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Breaks or Continuities? The Global Dimensions of Pro-Choice Campaigns and
Debates on Reproductive Rights in the Mirror of Feminist Activism in State
Socialist and Post Socialist Hungary

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Abstract

Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit reproduktiven Rechten und Pro-Choice-Aktivismus aus einer globalen Perspektive. Es werden globale und lokale Parallelen zwischen feministischen Bewegungen und Kampagnen zu reproduktiven Rechten und der Verbreitung feministischer Ideen und Praktiken in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts in Ungarn gezogen. Dazu gehört die Petitionskampagne von 1973, die von jungen Frauen initiiert wurde, die mit der Dissidentengruppe Demokratische Opposition verbunden waren. Sie zielte darauf ab, die geplante Verschärfung der Abtreibungsvorschriften zu verhindern und die bestehende Institution der freien Abtreibung zu bewahren. Das zweite Beispiel einer Pro-Choice-Kampagne wurde vom Ungarischen Feministischen Netzwerk in den Jahren 1991 – 1992 initiiert, deren Bestandteil eine Petitions- und Postkartenaktion war. Die gewählten Methoden zur Darstellung der Zusammenhänge sind eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse unter Verwendung von Artikeln aus der feministischen Zeitschrift *Nőszemély* sowie eine globale Kontextualisierung: der Vergleich der beiden ungarischen Kampagnen von 1973 und 1992; die Untersuchung, ob die ungarische feministische Kampagnen aus der staatssozialistischen und der postsozialistischen Zeit Brüche oder Kontinuitäten darstellen (wobei 1989 einen Wendepunkt darstellt), sowie die Frage, wie feministische Gruppen auf dem Erbe voneinander bauten.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Field Diary – Post Socialist Underpass

I am on my way from one train station to the other in Budapest, from Keleti to Nyugati – literally from 'East' to 'West'. After taking the metro, I decide to walk through an empty part of the underpass, a dimly lit corridor full of closed shops and booths. Someone not too far is playing the violin, making the situation similar to the plot of a film, when a character is walking, deep in thoughts. In my case, these thoughts are quite nostalgic, as some tables designed for selling goods, as well as the items visible through the dark shop windows remind me of my childhood in the 1990s and early 2000s, full of vivid markets and the strong presence of the so-called 'Chinese shops' and clothes. A period of changes, upheavals, parallel to the feeling that some things always remain the same.

Walking across the underpass represents both a time travel and a frozen moment for me, although it all comes to an end when I arrive at the strong lights and modern walls of the shopping mall Westend, full of well-known brands, chains of fast food and fast fashion.

This makes me think of the history of the feminist journal *Nőszemély*, starting at the beginning of the 1990s, full of political, social and economic upheavals, shaping one not just through new experiences – for example through consumption patterns –, but also continuities. This walk, starting from market booths and ending in a standardised, Western shopping mall, might represent the same road that the journal went through between 1990 and 1998, paved with (post) socialist continuities as well as Western contacts and support, balancing between those, while also finding their own way and voice.

In order to understand Hungarian feminist activism from that time, one might have to dig – or walk – deep into the symbolic underpass, paying attention to all details, some of which might seem vaguely familiar or on the contrary, completely unknown. Having spent months doing this, however proved to be a highly interesting and exciting journey, a path worth taking, if one aims at understanding the past and present of Hungarian women, as the history of the Hungarian Feminist Network and of their journal *Nőszemély* is not just a time travel or frozen moment, but also layers of our current, shared experiences.

1.2 Introduction

Reproductive rights¹ and pro-choice activism appear as global phenomena, based on three characteristics: first, legal frames and regulations on reproductive rights are defined not only by nation states, but also shaped by agreements and results of global conferences on human rights, women's rights and population control, even when those are non-binding. Second, just as reproduction itself is present all over the world, so are its varying frames and legal conditions, while pro-choice and pro-life arguments and activism also contribute to these frames in differing locations, simultaneously influenced locally by social, cultural and economic settings. Third, advocacy and activism of pro-life and pro-choice movements² is to be found across the globe, although with differing methods and under varying circumstances. Globality can be defined – based on a definition of sociologist Roland Robertson³ – by the awareness of the intertwined state of the world, in which phenomena continuously and mutually shape and influence each other, independent from geographic distance. Glocality – the intertwined state of global and local phenomena – is a central aspect of this thesis, in which global and local parallels will be drawn regarding feminist movements and

¹ A definition from the European Institute for Gender Equality summarizes reproductive rights as follows:

‘Human rights that are already recognised in national laws, international laws and international human rights documents and other consensus documents resting on the recognition of the basic rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. (...) The human rights of women include their right to have control over, and freely and responsibly decide upon, matters relating to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free from coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the bodily integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences.’ Online available under:

https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1179?language_content_entity=en [14.11.2024]

Reproductive rights include – among others – access to information on birth control and sexual health, access to contraceptives, right to abortion as well as freedom from coerced sterilization and contraception.

² The term pro-life is used for groups opposing access to legal abortion, while pro-choice groups support access to safe and legal termination of pregnancies on demand.

³ ‘Globalization as a concept refers both to the compassion of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.’ Roland Robertson, *Globalization. Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: SAGE Publications, 1992), 8.

campaigns concerning reproductive rights. Here, ‘global’ is defined as a state of interconnectedness across the globe, the wandering of ideas, strategies, practices, and in some cases, actors. ‘Local’, on the other hand, is Hungary, the chosen focus of this thesis, which will be used for presenting the wandering of feminist ideas and practices in the second part of the 20th century, both during (1970s) and after (1990s) state socialism.

Global examples of pro-choice activism include campaigns initiated by feminist groups from Latin America, as well as Eastern and Western Europe, with special attention to the main focus of this thesis: a petition campaign from 1973, as well as a pro-choice initiative from 1992, which included sending postcards, starting a petition, and involving the media. Both were the local appearance of global developments of debates on reproduction, family planning and women’s rights as human rights.

The petition campaign of 1973 was initiated by young women connected to the dissident group Democratic Opposition in state socialist Hungary, and was an outstanding example of citizens’ initiatives during that era. It aimed at preventing the planned tightening of abortion regulations – which in the end did not happen, participation however had consequences for some initiators. A central figure of this action was the later Paris-based documentary filmmaker, Zsuzsa Körösi, for whom her participation in collecting signatures resulted in a ban of finishing her university degree and continuing her studies at any Hungarian university. Some sources name her as the (main) author of the petition, while Körösi herself argues for collective authorship, the text being the result of the work of around 15 – 20 participants.⁴ Whether this campaign was (completely) feminist, is a matter of perspective. According to Fanni Svégel, the petition was inspired by second wave feminism and global encounters of Zsuzsa Körösi at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, which collided with local social and economic upheavals – events which will be elaborated in a chapter on the petition of 1973 in detail. Leftist movements of 1968 and the ‘Manifeste des 343’ published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (April 5, 1971) are named as sources of inspiration for the petition campaign:

⁴ Zsuzsa Körösi et al., ‘Petition for the Protection of the Freedom of Abortion (1973, Hungary)’, in *Texts and Contexts from the History of Feminism and Women’s Rights. East Central Europe, Second Half of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Zsófia Lóránd, Adela Hincu, Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc and Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz (Vienna: CEU Press, 2024), 610. ‘About the Author’ and ‘Context’ by Fanni Svégel. Translation of the petition can also be found in this chapter.

'Körösi encountered the leftist movements of 1968 at the 9th World Festival of Youth and Students held in Sofia, Bulgaria. Inspired by this experience, she traveled to London and Paris in the summer of 1971, where she was influenced by second-wave feminism through local people. In Paris, everyone was talking about the „Manifeste des 343” published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (April 5, 1971): a short text by Simone de Beauvoir was signed by 343 women stating „Je me suis fait avorter (I've had an abortion).”⁵

Feminist arguments, however, were left out of the text of the petition for strategic reasons, as recalled by philosopher Ágnes Heller, one of the intellectuals, giving advice regarding the petition campaign:

'To collect as many signatures as possible, the text targeted wider social strata, not only feminists and allies. It outlined the authors' objections to the tightening of abortion regulation in four points, and also offered solutions to problems hindering childbearing in four points. The necessity for accessible contraception, as well as improving childbirth conditions and easing the financial situation of families, were also articulated. In her recollection, the philosopher Ágnes Heller stated that it was not the content but the action itself that made a difference. She also pointed out that feminist arguments such as women's right to self-determination were omitted for strategic reasons, to maximize the number of signatories.'⁶

The achievement of 1553 signatures is important to mention already at the beginning, which could only be achieved by the common effort of many, following the snowball-effect – many had been collecting signatures parallel at various places: schools, universities, work places, house parties. Participants did not only sign the petition, but also added much personal information, and in some cases, even a description of their motivation for taking part. The following summary of Svégl highlights two important aspects of this petition: that it aimed at

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 613-614.

preserving the existing institution of free abortion, and that – even if not present in its text – it was the only such campaign inspired by feminist thought during state socialism in Hungary:

‘In the spring of 1973, inspired by the French manifesto, a group of young female students – Körösi and her friends, including Júlia Veres, a university student and active figure of the opposition, and Piroska Márkus, a high school student – formulated a petition to protect the existing institution of free abortion. This is considered to be the only movement generated by feminist ideas during the Kádár regime.’⁷

The second example of pro-choice campaigns includes an action initiated after the System Change of 1989 in the Eastern Bloc by the non-governmental organisation Hungarian Feminist Network and its working group, Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport [‘Campaign Group for the Right to Have a Choice’] in 1991 – 1992, when the newly elected Parliament had to meet decisions on reproductive rights, and pro-life groups started lobbying for stricter regulations on abortion. As the result of a decision of the Constitutional Court in January 1992, a new law regarding abortion regulations had to be created until the end of the year, which happened parallel to a fierce debate in society. The voice of women, however was heard the least, which led to Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport taking up the role of an advocate, aiming at presenting how issues connected to pregnancy and fetuses should be perceived independent from doctrines or ideologies, and that, instead, one should focus on the everyday needs of women, children and families. The group was created in May 1992, with the help of members of the Feminist Network and – professional and financial – support from abroad. Their goal was, similarly to Western political campaigns, to make the biggest impact possible on decision makers and the public in a relatively short time. Besides, the empowerment of women also appeared as a central aim, raising awareness to the fact that they, as citizens and members of society, with the right to vote should make their voices heard regarding an issue, which can fundamentally impact their lives. The postcard-action, an example of direct influence on decision makers proved to be the most successful part of the campaign. Thousands have sent postcards printed and distributed by the group to Members of Parliament, calling them upon as voters, not to vote for the tightening of abortion regulations. Members of Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport have also handed speaker György

⁷ Ibid., 610.

Szabad thirteen thousand signatures to Parliament, demanding to keep women's right to have a choice. In the end, the 'B version' of the law 'On the protection of the lives on fetuses' was accepted, meaning the more liberal proposal.⁸ Central figures of the pro-choice campaign of 1992 include Feminist Network member and editor of the group's journal, *Nőszemély*, sociologist Judit Acsády. Her research focus includes history of feminist movements, women's labour, civil society, gender studies, gender relations after the transitions, women's movements, women in public life, care and climate change. She is currently member of the Editorial Board of the Interdisciplinary eJournal of Gender Studies, the first Hungarian journal in the field,⁹ and her research papers contributed much to this thesis. Antonia Burrows, a feminist from the United Kingdom had taken up a central role in founding the Feminist Network, and bringing English-speaking literature on gender and feminism closer to members, also as a guest lecturer of Women's Studies at the University of Budapest (ELTE) in the 1990s. Her current projects include Közkinés Könyvtár, an independent and open library in Budapest offering reading materials on feminism, civil rights, social sciences, travel and history since 2015. Her involvement in Hungarian feminist campaigns is a great example of intensified international contacts of feminist groups in the former Eastern Bloc from 1989 on, and how ideas travel, often with the direct help of activists and scholars. Judit Acsády, Antonia Burrows and Zsuzsa Körösi have all participated in the conference 'Abortuszpetíció50 konferencia 1973–2023' ['Abortion Petition50 Conference 1973–2023'] in February 2024, organised by the feminist association Nőkért Egyesület ['Pro Women Association'], recently connecting the above-mentioned two pro-choice campaigns. These examples of citizens' initiatives and women's rights activism did not happen isolated or independent from global events and development of discourse, but had been intertwined with and – directly or indirectly – influenced by the results of transnational conferences, agreements, literature, and changes of rhetoric, both during the 1970s and 1990s: decades, which were central regarding reproductive rights, starting with the Proclamation of Teheran in 1968, following the first International Conference on Human Rights. As Djamchid Momtaz summarizes:

⁸ *Nőszemély*, 3rd issue, April 1993. Online available under:

https://nokert.hu/sites/default/files/csatolmanyok/noszemely_3_1993_aprilis_3._szam_0.pdf [30.03.2024]

⁹ <https://szociologia.tk.hu/en/researcher/acsady-judit> [04.11.2024]

‘The Proclamation devoted two paragraphs to women’s rights. One maintains that an inferior status for women is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (para. 15). In what was unquestionably a first, the Proclamation also recognized the basic right of parents “to determine freely and responsibly the number and the spacing of their children” (para. 16), implicitly recognizing the right of women to terminate a pregnancy that is at the root of national family planning policies.’¹⁰

As another milestone shaping the women’s rights discourse during the 1970s, the Helsinki Accords (1975) and notions of human rights are to be named, which had a great impact on dissident movements behind the Iron Curtain from already 1973 on, when – ‘following a foreign ministers’ meeting in Helsinki in July 1973, committees met in Geneva to draft an agreement, a process that lasted from September 1973 to July 1975.’¹¹ Besides, *Roe v. Wade*, a legal case in which the U.S. Supreme Court on January 22, 1973, ruled that unduly restrictive state regulation of abortion is unconstitutional,¹² had been considered a landmark decision regarding reproductive rights, and overlapped with the year of the Hungarian petition campaign, which was initiated a few months after. Another tendency, which can be connected to feminist movements across the globe is the emergence of women’s health and reproduction as a focus, as well as a shift away from the gender-neutral language of former human rights’ declarations, and gender as a perspective gaining ground during the second wave of feminism. Abortion and reproductive rights have continuously been present as topics of scholars working in the field of women’s and gender history, but gained more importance as a focus during the second wave of feminism. These developments also overlapped with a transnational concern of overpopulation versus a pro-natalist view of some states, also aiming at controlling reproduction. Although in not all cases can direct impacts on movements and feminist campaigns be observed, the above-mentioned developments in the second half of the 20th century shaped the frames in which feminists and activists operated. For the 1990s, two conferences of the United Nations are central regarding reproductive rights: the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, as well as the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. ‘Women and health’ was one of

¹⁰ https://legal.un.org/avl/pdf/ha/fatchr/fatchr_e.pdf [15.11.2024]

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Helsinki-Accords> [03.11.2024]

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/event/Roe-v-Wade> [04.11.2024]

the twelve main areas of the agenda. This conference, according to the website of the United Nations, is considered the most important of the four conferences on women held between 1975–1995, ‘... because it built on political agreements that had been reached at the three previous global conferences on women, and it consolidated five decades of legal advances aimed at securing the equality of women with men in law and in practice.’¹³ According to Feminist Network member Vera Bozzi, three representatives of the Feminist Network and connected organisations had taken part in the conference: Andrea Tóth at the governmental, Antonia Burrows and Blanka Kozma (Közéleti Roma Nők Egyesülete [‘Association of Roma Women in Public Life’]) at the non-governmental section in Huairou, 50 km from Beijing.¹⁴ The tendency of NGOization of grassroots and informal groups is also a global phenomenon of the 1990s, and the Hungarian Feminist Network is no exception.

