to save face, or for other reasons.

Totalitarian regimes, whether they be fascist, Communist or Nazi, hold a common belief shared by the ruling elite: their era would be “analogous to the great epochs of world history, which were characterized by period styles. [...] Adopting this ideology, they aimed to achieve spectacular changes not only in the traditional arts, but also at the level of propaganda, life-style models, and views of Man himself.”¹⁸⁰ Thus image and representation were the connective tissue that would build the link between politics and everyday life, or in other words, the bridge between the state and the people. Attempts to mimic the Soviet Union in style and aesthetics were part of an attempt to establish legitimacy after the Communist take-over.¹⁸¹ In maintaining a polished public image despite whatever inner turmoil may have been taking place, important steps were being taken to make propaganda a far-reaching part of everyday life. In line with György’s assertion of a deliberately manipulated and controlled ‘period style’ apparent in everyday life in Stalinist Hungary,¹⁸² Ratkó’s appointment to the Ministry of Health (and her continued stint as Health Minister, despite her poor standing with the highest party leaders) was an effort to conform to this style. I would argue that Ratkó’s term of office as Minister of Health might have been more important for what it was meant to symbolize than for what she actually

of his hopes for Ratkó’s improved behavior in the past two months, she had not complied. He blamed her eagerness to prove to all that she was healthy and capable, but in fact was in danger of exhausting herself. According to a 1952 article in Washington newspaper *Tri-City Herald*, Weil was the person who recommended the “inexperienced Communists” who replaced the “non-Communist experts” in the Welfare Ministry, and was responsible for facilitating Anna Ratkó’s appointment to cabinet minister, George E. Sokolsky, “Dr. Emil Weil Should Get Yank Boot,” *Tri-City Herald*, December 5, 1952, p. 4.

¹⁸⁰ György, “The Mirror of Everyday Life, or the Will to a Period Style,” p.15.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

achieved. As the first female minister of Hungary, and by virtue of the fact she was appointed so soon after the Communist take-over, Ratkó may be considered a symbol of the egalitarian nature of the Communist government.

I agree with the conclusion drawn by Piroska Kocsis, that Anna Ratkó was chosen to be Minister of Health primarily because she was a woman, but more precisely because she was a devoted female communist, thus setting an example for women, who were more inclined than men to vote conservatively and against the Communist party.¹⁸³ The failure of the totalitarian aspirations of the Rákosi regime are only exemplified by the failed reproductive policies championed by Anna Ratkó; the latter did not cause the former. However, one could argue that a more charismatic figure as Minister of Health might have changed the outcome of events. Efforts to establish totalitarian rule require reliable government agents who can achieve reliable outcomes; yet human error and the nature of men's and women's free will makes this aspect of totalitarianism practically impossible. Human nature and resistance to authoritative change when it does not directly benefit the individual will be discussed as problematic variables for the failure of Rákosi's attempt to establish totalitarian rule in the conclusion. These elements of unreliability when dealing with control of a population, will also be considered as instrumental in determining the success of a theory versus the success of a theory in practice in the conclusion.

Rákosi's 'father cult' as it has been given attention in this paper,¹⁸⁴ posits the leader as

¹⁸³ Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, pp. 95, 100. According to Kenez women were more likely to vote conservatively, as they had proven in 1945, when women made up sixty percent of the electorate, due to wartime losses of male voters.

¹⁸⁴ See chapter 3.3d for more on Rákosi as father symbol. Additionally, Kürti writes, "Equally extraordinary were the measures taken to curtail women's rights, sexual practices, and family life, and the general subordination of women to men concomitant with the solidification of a masculine gender model. Foucault's observation that the modern state attempts to regulate a specific sexual discourse (1980: 33-34) is applicable to Stalinist-totalitarian states as well, where constraints were placed on fecundity and reproductive behavior."

the father of the nation (often alongside Stalin and Lenin). As per the regime's attitude toward families, marriage and reproductive sexual relations, it seems odd that a complementary mother figure was neglected. Of course, in urging women to have children and reproduce the nation, every woman was cast in the role of national mother, but this was a more general symbolic tactic. Though Ratkó has never explicitly been posited as a "mother" figure, I would argue that the importance of her womanhood (and by extension motherhood) is implicit in her appointment to Minister of Health, a post that implies the provision of care and nurturance for the nation, a role traditionally assigned to mothers. I suggest Ratkó's appointment to Minister of Health was a political move that was intended to add to the totalitarian propaganda machine.