The presence versus lack of women’s movements¹⁵ in Hungary is also central regarding activities of the Feminist Network and the petition campaign of 1973, as the history of some feminist groups traces back to the beginning of the 20th century, and presents my central theses. First, a central concept accompanying the analysis of both global and local connections of feminist groups is the role of abortion and reproductive rights as a lens, highlighting the circumstances, opportunities and challenges of women in a given society, continuously shaped by history and social change. Second, Hungarian feminist campaigns did not happen isolated from each other, and differing groups had built upon the legacy of each other, as their activities had continuously been shaped by global tendencies and local conditions. While the System Change of 1989 has opened new doors and led to new difficulties for feminists, it is no example of a ‘clean break’,¹⁶ but rather a milestone of

¹³ <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/beijing1995> [03.11.2024]

¹⁴ Vera Bozzi and Gábor Czene, *Elsikkasztott feminizmus* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2006), 123.

¹⁵ A definition of the UNICEF project Social and Behaviour Change, which is used in this thesis, defines social movements as follows: ‘Social movements are joint efforts by citizens, groups and communities bound by similar goals who organize themselves to act and overcome their condition, tackle social issues together or resist domination. Social movements represent more intense and visible moments in a continuous social change process: the pace accelerates and the scale increases as the initial group generates more debates and rallies more people, in a snowball effect nurtured by activism, dialogue, networking, mobilization, media engagement and action.’ Online available under: <https://www.sbcguidance.org/understand/social-movements> [15.11.2024]

¹⁶ The term was used in the following source: Joanna Regulska and Zofia Włodarczyk, ‘Fluidity or clean breaks?’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, ed. Katalin Fábián, Janet Elise Johnson and Mara Lazda (London: Routledge, 2022).

continuity, as the following examples in separate chapters show. Besides, a further parallel originates in Hungarian feminism before state socialism.

An early group of Hungarian feminists, Feministák Egyesülete ['Hungarian Feminists' Association'], was founded in 1904 by Vilma Glücklich and Róza Bédy-Schwimmer.¹⁷ The high number of parallels one can draw between the Feminist Network of the 1990s and Hungarian Feminists' Association – operating until the communist takeover in 1948 and ban of independent organisations – is astonishing. It is, however, no coincidence, since members of the Network aimed at studying, presenting, and taking the feminist history of Hungary into consideration. This goal led to a continuous column of *Nőszemély* – undertaken by Irén Borbála Elekes, librarian at Országos Széchényi Könyvtár ['National Széchényi Library']¹⁸ and member of the Feminist Network –, using primary sources and archive materials. Besides boosting motivation to continue feminist activism and adding important sources to Hungarian women's history, this column also served as a counter-argument for recurring notions of feminism as a 'Western import', making it an unnatural occurrence in Hungary. Besides antifeminist arguments and challenges of feminist groups in differing political climates, two characteristics are crucial when observing parallels of the Hungarian Feminists' Association and the Feminist Network: extensive connections with feminist groups outside of Hungary, as well as the creation of new, feminist journals. Regarding the Feminists' Association, invitations of Western feminists and hosting events like the Seventh Convention of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, held in Budapest in 1913 is important to mention.¹⁹ Similarly to the foundation of *Nőszemély* as a feminist journal in 1991, feminist publications also contributed to the cause of activists at the beginning of the 20th century. Arpad and Marinovich mention *Feminista Értesítő* ['Feminist Bulletin'] from 1906, replaced in 1907 by

¹⁷ Susan Arpad and Sarolta Marinovich, 'Why Hasn't There Been a Strong Women's Movement in Hungary?', *Popular Culture* 29, no. 2 (1995): 84.

¹⁸ Hereby I would like to thank Irén Borbála Elekes for telling me about her contributions to *Nőszemély*, work with the Feminist Network, and valuable literary recommendations. The start of her relationship with the Network in itself presents important aspects of grassroot organisations and historical parallels with the Hungarian Feminists' Association. She found a copy of *Nőszemély* at her workplace, National Széchényi Library in Budapest, and started researching feminism in Hungary. Later on, this led to her joining the Feminist Network, becoming an editor of *Nőszemély*, and sharing fascinating chapters of Hungarian women's history from the first half of the 20th century.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

A Nő és a Társadalom [‘Women and Society’], edited by Róza Bédy-Schwimmer, as well as Egyesült Erővel [‘With United Strength’] from 1909 on.²⁰

Chosen methods for presenting connections are qualitative content analysis with the help of articles of the journal *Nőszemély*, documenting the campaign of the Feminist Network, as well as contextualisation: comparing both Hungarian campaigns from 1973 and 1992 to each other and to global examples from the same decades. These include developments from Latin America (primarily Mexico), as well as Western Europe (West Germany and Italy) during the 1970s and 1990s. The latter two also present regional contacts, since the West German pro-choice movement was tied to the Netherlands, while the Italian movement was strongly influenced by French feminist activism. The influence of literature from US American, British and French feminists also appears in many cases, including its impact on the Hungarian Feminist Network and their journal *Nőszemély*, containing Hungarian translations of essays and excerpts of novels. An essential part of this thesis is the literature used for contextualising events and developing theses. Literary sources – articles, papers and volumes – cover a wide range of disciplines, including history, sociology, cultural anthropology and gender studies, while laws and articles of the journal *Nőszemély* serve as primary sources. Authors quoted include feminists and scholars active during the pro-choice campaigns of 1973 and 1992, as well as after, researching these periods. Sources from participants of the petition of 1973 include papers of Zsuzsa Körösi and a blog entry of Piroska Márkus, while several works of Judit Acsády, an article of Zsuzsa Béres, as well as a book of Vera Bozzi and Gábor Czene present projects of the Feminist Network and the era their activities took place in, through the eyes of members of the Network. Other sources include works on reproductive rights globally and in Hungary before and after 1989, written either by Hungarian, or international scholars who showed a high interest in changing gender relations during the transition period. A recurring narrative – especially written by Western scholars around 1989 and in the early 1990s – is a concern about the situation of women, what they lost or could lose during the transition period, based on observations, interviews and statistics, primarily on labour, reproduction and childcare, as well as the representation of women in the media and advertisements. Besides online sources – definitions, articles, interviews –, the video

²⁰ Ibid., 84.

recording of ‘Abortion Petition⁵⁰ Conference 1973–2023’ is another source, which contributed much to this thesis.

All in all, this thesis is aiming at widening frames of the history of reproductive rights’ campaigns in Hungary, viewing them as glocal phenomena with roots in Hungarian feminist past, connecting them to global parallels from the same era, and considering them in many ways stories of success. While (self-)reflections and literature on both campaigns presented here include notions of difficulties and examples of goals not completely achieved, the existence of such campaigns under difficult circumstances and in hostile environments is, in itself, success, in my point of view. Collecting a surprisingly high number of signatures in a society, where petitions had no recent antecedent, or starting a complex, multilayered campaign – collecting signatures, sending postcards to Members of Parliament, modifying posters – including media involvement, are stories worth sharing, and have the potential of contributing to the motivation of new generations of feminist activists, just as the history of Hungarian feminists from the early 20th century had an impact on the work of the Feminist Network.

1.3 History of Reproductive Rights and Chronology of Women’s Movements in East Central Europe. The Role of Abortion as a Lens.

In order to understand the roots, frames and surrounding atmosphere of the petition of 1973 and the debate of 1992, defining a ‘trial of democracy’²¹, as well as women’s rights before and after 1989 in Hungary, it is important to look back at previous eras and widen our horizons regarding the general periodisation of pro women activism, primarily defined by a focus on Western women’s movements. While these universalizing notions of gendered history do overlap in some ways with developments in Central and Eastern Europe, there are also differences due to local circumstances, even within the region: throughout time, East Central Europe had been continuously shaped by the presence of multiple empires, as well as social and cultural upheavals, from which state socialism is one, relatively recent example and

²¹ Here I refer to a metaphor used by Anna Klára Haiser, already appearing in the title of her paper. Anna Klára Haiser, ‘Egy új demokrácia első próbája: abortuszvita a rendszerváltás idején,’ *Orpheus Noster* 14, no.1 (2022).

a milestone, which had affected gender relations through culture, labour and family policy. The results of these impacts on the region can be summarized along certain categories like education, labour and sexuality, as seen by Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann. Their chapter on women's and gender history presents a complex picture, in which, besides regional similarities and differences, the intertwined state of Western and East Central European histories is also highlighted:

'Central gendered legal and socio-economic arrangements and ideologies traveled from West to East in Europe and made a profound impact on both regions. But this was not a one-dimensional exchange. Western gender ideologies and practices met and intermingled with the varieties of the East Central European gender order.'²²

One example of chronology of Hungarian feminism, described by Judit Acsády, is dividing feminist movements of Hungary as follows:

- '1. pre-feminist movements, 'feministic' movements and aspiration for emancipation from the middle or second half of the 19th century on, connected to the Age of Reforms (e.g. education, employment, participation in public life)
2. From the end of the 19th century to the end of the First World War: first wave of feminism in Hungary (1904, Hungarian Feminists' Association)
3. Period between the two World Wars
4. After 1945 (no associations after 1948), state socialism, Soviet-type emancipation
5. Period after the System Change, new organisations – second wave of feminism.'²³

In this sense, while some of the chronology follows general trends of Western feminism – in several sources equaling feminism itself – , upheavals of Hungarian history led to local

²² Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann, 'Women's and Gender History', in *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700*, ed. Árpád von Klimó and Irina Livezeanu (London: Routledge, 2017), 310.

²³ Judit Acsády, 'A hazai feminizmus története iránti érdeklődés megújulása – A kutatások tétje és a szakmai együttműködések kérdése', *Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya eFolyóirat* 12, no. 1 (2022): 106.

changes of development. On the other hand, other periodisations are also possible, especially if we consider the importance of the petition of 1973 as a feminist campaign. It could contribute to broadening the period after 1945, when besides Soviet-type emancipation, a rare, but important, informal feminist campaign also took place, highlighting the aspect of fluidity before and after 1989.

Regarding reproductive rights in Hungary, the periods after the end of the First and the Second World War fundamentally determined regulations, which had long-lasting impacts on pro-choice campaigns decades later. Besides the start of providing professionalised humanitarian aid in a current sense during and after WWI, another upheaval concerned debates on terminating pregnancies. A leading role in these – partly professional, partly public – discussions was taken by gynecologists after the First World War. Although debates on the regulation of family planning and birth control have been present before, mass rapes committed during the World Wars contributed to intensified debates and, later on, changes of regulations. As Andrea Pető and Fanni Svégel summarize:

’ ... the phenomenon of mass military rape influenced ongoing debates on termination of pregnancy, and what legal and practical consequences followed. Cases of rape during World War I sparked public debates that gradually created space for abortion legalisation. The long-discussed permissive law only came into effect after the mass rape committed by soldiers of the Soviet Army in 1945 followed by the adoption of the Soviet family policy model with all its turns.’²⁴

Defining elements of the following decades included abortion committees and their social role, as well as the Ratkó era between 1949–1953 and the Ratkó-myth, playing a crucial role in views on the Hungarian history of reproductive rights until today, equaling it with bans on abortion and a huge ‘baby boom’ caused by state regulations.²⁵ Fanni Svégel debunks this myth in detail, including the role of Anna Ratkó, Minister of Health between 1950–1953, exact regulations of the period, as well as demographic statistics on the so-called ‘Ratkó

²⁴ Andrea Pető and Fanni Svégel, ‘A háborús nemi erőszak és a nőgyógyász lobbí hatása a magyarországi születésszabályozási rendszerre,’ *Per Aspera ad Astra* 8, no. 1 (2021): 70.