According to Rebecca Kay, under state socialism in the Soviet Union and satellite states "debates on the nature and means of achieving sexual equality were generally reduced to 'the woman question.'"¹⁸⁵ I suggest that this vaguely described 'problem' accordingly received an equally vague 'answer' in the ineffectual Health Minister Anna Ratkó. In this chapter I have attempted to apply asses whether Ratkó was a token female in Rákosi's government or if her appointment to that particular post had rather more to do with the regime's hope for successful reproductive policies presented by a woman, or if Ratkó's high position was meant to attract attention to the model Communist woman, among other possible explanations. In the 'egalitarian' society of state socialist Hungary, it is unnecessary to ask whether or not the feminization of the office of Health Minister was a political move, as every decision made by the government was calculated in order to benefit the Party and the cause of socialism,¹⁸⁶ though sometimes ineptly, as we have seen. Questions about the intentions behind the appointment of

¹⁸⁵ Rebecca Kay, "Introduction" in *Gender, Equality and Difference During and After State Socialism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, pp. 1-2.

Anna Ratkó to Minister of Health can be addressed through an examination of Anna Ratkó's personal contribution to the Rákosi regime in the larger context of socialism. Yet it must be acknowledged that limited information has left us with slightly more than speculative answers. The questions remain important, nonetheless. We can understand Anna Ratkó to be another brick in the structure of state socialism as it was envisioned by Rákosi and others, but like all other elements in the building of state socialism, she was an uncontrollable human variable. Thus, when she was perhaps meant to be an inspiring example of socialist work ethic and loyalty, she came to be seen instead as the despised minion of a repressive regime, and in fact a convenient scapegoat.

Conclusion

The minor baby boom that occurred after the implementation of stricter sentencing practices against the crime of abortion alongside the launch of a war on abortion among all segments of society led to overcrowding in schools and other state institutions, and initiated the “abnormal demographic pattern”¹⁸⁷ that reoccurred every twenty or so years. In examining This is just the most visible after-effect of the Ratkó Era, but at the same time possibly the least enduring, despite the continued ‘ripple-effect’ population growth. I call the demographic change the least enduring effect because Resolution 1.004 failed to achieve its stated demographic goals; Hungary still struggles with a declining and aging population and the small increase in the population over a short period in the 1950s achieved nothing in terms of enduring protection against population decline.

The contradictions apparent in the promotion of gender equality in the context of industrialization lie in the concurrent application of the Hungarian Communist Party’s maternalist agenda, which held that all women should want and did want to be mothers. The need for women to participate in (re)productive work both within and outside of the home was one of many incongruent elements that characterized state socialism in Hungary. A lack of cohesion and the inability to coordinate government agents and thus mobilize a united front on behalf of the population in the area of reproductive policies was just one aspect of the failure of the Ratkó Era.

¹⁸⁷ Kiss, “The Second ‘No:’ Women in Hungary,” p. 54. I have included Kiss among the authors I consider to espouse a functionalist approach, as she first states unequivocally that Resolution 1.004 caused the demographic change, and then uses “abnormal” as a qualifying term for demographic pattern when “normal” is not defined (if it exists).

The Hungarian citizens' response to Resolution 1.004 has been said by various authors to consist of the rise in the number of state-sanctioned abortions. This approach takes too much for granted, both the increase in the number of abortions and the repeatedly adjusted legislation were, at least in part, responses to the living conditions and economic situation of 1950s Hungary, among other things. The legacy of the Ratkó Era is part of the legacy of state socialism in the fifties; a largely unsuccessful attempt to shape society according to perhaps unrealistic ideals. The eagerness to establish control and the ineptitude of the regime as a whole (constantly relying on help from Moscow¹⁸⁸) worked to the ultimate disadvantage of the attempt to establish totalitarian control. Multiple attempts to increase the birth rate in order to support the politics of industrialization and the building of socialism were countered with attempts to correct the misguided regulations; this back-and-forth volley of improvised population policy measures created an atmosphere of confusion and lack of control, rather than establishing the opposite, desired air of control and contentment with the government's proposals.

Anna Ratkó's term as Health Minister was fraught with challenges, both on the level of unsuccessful policies and on a personal level, in Ratkó's inability to live up to the party leader's expectations. Ratkó's unsuccessful stint leading the Ministry of Health mirrors the failure of the reproductive policies enacted under her leadership, which reflect on the failure of the Rákosi regime as a totalitarian power. These examples of ineffectual (highly Sovietized) socialist politics fit into each other like matryoshka dolls, a fitting metaphor.

Ultimately, the success or failure of a regime or system of government is dependent on multiple factors, not least of these being human nature and the unreliability of human actors cast in roles by a leading ideology. The repeatedly amended reproductive policies epitomize the

¹⁸⁸ Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, pp.1-2.

failed attempt to establish totalitarian control under Rákosi, as they illustrate the unpredictability of the human element, in the case of both Minister Ratkó and the individuals whose reproductive rights were being delimited.

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