²⁵ Fanni Svégel, ‘A női test ellenőrzéséről, Ratkó-mítoszról és önrendelkezésről. Kritikai reflexiók egy tanulmány margójára,’ *Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya eFolyóirat* 13, no. 2 (2023): 209.

children'. According to Svégl, abortions during the Ratkó era were not completely banned, but more regulated than before, primarily solely available for health reasons, while social and personal reasons only reappeared among enabling factors from 1954 on. The population policy programme of 1952, including a fight against abortions as an aim, included education of healthcare workers, steps against illegal abortions carried out outside of healthcare facilities (with public legal actions) and government propaganda, peaking between the end of 1952 and July 1953. In October 1952, however, Anna Ratkó already suggested broadening, for which reasons terminations of pregnancies could be requested. Motives behind included making abortion committees more popular, and helping the institutionalisation of healthcare and abortions, while she also urged involving the police more in fighting illegal terminations of pregnancies. Factors contributing to the Ratkó-myth, according to Svégl include shame, fear and gossip, as well as the lack of information regarding exact regulations on carrying out abortions.²⁶ This was followed by an important shift regarding the approach of the state to demographics and the primary role of women in society, as described by Judit Acsády:

'In Hungary following the defeat of the 1956 uprising and freedom fight the Kádár regime made several attempts to pacify and consolidate the society. By the mid-1960's the strictness of the political oppression relatively eased, in 1968 economic reforms were introduced and also a new system of child care allowance became established. Mothers could stay at home on maternity leave and extend their absence from paid work up to a three-year-long period. These policies were connected both to the aims to ameliorate the demographic trends of the declining childbirth and both to the lessening need of a great number of women as labour force. That is, by this regulation a significant portion of women became withdrawn temporarily from the labour market. (...) At the same time there was a discursive shift emphasising women's role as mothers.'²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., 211.

²⁷ Judit Acsády, 'The Ambiguities and Contradictions of the State-Socialist Way of Women's Emancipation in Hungary (1948-1989). Overview and Search for the Traces of Feminist Resistance,' *Glasnik Etnografskog Instituta SANU* 71, no. 3 (2023): 47-48. She also presents changes of representation of women in state socialist Hungary through decades of the era: ' "(...) The tractor girls of the fifties were replaced by the "Pest woman" of the sixties, and the emancipated working woman of the seventies was replaced by the sexualized poster girls of the eighties.' (Kovácsné 2019, 4). The sexist turn in the representation of women became explicit in the course

These developments defined the period, in which the petition of 1973 was created. They simultaneously highlight how abortion works as a lens regarding representation and the social role of women in a given society – primarily as mothers or workers, for instance, – also documenting changing circumstances or geographic differences based on varying approaches of states to demographics, past (state socialism) and present (post socialism). This phenomenon, presenting the variety of gender regimes in the Eastern Bloc is described by Joanna Regulska and Zofia Włodarczyk:

‘In Romania, abortion was legalized in 1957 only to be severely restricted in 1967, and legalized again after the overthrow of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989. In Poland, the shift was the opposite, with postcommunist leaders quickly criminalizing most forms of abortion. This multidirectionality of change shows that generally recognized actors (such as a state) operate differently over time, place, and under different political regimes and result in different gender outcomes.’²⁸

The period after 1989, in which abortion became a central topic in certain Central Eastern European countries, for example Poland and Hungary, was simultaneously characterized by intensified East – West relations, primarily through encounters with US American and Western European activists and scholars, which has been analysed from multiple perspectives, as mentioned by Zsófia Lóránd:

‘The encounters between women from East and West in the Northern hemisphere after 1989 have been full of negotiations, productive exchanges and at times, misunderstandings. They have been the subject of much scrutiny too, scholarly, personal and political alike. For some, these encounters meant the ‘arrival of feminism’ to eastern Europe. For others, what took place in the East was rather a return to the interwar traditions of feminism silenced by the establishment of the

and during the aftermath of the first beauty contest in the state-socialist era in 1985 that ended with the tragic death of the winner of the competition, Miss Hungary, Csilla Magyar (Eperjesi 2021).’ Ibid., 49.

²⁸ Joanna Regulska and Zofia Włodarczyk, ‘Fluidity or clean breaks?’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, ed. Katalin Fábián, Janet Elise Johnson and Mara Lazda (London: Routledge, 2022), 22.

state socialist regimes. For others, the same processes appear as a happy reunion between East and West.’²⁹

In some sources, abortion also appears as a lens regarding differing perception and experiences of ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ feminists, recalled in an interview with Ann Snitow regarding an encounter with Feminist Network member Ágnes Hochberg, representing the issue of women being left alone with the complete responsibility of contraception, lack of cooperation from the side of male partners, as well as insufficient medical care:

‘But at that time there was a hunger, a sense of intensity, a great deal of curiosity that we had about each other as well as the anxiety we had about each other. All of these people were arriving on their first trip to the United States – or the first trip abroad. And then there was our desire to meet with those people. Did you ever know Agnes Hochberg?

I did, yes.

Well, she died. We were devastated. She was at the conference. And she sat right there and said, to this large room that was half American and half Eastern European, “I think the best thing we should do is get rid of abortion. Abortion has been horrible. Feminists should get rid of abortion in Hungary.” And all the American women in the room had a nervous breakdown! But that was an absolutely necessary conversation. The conversation that followed was about how could we make these rights our own. We talked about genuine social services – contraception, sex education, abortion free and on demand – the feminist program that we’d had for decades. But to Agnes, it just sounded like: once a year, me or my friends will have an abortion, without anesthesia. It was one of those moments

²⁹ Zsófia Lóránd, ‘Creating feminism in the shadows of male heroes. That other story of 1989,’ in *The Legacy of Division. East and West after 1989*, ed. Ferenc Laczó and Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2020), 177.

when you understand that you don't know anything, which is a good slap in the face.'³⁰

The above-mentioned function of abortion and reproductive rights as a lens, presenting the status and circumstances of women before and after 1989 is one reason behind dealing with two pro-choice campaigns from the state socialist and post socialist periods of Hungary. Global parallels, however, are equally present for both eras, and present shared experiences across time and place – including first encounters with feminism. Stories of 'awakening' when hearing about feminism are characteristic for the journey of many, who later became part of feminist campaigns, which could happen either through friends, or by reading feminist authors, which resonated with one's own experiences. The following detail of the memory of Angela Miglietti presents such an encounter besides the circulation of feminist thought and transnational connections, already in the late 1960s. The mention of female circles, women's groups in Italy, however, can also be connected to those from the 1990s in Hungary, like the Feminist Network:

'In 1969, I was a 51-year old divorcee living in Turin. My life had been marked by first-hand experiences of women's inequality, but I had no words with which to talk about it. With a group of friends, women of various ages, we searched for something that could give meaning to our experiences. One of them spoke to me of Women's Liberation in the United States. She also said that there were small groups of women in Turin, Milan and Rome who met in private homes and read American texts. Meeting some of these women, and reading those texts, has saved me ...'³¹

This Italian example also resonates with memories of a participant of the Hungarian petition

³⁰ John Feffer, THE NETWORK OF EAST-WEST WOMEN IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE A PRODUCT OF WILLFUL IGNORANCE. 23rd April 2015. Online available under: <https://fpif.org/the-network-of-east-west-women-in-east-central-europe-a-product-of-willful-ignorance/> [15.07.2024]

³¹ Maud Anne Bracke, 'Our Bodies, Ourselves: The Transnational Connections of 1970s Italian and Roman Feminism,' 560-561. As Bracke writes: 'In Angela Miglietti's memory, her encounter with the classic texts of US Women's Liberation – Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, and *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, on which more below – acquires a near-mythical status, enabling a personal transformation that resonated universally but was contingent on a locally situated reading.' Ibid., 561.

campaign from 1973, Piroska Márkus, shared in her blog:

'At the age of sixteen I met a woman called Júlia Veres, who had read lots of American feminist books and articles and she wanted a collection to be published in Hungary. She wrote a few page summary in Hungarian in order to present it for publication. This was in 1972, Budapest. She told me, at several publication houses the editors laughed at her. No one published in Hungary any feminist materials that time, as far as I know. I became so enthusiastic about her summary of the feminist writings that I was showing it to all my friends at my Secondary School. I went further and proposed to present the ideas in a special History Seminar, and for my surprise the (male) teacher offered one of the seminars for me to talk about these feminist writings. Despite his positive response it was clear for me that I was potentially making myself a target of ridicule by others. However I remember that during the classes (other classes, e.g. maths or language), me and my friends used to read the pages as we passed these to each other secretly under the tables and chairs. At least while they were reading the summary my school-friends were completely immersed in it. For me, these pages gave me the first words and theories to describe and justify the gut feelings I had against marriage, against living under the power of a man, against all the hypocrisy which was well known.'³²

The above-mentioned parallels across time and place, connecting transnational pro-choice campaigns with the emergence of local, in this case Hungarian examples, highlight a central thesis: feminist and pro-choice activism has been building upon previous campaigns, arguments, conclusions and ideas, while simultaneously expanding fields, modifying terms, increasing or even shifting meanings.

³² Online available under in English and Hungarian: <https://iripsukram.wordpress.com/> [22.04.2024]

2 Circumstances and Importance of the Petition of 1973. Transnational Feminist Connections in the 1970s.

Developments and campaigns of activists from the 1970s can be seen as milestones regarding reproductive rights, as the decade had been characterized by groundbreaking legal decisions – Roe v. Wade in 1973 in the United States –, governments’ stronger focus on the current demographic situation and a general fear of overpopulation, as well as easier access to contraceptives in many parts of the world. The 1970s is often connected to the ‘second wave’ of Western feminism, presenting a stronger focus of activists on reproductive rights, summarized by the slogan ‘My Body, My Choice.’ The usage of the term ‘second wave’ neither covers all feminist activism of the era, nor all parts of the world. On the other hand, due to its wide-spread usage, this term can help locating campaigns chronologically, and allows the drawing of global parallels within a given timeframe. As Jennifer Nelson writes regarding feminist activism in Mexico:

‘The “second wave” is a term that roughly applies to women’s rights activism of the 1970s. However, the periodization of the “second wave” has been contested in the United States by historians (including myself) who argue that the restriction of the movement to the 1970s leaves out women of color activism, much of which flourished in the 1980s. The “wave” metaphor does not apply very well to the Mexican context, although I use it here for the sake of brevity. In Mexico, feminist activism of the 1970s primarily emerged from student movements and left organisations in the urban context of Mexico City and around the 1975 International Women’s Year Conference held in Mexico City.’³³

This example presents not only limitations of periodisation by ‘waves’, but also a common start of feminist groups: emerging from student movements and left organisations in urban areas, shaped by international conferences. Parallels can be drawn between the above-

³³ Jennifer Nelson, ‘Abortion Rights and Human Rights in Mexico,’ *Reproductive Justice and Sexual Rights* 1 (2019): 141.

mentioned groups from Mexico, the informal group initiating and spreading the 1973 petition in state socialist Hungary, primarily students from the capital, Budapest, as well as the Feminist Network in the 1990s, founded in Budapest, many members being students or lecturers at ELTE University.

As previously mentioned examples show, the 1970s takes up a central role when looking back at feminist struggles for reproductive rights in the past, as is the case in the paper of Jennifer Nelson, focusing on abortion rights and human rights in Mexico, which connects the 1970s to ‘the emergence of modern Mexican feminism.’³⁴ Further tendencies overlap with the development of feminist campaigns in Hungary, including their time frames, as non-governmental organisations – like the Feminist Network in Hungary – also started to appear in Mexico during the 1990s, and ‘the United Nations became more prominent in bolstering feminist campaigns for the legalization of abortion.’³⁵ Similarly to Hungarian feminists,

‘Mexican feminists increasingly drew on international claims for reproductive autonomy for women forged at United Nations meetings in the 1990s. They centered their demands on a discourse that brought together claims for democracy, secularism, and human rights.’³⁶

While some of these – claims for secularism – did not appear among Hungarian feminists in the 1970s, democracy and human rights were central terms for feminist campaigns in the 1970s and 1990s. In the case of the petition campaign of 1973, this was also in accordance with the focus of the Democratic Opposition in state socialist Hungary, which group the main initiators of the petition were connected to. Judit Acsády summarized characteristics of the group as follows:

‘The Democratic Opposition existed without official permission as a loose network of critical thinkers. They held informal meetings at private apartments or abandoned buildings mostly in the capital but also in the countryside. The participants were mostly, almost exclusively, intellectuals (writers, philosophers,

³⁴ Ibid., 125.

³⁵ Ibid., 126.

³⁶ Ibid.

economists, university students), avant-garde artists. The political values of the groups and individuals belonging to the DE [Demokratikus Ellenzék – Democratic Opposition] were diverse. Yet, the core of their thinking was mostly connected to human rights, democracy, liberalism and to some of the values and issues of the New Left movements of the Western democracies for example social inequalities, ecology, minority rights, peace, disarmament, critique of nuclear energy, the critique of mass culture and the manipulative power of the media, opposition to authoritarianism and totalitarian systems. In terms of concerns for women's rights the controversy about the Democratic Opposition was that it neglected to embrace feminism or the understanding of women's rights as human rights even though the Helsinki process and the Declaration was the justification of their standpoints.³⁷

Here, it is important to mention local and regional frames of the petition of 1973, and the importance of the decade – why, to my mind, this campaign started in the early 1970s. Besides personal experiences (travels of Zsuzsa Körösi to Sofia, London and Paris), the presence of 'second wave feminism', leftist movements and human rights as an aspect gaining importance globally, there are two more points which could contribute to the time of campaign. My first point is partly connected to personal experiences and Soviet-type emancipation of women, as possible frames of motivation for taking a stand may include the demographics of initiators of the petition. In 1973, most of them were in their twenties, and grew up in an era characterised by a state-led emancipation of women, with their social role emphasized as workers, not as stay-at-home mothers and housewives. The change of official rhetoric and steps taken towards emphasizing the role of women as mothers was likely a sharp turn for many growing up during the 1950s and 1960s, with reproductive rights taken for granted. My second point is connected to changes within Hungary and the region, presenting that this phenomenon of turning towards more traditional gender roles was not only present in Hungary, but also in other parts of the Eastern Bloc, and characterized the period after the Prague Spring (1968) in Czechoslovakia, called Normalization. As Fanni Svégel describes:

'1973 was a turning point in many aspects of Hungarian history. After the Hungarian revolution of 1956, János Kádár became the leader of the country, and

³⁷ Judit Acsády, 'The Ambiguities and Contradictions of the State-Socialist Way of Women's Emancipation in Hungary (1948-1989). Overview and Search for the Traces of Feminist Resistance,' 53-54.

in 1968 introduced economic reforms to curb civil anxiety and satisfy growing consumer demands in the indebted country. The violent Warsaw pact invasion of Czechoslovakia the same year, in which Hungary participated, dispelled intellectual's hopes for a change in the system through reforms. The Western student riots, anti-war movements, and second-wave feminism also left their mark on the young Hungarian intellectual and alternative art scenes. Still, beyond the small circles of intellectuals aspiring for freedom, in the 1970s many felt they were running out of air. (...) In this climate, gossips of planned abortion restrictions forced young intellectuals to take action. (...) As economic reforms failed in 1972, right-wing and nationalist notions of national obliteration met the demands of the economy. In their capacity as mothers, women were seen as one solution to the problem of hidden unemployment. Despite the equality propaganda of the 1950s, the state saw women primarily as mothers, and subsidies were introduced in 1967 to reinforce this status, including the three-year Child Care Allowance (GYES).'³⁸

In this climate, young women connected to the Democratic Opposition, besides initiating the petition campaign of 1973, also organised some feminist projects, as described by Judit Acsády:

'In the interviews with women activists, who belonged once to the democratic opposition groups, it seems most probable that Júlia Veres and Zsuzsa Körösi came up with the idea that it would be good to set up a women's group. As one of the artists, Ágnes Háy remembers, the formation of a group happened after they met at the Young Artists' Club in Budapest. (...) Júlia Veres then organized a witty feminist-inspired exhibition in Budapest that became eventually open to the public. It displayed images and portrayals of women in the pages cut out of the weekly cartoon magazine of the time, *Ludas Matyi*.'³⁹

³⁸ Zsuzsa Körösi et al., 'Petition for the Protection of the Freedom of Abortion (1973, Hungary)', 611-612.

'About the Author' and 'Context' by Fanni Svégl.

³⁹ Ibid., 56.

Acsády also mentions a series of cartoons created by Ágnes Háy, representing the female and male gender symbols personified in different situations.⁴⁰ This is particularly important, since

'The publication of the drawings confirms that from the very beginning of the formation of a feminist group among the women connected to the opposition circles, that the issues they focused on were about gender representations, personal gender dynamics, women's identities and self-representation in avant-garde art.'⁴¹

These traces of feminist projects also tint and add to the remembrance of the petition of 1973, started by the same sub-group. Male dominance and a general lack of recognition of women's rights as human rights among members of the Democratic Opposition is a recurring topic in discussions on this campaign, both by initiators and participants, as well as scholars.⁴² The petition of 1973 played a crucial part not just in the history of reproductive rights in state – and later post – socialist Hungary, but also regarding citizens' initiatives before and after 1989, although the campaign is a generally underrepresented⁴³ chapter of Hungarian history, women's history and history of the Democratic Opposition in Hungary.

Frames and aims of the petition are summarized by Judit Acsády as follows:

'The petition was critical towards the planned tightening of birth control by the central committee of the party as the main decision-making body (Körösi 2020;

⁴⁰ Ibid., 57. According to Acsády, the booklet had been published by the samizdat publisher AB in 1979, and later in the English periodical *Feminist Review*. Ágnes Háy, 'Sex,' *Feminist Review* 1, no. 6 (1980): 105-107. In this sense, it could mean an exception regarding the lack of representation of gender relations in Hungarian samizdat publications.

⁴¹ Judit Acsády, 'The Ambiguities and Contradictions of the State-Socialist Way of Women's Emancipation in Hungary (1948-1989). Overview and Search for the Traces of Feminist Resistance,' 57.

⁴² For instance in the frames of the recent conference 'Abortuszpetíció 50 1973-2023'. The five hour-long conference and panel discussion was live-recorded, and can be viewed under:
https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=367222692744278 [03.04.2024]

⁴³ A relatively recent exception is the crime novel 'Szabadulószoza' of Éva Cserhádi from 2021, which is partly set in 1974, when the grandmother of one of the characters had gone missing after appearing in front of the Abortion Committee. Sources of Cserhádi included works of Zsófia Lóránd, and also mention the petitions of 1973 as an event unknown to the characters. Éva Cserhádi, *Szabadulószoza* (Budapest: Athenaeum Kiadó, 2021).

Sasvári 2000). Yet the petition was not necessarily formulated merely from a women's rights point of view, but rather from a demographic one. According to the original text the aim was to call attention to the decline in the birth rate. The petition claimed that the decline can be stopped without the planned restrictive measures, in other words, by other means.' ⁴⁴

The four points of the petition, therefore, offered solutions to stop the decline and ways to make abortions unnecessary, including: accessible, medically harmless birth control, modern sexual education, solving issues of housing, and the introduction of childcare allowance, guaranteed to any family member staying at home with a child. ⁴⁵ Therefore, the petition of 1973 represented an additional voice in the discourse on population decline, and joined with its own argument, expressing the view that restrictions of reproductive rights would not solve this issue, for which there are other tools, but would harm the interests of women and families. A detailed reconstruction of the events and reflection on the motivation of those who signed it in 1973 had been undertaken by Zsuzsa Körösi. It included research in archives ⁴⁶ as well as interviews with nineteen supporters of the campaign. The achievement of 1553 signatures is important to mention, since it could only be achieved by the common effort of many, following the snowball-effect – several participants had been collecting signatures parallel at various places: schools, universities, work places, house parties. Participants did not only sign the petition, but also added much personal information, and even a description of their motivation for taking part. An outstanding and current source – as well as reflection – of the campaign was the recorded conference 'Abortuszpetíció50 konferencia 1973–2023' ['Abortion Petition50 Conference 1973–2023'] from February 2024, organised by the feminist association Nőkért Egyesület ['Pro Women Association'], connecting two central pro-choice campaigns, the first initiated fifty years ago, in 1973 ⁴⁷, the second in 1992 by the

⁴⁴ Judit Acsády, 'The Ambiguities and Contradictions of the State-Socialist Way of Women's Emancipation in Hungary (1948-1989). Overview and Search for the Traces of Feminist Resistance,' 57-58.

⁴⁵ Zsuzsa Körösi et al., 'Petition for the Protection of the Freedom of Abortion (1973, Hungary)', 615-617. Petition translated by Beáta Sándor.

⁴⁶ The archives, on which her reconstruction of events is based are the Hungarian National Archive ['Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár'], the Historic Archive of Services for National Security ['Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltár'] as well as the Open Society Archive (OSA). Zsuzsa Körösi, 'Petíció az abortusz-szabadság megőrzéséért 1973 (1. rész)' *Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya eFolyóirat* 9, no. 2 (2019): 1.

⁴⁷ The conference was originally planned for 2023, but took place on 26th February 2024.

Feminist Network, while also discussing the history of reproductive rights and their current state in Hungary. Central figures of the two petition campaigns were present at the conference, including organisers of the petition after the System Change, Judit Acsády and Antonia Burrows. Participants of the round table discussion included Zsuzsa Körösi, Piroska Márkus, Ágnes Horváth, Róza Hodosán and Péter Szil, while György Dalos and Gábor Klaniczay joined the discussion online. Two participants organised, and four signed the petition in 1973. Participants – similarly to interview partners of Zsuzsa Körösi – mentioned a wide range of reasons for signing the petition, including: resistance [against the regime], freedom (as an aim and feeling connected to signing the petition), recalled by Ágnes Horváth, friendship with initiators of the petition, left-wing tradition and insufficient conditions for raising a child. Examples of such conditions included lack of proper housing options, as well as not enough places in nurseries. The topic of unwanted pregnancies – similarly to homosexuality – was mentioned as a complete taboo for long in Hungarian society, while the state socialist system was described as deeply conservative, with a Marxist mask. Examples, however, are named for dealing with abortion as a topic from the later years of socialism, including Soviet and Hungarian films.⁴⁸ Participants of the discussion did not only share their personal connections and motivation for signing the petition, but also recalled frames and circulation of arguments of the era when the campaign took place. These included the question 'Kicsi vagy kocsi?' ['Car or baby?'], recurring in articles and presenting the (assumed) presence of consumption as an aim or having a stable financial background before having children, also impacting family planning. The author Gyula Fekete as an important figure of the anti-abortion movement is mentioned, as well as the phenomenon of the so-called 'folk authors', focusing on the countryside of Hungary, having often dealt with this topic, unlike 'liberal authors', presumably referring to the literary countergroup of 'folk authors' – 'urban authors' from cities. The language and terms used in the petition also appear as a recurring theme. Péter Szil mentioned, for instance, the lack of female autonomy over their own bodies in the text of the petition, and generally the lack of expressions which appeared later from the West. Szil

⁴⁸ A Hungarian musical from the 1970s is mentioned, in which women working in a canning factory rebel against patriarchy, when male workers vote for building a fishing cottage, instead of a nursery for children of the workers. The main character, who is pregnant, decides to get an abortion, but changes her mind, and chooses to raise her child with the help of her colleagues, singing 'Mégis megszüülöm' [I will still give birth']. The title of the musical is 'Szikrázó lányok' ['Sparkly Girls'], and was directed by Péter Bacsó in 1974. The main character, Brigitta, was played by Ildikó Bánsági. It thematized not only the lack of childcare facilities, but also abortion and pro-natalist messages of the time.

highlights the preparatory state of both the Democratic Opposition and of the campaign, calling the Opposition 'előellenzék' ['pre-opposition'] and early campaigns 'kommunikációs előiskola' ['prep school of communication']. In this sense, Szil also presents that the reason for not mentioning women's autonomy over their bodies was partly due to their lack of vocabulary. The circulation of information through culture is also thematicized, as Szil mentions smuggled books and records from abroad, as well as listening to Szabad Európa Rádió/ Radio Free Europe. Several signers, including Gábor Klaniczay recalled the way the petition was formulated: nowadays they would have changed a few expressions, but would still sign it. Gábor Klaniczay recalled signing the petition at the canteen of the Faculty of Humanities of ELTE University in Budapest, which appears as a central location of the campaign, since many initiators studied there. The Faculty was also connected to the consequences of the petition: Zsuzsa Körösi, right before her final, state exam, as initiator was banned from all Hungarian universities forever due to her participation, after the university received an order to organise a disciplinary procedure. Gábor Klaniczay and Gábor Pajkos sent a letter to the disciplinary committee to demonstrate against the trial. Péter Szil recalled that the petition was handed in in September 1973, and signers started to be called to account for their participation in November 1973. Philosophers and historians were mentioned as members of the oppositional circles, also adding that women were less visible within the group – this is one reason why the petition was a surprising action. Participants, who signed the petition included members of the Communist Party, acclaimed scientists and intellectuals, as well as authors. Their identification, as mentioned above, was not difficult, since address, occupation and comments or description of motivation of signers were present on the petition. According to Szil, signers who were members of the Party were questioned first, and received warnings. Later, signers who were not members of the Party were called to account for their participation, which often had bigger consequences, and could result in losing their jobs. These trials were over in winter 1973. Despite the above-mentioned negative consequences, the petition of 1973 can still be considered a huge achievement. Although not directly connected to the petition itself, planned restrictions of reproductive rights did not happen, and a dedicated group of citizens with no institutional support or much experience in activism managed to collect 1553 signatures in a society, where such practices were neither common, nor tolerated.

The decade, in which it happened, had been characterized by spectacular campaigns and radical actions for reproductive rights, for which examples from Mexico, West Germany and

Italy are presented. Jennifer Nelson describes a rally in Mexico City from 1979, when feminists

‘... declared May 10 (Mother’s Day in Mexico) the “Dia de la Maternidad Libre y Voluntaria.” To honor women who had died from illegal abortions, the feminists dressed as women in mourning, wearing crowns of the dead, and carrying tools women used to provoke self-abortions.’⁴⁹

Christiane Leidinger describes a form of ‘embodies protest’ from 1975–1977 as ‘transnational political action’, when West German feminists had been organising collective bus rides to the Netherlands, where, unlike in West Germany, abortions were legal, in order to undergo terminations of pregnancies.⁵⁰ Besides solidarity, collectiveness and direct aid, taking a stand and presenting their goals was also an aim, incorporated in the slogan ‘Wir fahren nach Holland, aber nicht wegen der Tulpen’, which also stood on posters spread in the city centre of Frankfurt in the summer of 1975.⁵¹ Besides, the Frankfurter Frauenzentrum had also announced a bus ride to the Netherlands for the 12th July 1975 on the pages of the newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.⁵² Such bus rides were not the first, as Leidinger mentions similar collective travels from France to neighbouring countries, making it an example of ‘transnationaler feministischer Ideentransfer’.⁵³

Maud Anne Bracke also describes a form of direct aid and acts of solidarity, strongly connected to the body and embodies experiences from Italy, influenced by French examples and US American feminist readings, presenting another clear case of transnational feminist transfer of ideas:

‘... the influence stemming from US women’s liberation in the early 1970s contributed to the Italian emphasis on the body, while strong connections with France shaped the mass mobilisation strategies contributing so acutely to

⁴⁹ Jennifer Nelson, ‘Abortion Rights and Human Rights in Mexico,’ 131.

⁵⁰ Christiane Leidinger, ‘Freiheitsaktionen der Frauenbewegung: die kollektiven Busfahrten zu Schwangerschaftsabbrüchen in die Niederlande (1975-1977) als Form ver-körperten Protests,’ *Gender: Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft* 14, no. 1 (2022): 134.

⁵¹ Ibid., 136 and 139.

⁵² Ibid., 139.

⁵³ Ibid.

legislative change. Thus, even what may appear quintessentially Italian characteristics of 1970s feminism resulted from the translation of transnationally travelling ideas and approaches. (...) In Rome, reproductive rights and health became the focal point of the feminist movement. The influence stemming from US women's liberation was evident particularly in the adoption of 'self-help', originally developed by women's liberation groups in Los Angeles, Boston and New York. (...) Feminist self-help was disseminated across Italy in a specific context: the *consultori autogestiti*. These were women's reproductive health clinics, self-managed by feminist activists and supported by professionals sympathetic to the cause. Many of these carried out illegal abortions (...), operating as underground organisations up to their institutionalization through a series of regional laws from 1976 and the introduction of abortion legalisation in 1978. (...) By spreading ideas of women's sexual liberation, and carrying out safe illegal abortions and providing free contraception and information, they helped transforming feminism into a social movement with support across social classes.⁵⁴

Even though the petition campaign of 1973 was less visually spectacular than the above-mentioned examples, it still had a great impact, mobilised a high number of participants, and was one of a kind within state socialist Hungary, stretching the limitations of advocacy and expression of opinion. At the conference 'Abortuszpetíció50' Péter Szil mentioned three key concepts, answering three key questions, which summarize well the importance of the petition. First, that since 1945, this was the first time, when it was not two people with influence having a debate and discussing something, but a collective action taking a stand. Second, the reason for having so many people sign the petition was due to autonomy as a concept, and as the main, oppositional goal [in the era]. Third, the reason for the petition being forgotten is: that abortion is [seen as] a female issue. The last point is already changing, as more and more scholars focus on this chapter of Hungarian women's history, and Nőkért Egyesület/ Nőkért.hu, as mentioned in the frames of the conference, is planning to create a separate website for the campaign, sharing documents connected to this crucial moment. There was, however, another moment of re-discovery of the petition of 1973, namely in 1992,

⁵⁴ Maud Anne Bracke, 'Our Bodies, Ourselves: The Transnational Connections of 1970s Italian and Roman Feminism,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 562.

in the frames of the pro-choice campaign of the Feminist Network. During the conference 'Abortuszpetíció50', Antonia Burrows, founding member of the Network mentioned the awareness of the petition campaign from 1973 as 'legendary', which came before theirs: 'At the Feminist Network we knew that it [the abortion petition] had an antecedent in Hungary.' As another example of continuity, two female members of the Democratic Opposition are mentioned by Vera Bozzi having had connections with the Feminist Network, Ottilia Solt and Róza Hodosán, although these encounters were rather occasional meetings. Ottilia Solt, however attended one of the early meetings of the Feminist Network in 1991 in the apartment of Feminist Network member Zsuzsa Béres.⁵⁵

3 Circumstances and Parallels of the Pro-Choice Campaign of the Feminist Network in 1992.

3.1 History of the Hungarian Feminist Network

The Hungarian Feminist Network was founded in June 1990,⁵⁶ right after the System Change of 1989 and the certain legislative changes it brought along: in Article 63 of the modified Constitution of 1989, the freedom of association and assembly was stated, including 'the right to establish organizations whose goals are not prohibited by law and to join such organizations'.⁵⁷ Newly formed associations – including women's groups – arose, focusing

⁵⁵ Bozzi and Czene, *Elsikkasztott feminizmus*, 68.

⁵⁶ According to Vera Bozzi, the inaugural meeting of the organisation happened on the 8th of June at the clubhouse of MÚOSZ – Magyar Újságírók Országos Szövetsége ['Countrywide Alliance of Hungarian Journalists'], while the confirmation of registration of Feminista Hálózat as an organisation in Budapest was sent in September 1990.

Vera Bozzi and Gábor Czene, *Elsikkasztott feminizmus*, 23, 25.

⁵⁷ As written in Article 63, Chapter XII. Fundamental Rights and Duties:

'On the basis of the right of assembly, everyone in the Republic of Hungary has the right to establish organizations whose goals are not prohibited by law and to join such organizations.'

on a wide range of topics and targeting various audience. Besides the women's sections of newly formed political parties and trade unions, Judit Acsády names some of the rare examples of independent self-help and grassroots organisations as well: NaNe (Nők a Nőkért Együtt az Erőszak Ellen Egyesület ['Women For Women Together Against Violence Association']), Ombudswoman Program Office, Feminist Network, Green Women, Roma Women in Budapest, besides local groups in other cities of Hungary: Miskolc, Szeged, Sopron and Veszprém.⁵⁸ Susan Arpad and Sarolta Marinovich mention the umbrella organisation Hungarian Women's Foundation (MONA), founded in 1992, which in spring 1993 brought representatives of 24 organisations together in the frames of a Women's Roundtable. Some of the participants included: the Reformed Church Women's Organisation, the Association of Roma Mothers, and the Women of Clean Water.⁵⁹ There were, however, great differences regarding their goals and motivation. As Acsády describes, some conservative female groups aimed at reconstructing 'what women lost during state socialism and claim that motherhood and household duties are women's real jobs.'⁶⁰ Others aimed at saving what women and families were provided with during socialism, for example child care leave and nurseries – rights and services that, with the re-establishment of market economy, started to disappear.⁶¹ There was, however, a great difference between most women's organisations and the FeministNetwork: the latter was the only one at that time identifying itself openly as a feminist group.⁶² Including the expression 'feminist' in their name,

Act XXXI of 1989 on the amendment of the Constitution, 61–63. §. Freedom of expression, freedom of the press and the right of association.

⁵⁸ Judit Acsády, 'Urges and Obstacles: Chances for Feminism in Eastern Europe,' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22, no. 4 (1999): 406.

⁵⁹ Susan Arpad and Sarolta Marinovich, 'Why Hasn't There Been a Strong Women's Movement in Hungary?', 92-93.

⁶⁰ Acsády, 'Urges and Obstacles: Chances for Feminism in Eastern Europe,' 406.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² The lack of other associations defining themselves as feminist – even when working for the improvement of women's conditions – can partly be explained by the antifeminist atmosphere in Hungary, intensifying from the 1980s, already before the System Change. The fact that conservative circles and members of the Hungarian Democratic Opposition both condemned feminism during socialism is an interesting historic parallel with the early days of Hungarian feminism in the first half of the 20th century: '... while Hungarian feminism has been attacked from „the left” by socialism (posing gender identity against class identity) at the same time, it has been attacked from „the right” by nationalism (posing gender identity against national identity). According to both these analyses, feminism is from Western civilization, it is a selfish, self-indulgent movement of pampered

however, was not their first choice. According to founding member Vera Bozzi, on a draft of their statutes, the group was still called Autonóm Nők Hálózata ['Network of Autonomous Women']. They chose Feminista Hálózat after a debate on whether they should include 'feminist' in their name from the following six options: Magyarországi Feministák Egyesülete ['Association of Feminists in Hungary'], Feminista Hálózat ['Feminist Network'], Feministák Köre ['Circle of Feminists'], Nők Autonóm Köre ['Autonomous Circle of Women'], Magyarországi Nők Autonóm Hálózata ['Autonomous Circle of Women in Hungary'] and Magyar Nők Országos Köre ['Countrywide Circle of Hungarian Women']. In the end, out of the fifteen members that were present at the meeting, thirteen voted for Feminista Hálózat.⁶³ The number of members and active participants of projects had constantly been changing. While some studies mention an approximate number of fifty founding members⁶⁴, according to Bozzi fifteen participated in the inaugural meeting, although twenty six signed the attendance list.⁶⁵ Besides names, this document also presents occupations of members, in accordance with the structure of membership mentioned by Zsuzsa Béres (founding member) and Gail Wilson:

'... women had begun to form various grass-roots groups during the two years of change leading to the downfall of the communist regime in spring 1990. Women in academia had also begun to campaign for the acceptance of women's studies programs in Hungary's universities. Women from these two backgrounds, together with those for whom the network was their first affiliation, came together to found the Hungarian Feminist Network in June 1990.'⁶⁶

women in a consumer society.' Arpad and Marinovich, 'Why Hasn't There Been a Strong Women's Movement in Hungary?', 87.

⁶³ Bozzi and Czene, *Elsikkasztott feminizmus*, 23-24.

⁶⁴ For instance a study of Chris Corrin. Chris Corrin, 'Hungary. Magyar women's lives: complexities and contradictions,' in *Superwomen and the Double Burden. Women's experience of change in central and eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Chris Corrin (London: Scarlet Press, 1992), 68.

⁶⁵ Bozzi and Czene, *Elsikkasztott feminizmus*, 24.

⁶⁶ Zsuzsa Béres and Gail Wilson, 'Essential Emotions: The Place of Passion in a Feminist Network,' *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 8, no. 2 (1997): 172.

Members' occupations included the following: teacher, student, photojournalist, journalist, restorer, translator, biologist, artisan, sociologist, geophysicist, cultural worker, psychologist, book editor, legal adviser and associate professor/literary historian.⁶⁷ As an important meeting – and, in some sense, starting point of Feminista Hálózat was the Eötvös Klub in the centre of Budapest (a club of ELTE [Eötvös Loránd University]), where some future members of Feminista Hálózat held weekly meetings, also considering the foundation of a women's organisation.⁶⁸ These meetings do not only present members' strong ties to ELTE, but also that many participants joined after being invited by friends and acquaintances. Word of mouth communication, the way new members found the group also remained an important way of passing information later on. The 'double interest' of Feminist Network members, namely studying feminism in and outside of Hungary already appeared at these meetings, and became visible through issues of their feminist journal *Nőszemély* – an important source, which will be discussed in detail in a separate chapter. The journal presents both the re-discovery of the history of Hungarian feminism, while translations of foreign essays and articles, issues of women from all over the globe and a global, intersectional view on women's lives appears on the pages of *Nőszemély*. At Eötvös Klub, future members were discussing Western feminism with Antonia Burrows, a lecturer at ELTE from the United Kingdom, who also lived in West Germany for ten years.⁶⁹ Hearing about feminism present in other parts of Europe coincided with personal experiences as women, motivation to make a change, as well as an optimistic outlook and new possibilities available after 1989. Zsuzsa Béres and Gail Wilson described the Feminist Network and its goals as follows:

'The Hungarian Feminist Network can be described as a grass-roots organization representing a diversity of women's concerns, from reproductive rights to employment and education. Insofar as it was a community organization, it was ideologically rather than locally rooted (...). Its main goal was to work against all forms of discrimination against women by increasing awareness of issues

⁶⁷ Bozzi and Czene, *Elsikkasztott feminizmus*, 24-25. Chris Corrin also mentions that the majority of members of female groups was intellectuals and professionals. Corrin, 'Hungary. Magyar women's lives: complexities and contradictions,' 70.

⁶⁸ Bozzi and Czene, *Elsikkasztott feminizmus*, 19.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

affecting women and by acting as a pressure group on matters of particular importance to women, such as reproductive rights.’⁷⁰

The latter focus leads directly to a central campaign of a sub-group of the Network, Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport [‘Campaign Group for the Right to Have a Choice’], which had principally determined not only the history of the Network, but also the importance of reproductive rights and the function of abortion as a lens presenting constant changes of the situation of women in a given society, globally as well as locally.

3.2 The Importance and Context of the Pro-Choice Campaign of 1992.⁷¹

Observing the wide range of topics and issues the Feminist Network and their journal *Nőszemély* dealt with during the 1990s, two emerge: abortion and violence against women.⁷² The formation and stronger ties of organisation of the Network were specifically tied to their pro-choice campaign carried out by the sub-group Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport. This project deserves its own focus, as it did not only mean a milestone for the Feminist Network, but also the crystallisation of its global connections and support, as it arose the interest of Western scholars, feminists and organisations, as described by Katja Guenther, which also summarizes the frames of the campaign:

⁷⁰ Béres and Wilson, ‘Essential Emotions: The Place of Passion in a Feminist Network,’ 172.

⁷¹ Some sources connect the petition of the Feminist Network to the year 1992, while others mention 1991 as the start of the campaign, meaning the same event.

⁷² Violence against women as a central issue for direct social activism also appeared among feminists in former Yugoslavia during state socialism, as described by Aida Bagić, presenting how the idea of SOS hotlines was already present in the region from the 1980s on: ‘In the middle to late 1980s, a new generation of women became more interested in direct social activism. The first SOS hotlines for women victims of domestic violence were opened in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade. The Yugoslav Feminist Network was formed in 1987, in order to exchange experiences in establishing SOS hotlines and to raise public awareness about violence against women.’ Aida Bagić, ‘Women’s Organizing in Post-Yugoslav Countries. Talking about “Donors”,’ in *Global Feminism. Transnational Women’s Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights*, ed. Myra Marx Ferree and Aili Mari Tripp (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 144.

'The Hungarian Feminist Network, for example, began in 1990 as a grassroots organization interested in a wide range of feminist concerns. However, when policy makers began promoting new restrictions on abortion in 1992, the organization functionally became a single-issue lobbying and protest group (Béres and Wilson 1997). With funding from the Global Fund for Women and Planned Parenthood, the Hungarian Feminist Network went on to found a multipurpose women's center and NaNE, Hungary's only hotline and advocacy center for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. However, for several years, the organization focused almost exclusively on reproductive rights. This was a function not of a narrow view of women's interests or of the demands of external funders but rather of the pressing issues women faced at the time. While the Hungarian Feminist Network went on to expand its goals and services, other organizations continue to focus on one domain in the hopes of accomplishing meaningful change there. Funding agencies do not necessarily set those goals. Rather, political opportunities and pressures – of which the demands of funding agencies are often a part – influence which issues are most salient and in need of mobilization.'

⁷³

Focus and results of their activities will be summarized with the help of the following key terms, which had constantly shaped and determined pro-choice activism in the 1990s globally:

- Discourse of Human Rights
- Democracy, Rights and Citizenship
- NGOization
- The Shaping Power of International Conferences

The impact of some of these, in many cases intertwined points are clear and direct, while others primarily present a general circulation of ideas.

Discourse of Human Rights

The human rights discourse has already become a central focus of groups of activists in the 1970s, including feminists, although a great shift away from the gender-neutral tone of human

⁷³ Katja Guenther, 'The Possibilities and Pitfalls of NGO Feminism: Insights from Postsocialist Eastern Europe,' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36, no. 4 (2011): 879-880.

rights discourse, and the emergence of gender as an aspect happened later on.

A discourse of human rights also became part of feminist strategies during the 1990s, for instance in Mexico, although also used by pro-life activists:

‘Feminists in the 1990s, recognizing that an emphasis on democratic secularism alone had not been effective in pressing the government to legalize abortion worldwide, additionally employed a discourse of human rights linked to reproductive rights forged at the 1994 United Nations conferences on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo and the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing (Ewig 2006, 638). This argument had its own limitations, including appropriation of human rights language by right-to-life activists who argued that human life began with conception so that embryos and fetuses must also be protected under human rights law. Mexican feminists in the 1990s and 2000s also drew on a language of “liberty of conscience” circulated by Catholic women who supported legal abortion.’⁷⁴

In the same time period, similarly following conclusions of the United Nations Conferences in Cairo (1994) and Beijing (1995), the human rights aspect has also contributed to overcoming a sole focus on demographic goals, putting a stronger emphasis on women’s health – an aspect already present in feminist theory and practice in the 1970s:

‘In the 1990s feminists increasingly influenced the international nonprofit population establishment which had adopted arguments forged at the United Nations Conferences in Cairo and Beijing promoting women’s health and access to reproductive control based on claims to human rights over purely demographic goals. (...) As Rosalind Petchesky explains, “Feminist groups in the 1990s had a major impact ... in shifting dominant discourses about reproduction, population and sexuality in a direction that puts the ends of women’s health and empowerment above that of reducing population growth.” (...)’.⁷⁵

Democracy, Rights and Citizenship

⁷⁴ Jennifer Nelson, ‘Abortion Rights and Human Rights in Mexico,’ 126.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 133.

The topic of reproductive rights and pro-choice activism had long been connected to legal frameworks, possibilities of activists and citizen's initiatives, just as the concept of democracy is tied to the right to make a choice. Therefore, it is no wonder, that democracy, rights and the definition of citizenship also appear as arguments for the right to have a choice regarding reproduction, and present the function of abortion as a lens:

'Elizabeth Maier (2015) argues that debates over abortion encompass contemporary transnational cultural debates much larger than the topic of legal abortion itself. These include the relationship between personhood and rights, the definition of citizenship, the meaning of human rights, the family, and the relationship between the state and religion.' ⁷⁶

Western scholars studying gender relations in Hungary during the transition period also had a high interest in democracy, rights and citizenship, as well as their shifts following the upheavals of 1989. Many did not treat this topic as an interest solely focusing on the era after the System Change, but also looked into its recent past and activism from the state socialist system, besides analysing current frames of democratic citizenship in the region. As Barbara Einhorn formulated:

'I shall, however, argue a third case, which highlights the ambiguities in the situation of women both 'before' and 'after': namely, that, despite clear improvements in the civil and political rights associated with democratic citizenship, in the short run at least women in East Central Europe stand to lose economic, social welfare, and reproductive rights. Moreover, a newly dominant discourse threatens to subordinate women's citizenship rights in many cases to the goals of nationalist projects.' ⁷⁷

Her analysis also included questions of past and present, as well as directions and frames of female empowerment:

⁷⁶ Ibid., 140.

⁷⁷ Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market. Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993), 1.

'Did state socialism in East Central Europe 'emancipate' women? If not, then are democracy and the market likely to do so? What *are* the prerequisites for improving women's personal autonomy and social status? And can they be implemented from above, or must they emanate from grassroots feminist struggle?'

⁷⁸

The image of gender as a prism also appears by Einhorn:

'My contention is that gender is a prism through which the process of social change itself can be both illuminated and evaluated. The concept of citizenship sharpens this focus. Women's status in society is not static: it is both influenced by and has an effect upon the process of social transformation itself. What is meant by citizenship here is not simply formal voting rights, nor even the right to call upon the state for certain forms of social provision, as in the social democratic welfare model of society. Rather, it implies active agency, the assertion of full individual autonomy within a community dedicated to the wellbeing of its members, who are bound by broader ties than those of family or kinship. This expands the concept of citizenship beyond the French Revolution's idea of political sovereignty vested in the individual, to encompass the notion of 'civil society' as it was projected by former dissidents in East Central Europe.'

⁷⁹

Democracy, civil society and new political subjects – primary perceived as 'political man', not independent from gender relations in the state socialist era also appear by many, including Peggy Watson:

'Within this „curved space”, then, gender takes on a new and specifically political meaning, because it begins to matter with respect to how individuals come to be differentially included within the new political community created by democratic citizenship. Traditional ideas of gender difference, reinforced under Communism, are integral to the realization of the new rights of citizenship, and it is this new fusion of the social with the political that produces the „male subject” or „political

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 2-3.

man”. In this sense, the construction of civil society in Eastern Europe is the construction of a man’s world.’⁸⁰

Susan Gal also highlighted the connections between past (socialism) and present (transition period and what followed), presenting the complexity of female empowerment in socialism and the contrast between rhetoric and practice, including the case of reproductive rights:

’... while the official line of equality and homogenization remained in place, a second discourse of naturalized sexual difference began to emerge in many of the officially sanctioned media in the countries of the region, starting as early as the 1960s. (...) In the Hungarian case, when the birthrate declined, or when the hoarding of labor („overemployment”) characteristic of the later state-socialist economies became acute, official newspapers and magazines would mount campaigns chastising women for competing with men in the workplace and urging women to be more nurturing toward men, to be less selfish and less masculine workers, to retreat from the labor force, and to bear more children. Again, this was less a move against the socialist system than a way of dealing with its internal logic, which reliably produced overemployment and slack labor discipline. In the 1980s, a wave of press activity and advice books blamed women for the extremely high levels of male alcoholism, suicide, early mortality, and juvenile crime. Women, it seemed, were being too much like men in the workforce. As a result, men had become feeble, frightened, and feminized. This unnatural reversal, allegedly perpetrated by women themselves, supposedly caused the many social ills of Communism.’⁸¹

The connection of reproductive rights to democratic representation – an argument widely used in Hungary during the 1990s – also appears regarding the history of Mexican feminism:

⁸⁰ Peggy Watson, ‘Civil Society and the Politics of Difference in Eastern Europe,’ in *Transitions, Environments, Translations. Feminism in international politics* ed. Joan W. Scott, Cora Kaplan and Debra Keates (New York: Routledge, 1997), 26.

⁸¹ Susan Gal, ‘Feminism and Civil Society,’ in *Transitions, environments, translations: feminisms in international politics*, ed. Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1997), 36-37.

'Ortiz-Ortega argues that feminists developed an inclusive notion of abortion rights as citizen's rights: by the end of the eighties, feminists argued that „the right to legal and safe abortion” was more than an issue of public health or social justice. It became an issue of democratic representation... women were citizens who claimed their rights to abortion as a right to citizenship.’⁸²

NGOization

When observing activism during the 1990s, a global boom of NGOs – often accompanied by the transformation of grassroot groups – becomes clear, and resulted in the participation of non-governmental organisations at international conferences:

'... the process of NGOization was further accentuated when the UN summoned feminist NGOs to participate in Cairo Summit on Population and Development, the Beijing Women's Conference and others in the string of Social Summits and the follow-up '+5' and then '+10' conferences it sponsored during the 1990s and 2000s.’⁸³

The Shaping Power of International Conferences

Central conferences of the 1990s, which had fundamentally determined the reproductive rights debate include

‘...the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo at which reproductive rights were defined as “human rights which are inalienable and inseparable from basic rights such as the right to food, shelter, health, security, livelihood, education, and political empowerment,” (...)’⁸⁴

as well as ‘... the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, which asked governments to “consider reviewing laws that provide punitive measures against women who have had illegal abortions.” (...)’⁸⁵

⁸² Jennifer Nelson, 'Abortion Rights and Human Rights in Mexico,' 131-132.

⁸³ Sonia Alvarez, 'Beyond NGO-ization? Reflections from Latin America,' *Development* 52, no. 2 (2009): 177.

⁸⁴ Jennifer Nelson, 'Abortion Rights and Human Rights in Mexico,' 138.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Multidirectional interactions and the significance of locations are also described by Maud Anne Bracke, representing the 'glocal' state of reproductive rights debates:

'The era of global debates on family planning coincided with the radicalisation of feminist activism in the Western world, sometimes referred to as 'second-wave feminism. (...) Building on intersectional feminist theory, this article highlights what Adrienne Rich in the 1970s termed the 'politics of location' in feminist activism: the diversity of perspectives, embedded in distinct local conditions and the different histories of 'particular patriarchies'. Such an approach involves foregrounding organisations from the Global South and communist Eastern Europe, identifying diverse understandings of reproductive freedom, and noting how Western feminists were influenced by actors and developments in other parts of the world.'⁸⁶

4 Pro-Choice Campaign on the Pages of Nőszemély. Documentation and Representation of a Goal.

Nőszemély, the journal of the Feminist Network had played a crucial role throughout its history, and is a primary source regarding the reconstruction of the Networks' feminist projects and campaigns. It presents a wide range of topics and interests, featuring local, regional and international events, debates and ideas through articles, essays, interviews, photography reports, book reviews, contemporary art and literature, and last, but not least, archival documents of the Hungarian feminist past. The pro-choice campaign of 1992 is no exception, and reports about activities and achievements are central regarding this chapter of feminist history – and an early example of using the new, legal tools available in a democratic

⁸⁶ Maud Anne Bracke, 'Contesting 'Global Sisterhood': The Global Women's Health Movement, the United Nations and the Different Meanings of Reproductive Rights (1970s-80s.)' *Gender & History* 35, no. 3 (2023): 814.

system.⁸⁷ Issues of *Nőszemély* selected for analysis include the issue from June 1992 (second issue of *Nőszemély*)⁸⁸ and from April 1993 (third issue),⁸⁹ which were written during and after the pro-choice campaign of 1992, and therefore deal with it in detail the most. The second issue can also be seen as a thematic publication, focusing primarily on the campaign. Criteria of selection of articles and issues were mentions of the pro-choice campaign, and the number of articles and issues having a focus on reproductive rights allowed the presentation of the whole selection, following each other chronologically, as printed in the journal. Topics mentioned in the articles will be contextualised in detail and connected to global parallels of the 1990s in subchapter 4.2. The second issue (June 1992) consists of 28 pages, its main editor was Katalin Wank / Richárdné Wank, an active member of the working group Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport. In this part of thesis, articles, news and announcements dealing with the abortion debate and pro-choice campaign are translated, described in detail and contextualized in connection with global frames of discussions on reproductive rights, while also recognized as an essential part of the local debate on abortion in Hungary at the beginning of the 1990s. The focus of content analysis includes mentions of phenomena and developments, which characterised feminist activism and pro-choice campaigns in other parts of the world in the era.

4.1 Description of the Content of Selected Issues of *Nőszemély* on Reproductive Rights

The issue of 1992 starts with an opinion piece of translator Zsuzsa Béres, organised into

⁸⁷ While 1989 has clearly opened new legal possibilities, for example printing journals and founding organisations, it is important to note that antifeminist forces were also eager to use new tools. During the general restructuring and upheaval of the political, economic and legal system, antifeminist groups also organised themselves, lobbied, and opened the issue of re-regulating the legal frames of abortion, which was followed by a feminist response.

⁸⁸ The complete issue can be downloaded from the website of Nőkért Egyesület:
https://nokert.hu/sites/default/files/csatolmanyok/noszemely_2_1.pdf [30.03.2024]

⁸⁹ Online available under:
https://nokert.hu/sites/default/files/csatolmanyok/noszemely_3_1993_aprilis_3._szam_0.pdf [30.03.2024]

columns, serving as an introduction to the issue.⁹⁰ It begins with the image of nine men in robes, announcing the public decision of the Constitutional Court and analysing the contradiction of the 'rights of fetuses' versus the 'autonomy of women' in legal terms, which determined a debate of almost two years. Béres highlights how nearly all participants and decision makers of the abortion debate were men, while its consequences primarily affect women, whose 'moral obligations', supposed 'irresponsibility' regarding birth control and 'holiest profession (as mothers)' had been repeated regularly. Besides, Béres reflects on the reduction of the issue to a philosophical, legal, genetic, moral or religious question, treating women and their bodies as a subject and object, something lifeless, destined primarily for completing the social duty of giving birth, whether they want it, or not. The article of Béres also presents the view of the Feminist Network, which – despite attacks from antifeminist forces stating the opposite – did not propagate for abortions as an aim, but for having a choice in this regard, as women are not objects or machines for giving birth, but people with feelings, for whom the termination of pregnancies is often a painful and humiliating experience, which they frequently have to go through with no emotional support, and because of their partners' will.

It is particularly fascinating, how Béres mentions 'formal and informal' examples of objection from Hungarian citizens' already from the time of the 'one-party dictatorship' [state socialism], when people were taking a stand for liberal regulations of family planning, respecting the decisions of individuals and families, also about terminating pregnancies. Although not specified, this mention is highly likely to be the petition of 1973. Besides, many arguments of Béres overlap with the motivation of participants signing the petition in 1973. These include how, although the criminalisation of abortions could lead to an increase of births for a while, would not change the general tendencies [of population decline], based on local and international examples, but would lead to dangerous and illegalised abortions. Béres, similarly to participants of the petition from the socialist era, also connected the issue of unwanted pregnancies to tensions in the family and mental or emotional issues a forced birth could cause, as well as socioeconomic factors – children being born into insufficient circumstances. This was also one of the possible reasons for selecting when applying for an

⁹⁰ Besides the cover and table of contents, the only part of the issue before the opinion piece of Béres is a short description of the meaning and context of *Nőszemély* as the title of the journal and its connections to the aims of the editors.

abortion under liberal regulations, and appears as a recurring argument among signers of the petition of 1973, who mention for instance the difficulties of housing in state socialist Hungary. According to Béres, the issue of children born into poverty had not been resolved during socialism, and no change was to be expected regarding child poverty during the era of transition, given the economic hardships.⁹¹ These arguments led to the conclusion, how irresponsible – and even cynical – is to talk about human rights of fetuses just conceived, if people already born are not guaranteed the right to human dignity. Béres also emphasized the wish for a society, which is pro-children, providing them with equal rights and opportunities. Criminalisation [of abortions] and forcing women into giving birth, however, is not the way to motivate people to have children, but rather the improvement of various conditions, individually and socially. This is followed by a statement, which also defines the starting point of this thesis: 'Az abortuszkérdés túlmutat saját jelentőségén' – 'The question of abortion extends beyond its own importance'⁹², as it is about the value – and role – of women in a given society, whether they have the choice to make decisions about family planning, employment and about the way they would like to live, or the state does this for them. The freedom of choice liberates women, and gives them the chance to make decisions, lead their own lives. Family planning, contraception and – if needed – the termination of pregnancies, ensured by laws, are crucial regarding the maintenance of female autonomy. The author – also speaking presumably in the name of the Feminist Network and editors of *Nőszemély*, using the term 'we' – found the fact that the Constitutional Court emphasized the role of the state regarding the protection of fetuses, alarming. The liberation of women is mentioned as an alternative to focus on, especially due to their triple burden – work, family, household –, making it difficult for them to notice what kind of new danger is lurking. Here, Béres lists the possible losses of women in the transition era, many of which were analysed by scholars during that time: loss of paid employment, institutionalised childcare facilities, affordable services, which could be followed by the loss of something taken for granted in the last decades: the possibility of legal abortions, covered by public health insurance. Another historic parallel follows, also overlapping with motivation shared by signers of the abortion petition in 1973: the example of the so-called 'Ratkó children', unfolding the results of the

⁹¹ Zsuzsa Béres underlines it with statistics, how the government deficit of 1991 was expected to be over 100 billion Hungarian forints.

⁹² *Nőszemély*, issue of June 1992, page 2.

Hungarian 'baby boom' of the 1950s,⁹³ strongly connected to healthcare, education, and social welfare, as well as access to those. Overcrowdedness as an experience, for example at school, appears not only in testimonies of young people signing the petition in 1973, but also among the arguments of Béres. She describes how children of the 'Ratkó children' were currently fighting over admission to high schools, others, after graduation, for employment. How will the state, with an empty treasury provide the 'Surján children'⁹⁴ with healthcare, childcare support and unemployment benefits? – asks Béres. The article ends with advice for decision makers and political parties, consisting 93 % of men, that in a newly transformed, multi-party, democratic system, it is not recommended to ignore the interests and human rights of women, representing at least 50 % of voters. If they cannot step beyond the interests of political parties for the interests of citizens, the question of abortion could become the first trial of democracy in Hungary⁹⁵ – summarizes Béres.

The next article, written by Katalin Wank, is similarly organised into columns and paragraphs, resembling a poem with its form, while being an opinion piece on the decision of the Constitutional Court as well as the abortion debate, starting in 1990. It shares multiple points and arguments with the article of Béres, but is longer, and uses titles for structuring her overview, while offering context for the years-long debate. The titles include: THE STATE; CHURCH – LOVE – FERTILITY; SEXUALITY AND FERTILITY; HEALTHCARE; NATURE PROTECTION, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION; ABOUT THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT; WOMEN, HALF OF HUMANITY. Before these, Wank summarizes central issues and shares some of her major arguments, starting with the question: Can there be rule of law and guarantee of human rights, if a state forces citizens to give birth? The image of the impersonal power is used, which is taking the right of choice from the individual, who is only being used and counted, as this power solely thinks in crowds, not individuals. The Feminist Network, on the other hand, does not represent group interests, but

⁹³ The exact role of Anna Ratkó, Minister of Health, who is often connected to stricter abortion regulations and even a complete ban, is mentioned earlier. Fanni Svégel, 'A női test ellenőrzéséről, Ratkó-mítoszról és önrendelkezésről. Kritikai reflexiók egy tanulmány margójára.'

⁹⁴ Following the common expression of 'Ratkó children', Béres created a similar one for the 1990s, using the name of Christian Democratic politician László Surján, Minister of Welfare between 1990 and 1994. The picture of Surján also appears on the cover of the issue of *Nőszemély* from June 1992.

⁹⁵ The expression overlaps with the title of a paper from Anna Klára Haiser: 'Egy új demokrácia első próbája: abortuszvita a rendszerváltás idején.' ['The first test of a new democracy: the abortion debate during the transition period.']

rather basic rights of individuals, of humans, of women. Wank highlights how they did not consider abortions the only right way, but something that women should have the right to decide on, also mentioning the importance of prevention: the availability of contraception and sex education. The Hungarian word 'jog' [meaning both 'right' and 'law'] appears as a recurring expression, similarly to 'responsibility'. Wank connects both to arguments. First, the practice of the pro-life group (mentioned as 'protectors of cells and fetuses'), of accusing women of murder, if they decide to terminate their pregnancies is mentioned. How does such a public accusation not have legal consequences? Is it not against the Constitution? – asks Wank rhetorically, also adding another tasteless metaphor to the analysis of language used during the debate: that the pro-life side equaled abortions with the Holocaust. She also distances the Feminist Network from similar language, stating: 'We do not engage in skirmish with such rhetoric. We use arguments.'⁹⁶ 'Responsibility' appears for instance in a financial sense, stating how, if a 'flow of babies' would overrun the country, the pro-life side – who could be named: members of pro-life associations, Members of Parliament voting pro-life, as well as those arguing against having a choice publicly or privately, – should feel responsible for the upbringing of those babies. Katalin Wank also mentions the dangers of illegal abortions, life-long medical issues or death, which – for some arguing pro-life – were not too high costs to pay in order to return to 'normality': Wank mentions a statement from the newspaper Magyar Nemzet from 1991, in which the author, Béla Sebestyén called for drastic measures, even if the transition period will have its victims. In this introduction and overview, the past, present and future appear as the last image. The future – as supposed lack of belief in the bright future of the homeland of those, who terminate their pregnancies – is mentioned as an argument of the pro-life side, which Wank answers with that children need necessities immediately, not in the remote future. Force and violence – as tools for reacting to the issue – appear in her arguments as something dark from the past, which developed, Western democracies have already recognized. The present, however, is marked by an increasing hope for a more humane and tolerant world, and the abortion debate appears as a central question regarding the fight of enlightened humanism and a darker past. The columns organised by titles mentioned above offer historic facts and an overview of pro-choice arguments. Questions and issues mentioned by Wank include, for instance: treating people as individuals versus as a mass, the will of dictators for population growth for military purposes, the pension system, overpopulation and its consequences for the environment, contraception and

⁹⁶ Nőszemély, issue of June 1992, page 6.

prevention of pregnancies, gynecological practice of saving mothers, if the fetus risks their lives. Similarly to Zsuzsa Béres, Katalin Wank also reflects on the decision of the Constitutional Court, in which no female judges were involved. She mentions how deciding on whether cells and fetuses are people appeared as the most important issue in this regard, which question was to be sent to the national legislation to discuss. Wank wonders why the Parliament is to decide a question of science, instead of experts of genetics or biologists. The article ends with a historic overview and analysis of patriarchy, as well as the oxymoron of making laws that are against human rights.

This article is followed by a translated excerpt from a publication of Planned Parenthood, Federation of America Inc., listing nine arguments in favour of the freedom of abortion in brackets. These reasons are in accordance with previous arguments mentioned by members of the Feminist Network, and focus on the protection of lives and health of women, their autonomy of making decisions about motherhood, the right to privacy and human rights, teenage pregnancies, and the role of families regarding family planning. The solution, mentioned in the end, is named as family planning and the freedom of choice, which is followed by a photo, made by Vera Bozzi, showing members of the Feminist Network, holding petitions.

The next article is a general statement from organisers of the pro-choice campaign, starting with the title 'Women, be aware!', a warning for difficulties of future abortions, from which women and families will suffer, as it could be seen in other countries. Authors of the page argue for safe, modern and available contraceptives, free abortion, sexual education and family planning as a shared responsibility. Democracy and human rights are mentioned here as well as important key words, highlighting how democracy shall give people more control over their lives, not less, adding in capital letters, that this also applies to women. Authors mention the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations from 1968, which states that 'Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children',⁹⁷ for which authors name the above-mentioned actions as necessities. This is followed by four points, what readers can do to support the cause:

- Contacting Members of Parliament

⁹⁷ Proclamation, adopted unanimously at the UN International Conference on Human Rights, Teheran, 1968 (Article 16). Karen Newman and Charlotte Feldman-Jacobs: FAMILY PLANNING AND HUMAN RIGHTS—WHAT'S THE CONNECTION AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT? July 2015. Online available under: <https://www.igwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/family-planning-rights-brief.pdf> [26.05.2024]

- Signing the petition of the Feminist Network
- Forwarding the call to friends
- Joining the [pro-choice] Action Group of the Feminist Network.

Contact details (address of their office on Forgách Street and a telephone number) are added at the end of the article.

The next two pages include artistic contributions, a poem of Katalin Wank about motherhood with the title 'Fonál' ['Cord'], and a dialogue – presumably a theatre play –, called 'Jogvita' ['Legal Debate'], recorded by 'k.n'. The latter describes an imagined conversation between a cell and a man, who is the characterisation of pro-life arguments, creating an absurd dialogue. The following article, written by Annamária Szántó about feminism in Austria, mentions the Hungarian abortion debate in contrast to current feminist campaigns in Austria, which aimed at expanding goals already achieved: opening new women's and children's shelters for victims of domestic violence. Besides, a further parallel is highlighted, which can be connected to campaigns from the 1970s. On page 19, Szántó recalls the twenty-years old history of radical feminism and women's movements in Austria, and how, at the beginning of the 1970s, ten thousands of women organised public demonstrations in order to end the abortion ban; reported themselves at the police in crowds ('I have aborted, too'), and demanded self-determination with banners ('My belly is mine'), shaking up a man's world, built upon double morals: banning abortions, while promoting sexual liberty. The latter, connected by Szántó to the 'new left', overlaps with similar arguments of feminists reflecting on gender relations of the Democratic Opposition in Hungary from the 1970s, describing traditional gender roles and strong gender hierarchies, which also determined the remembrance of their activities. The question of abortions, again, appears as an important indicator of gender relations in general.

The article of Szántó is followed by an announcement of the Feminist Network, dealing with the abortion question, written in bigger letters, than the previous essay, also using terms of the first women's movements, which were similarly aiming at achieving the right to choose, back then in public (universal suffrage), and during the campaign of the Feminist Network, in private ('my body, my choice'):

'What does dictatorship and force give birth to?

Resistance!

And if also to children?

Poor children!

Any war against abortion, no matter under which label, is nothing else, but a

political turf war for power.

'Universal suffrage', also in our private lives!'

The next heading, under the title 'Appeal' is an open call – not only to women, who identify themselves as feminists –, for joining a group against violence against women, also explaining that abuse does not only mean sexual harassment, but also all forms of mental, psychological and physical abuse. Besides, the pro-choice petition campaign is also mentioned, naming abortion as a 'last option', highlighting the view of the Feminist Network previously mentioned: that abortion is not a goal, but should be an option that women can choose, if nothing else worked for avoiding pregnancies. As tasks for potential volunteers, collecting signatures and organising petition campaigns are mentioned, for which not just Budapest-based women, but also activists from other parts of Hungary were targeted. The concept of 'sisterhood' appears in the expression 'nőtársaink' ['fellow women'], whose help and solidarity – another central thought present in feminist movements – they counted on. The address and landline number of the office on Forgách Street is mentioned not only for making, but also for maintaining contact.

The last written part, under the title 'News, News, News' reports on previous events and news regarding the Feminist Networks. Out of ten summaries, five mentions are connected to the abortion debate and pro-choice activism. Authors share how the petition campaign against the current aggravation of abortion regulations started in autumn, 1990 and that around 6000 signatures were collected in a short time. These were handed to the Constitutional Court on 31 October 1991, before they made their decision, together with a letter, delineating the standpoint of the Feminist Network. On 4 November 1991 they held the first international press conference of the group, sharing their standpoint with the media, also highlighting how the debate has completely ignored the view and interests of women. TV channels, radios, nationwide newspapers, and several international reporters attended the press conference. Under the title 'Helsinki Citizens' Assembly', a meeting of the Female Section held in Prague between 6–8 December 1991 – a meeting of the Network of East-West Women⁹⁸ – is mentioned. Its central topic, reproductive rights of women are briefly explained, while the English translation is added in brackets, complete with a focus on the question of abortions in

⁹⁸ 'Founded in 1991, The Network of East-West Women (NEWW) strengthens the capacity of women activists and women's NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe, the Newly Independent States and the Russian Federation (CEE/NIS) to raise awareness of gender issues and influence public policy affecting women's lives.' Online available under: <http://www.neww.org/index.html> [04.02.2025]

Eastern Europe. As a result of workshops, a booklet is mentioned, which was to be translated into participants' native languages, published in their countries of origin. The summary of meeting students in Agárd, which happened as the result of an invitation from the Széchenyi College of the University of Economics, is described as an unpleasant experience. As a lesson learnt, feminists mention the need to be prepared not just regarding topics of the meeting, but also mentally, as they experienced hostility from the audience. Although not mentioned among the news, the theme of the meeting was the abortion debate, as seen in the caption of photos, starting from the next page. This is followed by positive news regarding applications, since the Feminist Network had received a maximum of ten thousand US dollars support from the Global Fund for Women – as described on the pages of *Nőszemély* –, a foundation from the United States, supporting grassroots female organisations, until then primarily from the Global South. Although it was meant as general support for the group, the reason for being granted was the pro-choice campaign. The International Planned Parenthood had also contributed to the pro-choice campaign with a support of two thousand dollars. This issue of *Nőszemély* ends with three photos of events that took place since the previous issue was published, depicted on the back page of the cover: handing over signatures at the Constitutional Court for a liberal law on abortions, Ms. Santa ⁹⁹ party of the Feminist Network, Judit Bálványos playing the saxophone, and of the abortion debate in Agárd.

Abortion as a topic and the pro-choice campaign of the Feminist Network still appear in the next issue of *Nőszemély* from 1993, although to a smaller extent. The way it is communicated, however, differs from the previous issue, which was written parallel to the abortion debate itself. Less was explained to Hungarian readers, since questions and topics authors covered have constantly been present in the newspapers, on TV, or on billboards and posters on the street. Articles written in 1993 already serve as an overview and reflection on what happened, how the campaign was formed, and how decisions made by the Constitutional Court are likely to impact the lives of women and families.

On page 11, it is mentioned three times in the last part of the summary 'A Feminista Hálózat rövid története' ['Short History of the Feminist Network'], written by Feminist Network member Nilda Bullain. First, abortion as one of the topics members have attended conferences on. Second, as one of the focus of their activism: they have attended demonstrations regarding reproductive rights of Polish women, as well as demonstrations organised by other NGOs

⁹⁹ It is again a play with words, as instead of 'Santa Claus' ['Télapó'], its female equivalent, 'Télanyó' is used.

against racism, war, and mass rapes of women during the Yugoslav War. Third, the petition campaign organised by Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport is mentioned as their greatest activity so far, aiming for such a law on abortion, which provides women with the right to choose.

This is elaborated in the next article, focusing on the campaign itself, written by 'A.J.' and 'B.N.' – presumably Judit Acsády and Nilda Bullain. It starts with details of the background of the campaign, explaining how – as the result of the decision of the Constitutional Court in January 1992 – a new law regarding abortion regulation had to be created until 31 December 1992, which happened parallel to a fierce debate in society. The voice of women, however was heard the least, which led to Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport taking up the role of an advocate, aiming at presenting how issues connected to pregnancy and fetuses should be perceived independent from doctrines or ideologies, and that, instead, one should focus on the everyday needs of women, children and families. The group was created in May 1992, with the help of members of the Feminist Network and – professional and financial – support from abroad. Their goal was, similarly to Western political campaigns, to make the biggest impact possible on decision makers and the public in a relatively short time. Besides, the empowerment of women also appears as a central aim, raising awareness to the fact that they, as citizens and members of society, with the right to vote should make their voices heard regarding an issue, which can fundamentally impact their lives. The postcard-action, an example of direct influence on decision makers proved to be the most successful part of the campaign. Thousands have sent postcards printed and distributed by the group to Members of Parliament, calling them upon as voters, not to vote for the tightening of abortion regulations. Besides, the group has worked on the shortened, Hungarian-speaking version of a US American documentary on abortion, presented at press screenings. When the article was published, the group was planning to screen it in public, maybe also at schools. Well-known tools of campaigns – flyers, posters, advertisements – are also named, as well as contributions to legal decision making: the group had collaborated with left-wing political parties (SZDSZ ['Alliance of Free Democrats'] and MSZP ['Hungarian Socialist Party']) regarding their proposal and detailed, professional critique of the planned bill, which was sent to all Members of Parliament. Following the initiative of the group, the European Network for Women's Right to Abortion and Contraception (ENWRAC) had sent an open letter to the Hungarian Parliament, asking Members of Parliament to consider the interests of women. Members of Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport have also handed

speaker György Szabad thirteen thousand signatures to Parliament, demanding to keep women's right to have a choice.

The next article, written by Anna Báthory, summarizes the morals of the new law on abortion. Although the 'B version' of the law 'On the protection of the lives on fetuses' was accepted in the end, meaning the more liberal proposal, the author highlights the downside present in both the law itself, and the speeches and discussion surrounding its birth. These present, according to Báthory, how – despite voting for the more liberal version –, the self-determination and human dignity of women were not completely respected.

This is followed by a statement of Szabad Döntés Jogáért Kampánycsoport on page 17, in brackets. The group summarizes both the positive and negative aspects of the new law. They welcome that its 'B version' has been accepted, which makes it possible for women to make decisions regarding their pregnancies, as well as that – as opposed to the draft of the new law – it allows abortions to be carried out in a longer time frame in certain cases. The price of the procedure – only covered by public insurance, if it was medically needed, or the pregnancy was the result of a crime –, also appears in the statement. While the group is of the opinion that it should be covered by public insurance, they considered its price reasonable, which could also be prepaid by the state. Prevention as a central aspect is also mentioned, the group wished for a variety of contraceptives without product tax, as well as sex education at schools. Two points, which were reflected on the least before, include the need for using the vacuum surgery technique at earlier abortions, making it easier and safer. Besides, as a negative consequence of the new law, the group names the compulsory parental permission in case of teenage pregnancies, which may cause harm in dysfunctional families, and might lead to mental burdens and physical injuries.

4.2 Reflections and Analysis of Content. Relations to Tendencies and Phenomena of the 1990s regarding Reproductive Rights.

A Short Comparison with the Petition of 1973.

Based on articles mentioned here, it is clear that the view, aims, activities and participation in the abortion debate of the group was clearly communicated both during and after the campaign, in articles written by individuals, as well as in statements of all members. Examples of advocacy – cooperation and (in)direct communication with political parties or Members of Parliament –, as well as classical tools of activism (making flyers, spreading

posters, sending postcards) both appear, as well as the mobilisation of transnational actors (support from the Global Fund for Women; open letter of the European Network for Women's Right to Abortion and Contraception (ENWRAC) to the Hungarian Parliament). The campaign was complex, well-organised, and capable of reaching a wide audience through multiple platforms, directly and indirectly, using all tools available: legal possibilities for aiming at social change as an NGO, publishing a journal and involving the media in spreading news, as well as influencing and working together with political actors in a newly established democratic system.

Zsófia Kulcsár and Anna Klára Haiser both highlight the importance of the pro-choice campaign regarding its role as an organising tool and common aim, while Haiser also describes the phenomenon of using possibilities provided by the new, democratic system. Besides, while in traditional forums, for instance on pages of the newspaper *Magyar Napló*, primarily men dominated the discourse on abortion, the Feminist Network aimed at involving more women in the debate, and carried out the campaign completely in public.¹⁰⁰ Articles of *Nőszemély* also demonstrate this, and are important first-hand sources of a successful campaign. Details currently added to the history of the petition campaign include notions of Antonia Burrows, founding members of the Feminist Network, participating in the conference Abortion Petition50. She recalls how the group had been collecting signatures and spreading postcards for months at Moszkva tér (now Széll Kálmán Square), one of the busiest transport interchanges in Budapest, especially on Saturdays, when many came there to the market. According to Burrows, all who went past, have signed their petition. Many points mentioned by Burrows are connected to images, as both feminists/ the pro-choice side and antifeminists/ pro-life groups campaigned with the help of visual tools. Burrows recalls, for example, seeing representatives of the US American pro-life movement on Hungarian TV, the camera recording the fetus-shaped key chain of a man from close-up. The conservative Hungarian political party MDF ('Magyar Demokrata Fórum' ['Hungarian Democratic Forum']) also used images to reinforce their message in public, putting up political posters at the metro station Moszkva tér, depicting a young, smiling, pregnant women, having a map of Hungary at her belly. Images used by the Feminist Network included pictures of two knitting needles – a symbol of illegalized, dangerous abortions, which could lead to death of women –, as well as a slogan: 'How many women and girls die during illegal abortions?' This was also glued to pro-life posters, which, even if it was removed from those, also left its mark on the posters

¹⁰⁰ Anna Klára Haiser, 'Egy új demokrácia első próbája,' 83-84.

under – just as feminist campaigns had been building upon the legacy of each other, simultaneously modifying and expanding the discourse.

Unfortunately, the text of the petition of 1992 is not available neither online, nor in sources found for this thesis, but is summarized by Anna Klára Haiser as follows:

'A few blank pages from the petition forms survived, as well as a one-page open letter dated 25 June 1990, signed on behalf of „citizens who initiated the protest”, but it is not clear where authors intended to send it, it was probably the text of the petition. It called for a new abortion law that would allow citizens the freedom to choose whether or not to have an abortion. They argued that banning abortion would not lead to an increase of births in the longer term, but could have unforeseen consequences: illegal operations and the birth of unwanted children, which could cause tensions within the family. The authors argue that in order for change to occur, the ideal conditions for childbearing need to be created within society.'

¹⁰¹

In this sense, the content of the petition of 1992 is remarkably similar to the petition of 1973, also reacting to concerns of a decline of population growth, while highlighting the negative consequences that a restriction of reproductive rights could have, and mentioning changes which would be needed to increase birth rates. Further arguments, such as women's rights and human rights were expressed at other platforms – in the media, in the frames of articles written for *Nőszemély* –, and presumably in person when approaching people to sign the petition. Another difference between the two campaigns was the increased level of regional solidarity of the 1990s with women dealing with similar issues. While restrictions of reproductive rights during state socialism were strongly present for instance in Romania, public actions raising awareness of such problems were not present in Hungary until 1990, when the Feminist Network organised a demonstration in front of the Polish Embassy, in solidarity with Polish women facing the restrictions of abortion regulations.¹⁰² One reason for this, however, could be the changing circumstances of citizens' rights, and does not

¹⁰¹ Anna Klára Haiser, 'Egy új demokrácia első próbája,' 78-79. Translation.

¹⁰² Ibid., 79, as mentioned by Feminist Network member Emília Szilágyi in an interview in the newspaper *Esti Hírlap* on 9 October 1990.

necessarily mean a lack of information or solidarity during state socialism.

Four key terms that had shaped and determined pro-choice activism in the 1990s also describe central arguments present in the above-mentioned articles and news, and this analysis aims at connecting these, previously mentioned terms with their appearance in the journal:

- NGOization
- Discourse of Human Rights
- Democracy, Rights and Citizenship
- The Shaping Power of International Conferences

NGOization, a central phenomenon of the 1990s, had fundamentally defined frames of activism for the Feminist Network at a time when non-governmental organisations started to be seen as experts, and consulted in issues they were specialized in, also at global conferences. Two influential conferences of the United Nations were organised shortly after the campaign of 1992: the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, as well as the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. ‘Women and health’ was one of the twelve main areas of the agenda. According to Feminist Network member Vera Bozzi, three representatives of the Feminist Network and connected organisations had taken part in the conference: Andrea Tóth at the governmental, Antonia Burrows and Blanka Kozma (Közéleti Roma Nők Egyesülete [‘Association of Roma Women in Public Life’]) at the non-governmental section in Huairou, 50 km from Beijing.¹⁰³ The frames of the whole campaign, as well as the production of articles were all connected to the status of the Feminist Network as a registered organisation, and also contributed to having certain opportunities for presenting their views: in the media or at debates, lectures. The multi-directional, shaping power of international conferences, – even though in this case two important ones happened after the campaign described on the pages of *Nőszemély* – can already be observed in arguments used by authors of *Nőszermély*, as many of those have their roots in women’s movements and the reproductive rights discourse of the 1970s. As Maud Anne Bracke describes:

‘This article contributes to a genealogy of the global articulation of reproductive rights principles, as established at the 1994 United Nations (UN) Conference on

¹⁰³ Bozzi and Czene, *Elsikkasztott feminizmus*, 123.

Population and Development held in Cairo and at the UN Women's Conference held in Beijing the following year. It highlights the key role played by an emerging global women's health movement in the 1970s–80s, in shaping UN debates on family planning, women's rights in procreative choice and women's roles in socio-economic development.' ¹⁰⁴

While demographic goals and a fear of (global) overpopulation versus a fear of population decline (nation states) had been defining the reproductive rights discourse, the role played by women's health had simultaneously also gained importance, both appearing in articles by Zsuzsa Béres and Katalin Wank. Key terms used by authors of *Nőszemély*, such as 'dignity', 'human rights' and 'rights of individuals' also appear in a summary of the International Conference on Population and Development. Besides, types and characteristics of groups, which were supposed to be consulted regarding implementation, such as 'civil society', 'women-led organisation', [originally] 'grassroot' and 'community group' also described the Feminist Network:

'In 1994 the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo, transformed global thinking on population and development issues and defined a bold agenda, placing people's dignity and rights at the heart of sustainable development. There, 179 governments adopted the ICPD Programme of Action. It affirmed that inclusive sustainable development is not possible without prioritizing human rights, including reproductive rights; empowering women and girls; and addressing inequalities as well as the needs, aspirations and rights of individual women and men. ICPD set the standard for people-centred development, guiding national policies and programmes for the implementation of the Programme of Action by governments, in collaboration with parliaments and civil society, including women and youth-led organizations, the private sector, community groups and individuals at the grassroots level.' ¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Maud Anne Bracke, 'Contesting 'Global Sisterhood': The Global Women's Health Movement, the United Nations and the Different Meanings of Reproductive Rights (1970s-80s),' *Gender & History* 35, no. 3 (2023): 811.

¹⁰⁵ International Conference on Population and Development. Online available under: <https://www.unfpa.org/icpd> [03.11.2024]

A summary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held between 4–15 September 1995 in Beijing, contains further central aspects, including the invitation of members of NGOs, as well as strategic objectives and actions for the achievement of gender equality in twelve critical areas of concern, many of which overlap with the focus of the Feminist Network, and issues presented in Nőszemély:

‘The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China was the most important of the four conferences on women held between 1975–1995, because it built on political agreements that had been reached at the three previous global conferences on women, and it consolidated five decades of legal advances aimed at securing the equality of women with men in law and in practice. More than 17,000 participants attended the conference, including 6,000 government delegates at the negotiations, more than 4,000 accredited NGO representatives, a host of international civil servants and around 4,000 media representatives. A parallel NGO Forum held in Huairou near Beijing also drew some 30,000 participants. The conference marked a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted unanimously by 189 countries, was an agenda for women’s empowerment that is now considered the key global policy document on gender equality. It set strategic objectives and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality in 12 critical areas of concern: Women and poverty, Education and training of women, Women and health, Violence against women, Women and armed conflict, Women and the economy, Women in power and decision-making, Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women, Human rights of women, Women and the media, Women and the environment, The girl-child.’¹⁰⁶

A summary of the area ‘women and health’ contains crucial arguments mentioned on the

¹⁰⁶ Fourth World Conference on Women, 4-15 September 1995, Beijing, China. Online available under: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/beijing1995> [03.11.2024]

pages of Nőszemély, highlighting the role of human rights regarding reproductive rights, as well as presenting the ability of women to control their own fertility as an important basis for the enjoyment of other rights [as citizens, for instance]. Simultaneously, equal relationships and ‘responsibility’ as a key term, which also appeared at the conference Abortuszpetíció⁵⁰ in connection with the petition of 1973 in state socialist Hungary, are also highlighted in the summary:

‘(...) Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant. (...) Bearing in mind the above definition, reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents. In the exercise of this right, they should take into account the needs of their living and future children and their responsibilities towards the community. (...) The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences. (...) Unsafe abortions threaten the lives of a large number of

women, representing a grave public health problem as it is primarily the poorest and youngest who take the highest risk. Most of these deaths, health problems and injuries are preventable through improved access to adequate health-care services, including safe and effective family planning methods and emergency obstetric care, recognizing the right of women and men to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant. (...) The ability of women to control their own fertility forms an important basis for the enjoyment of other rights. Shared responsibility between women and men in matters related to sexual and reproductive behaviour is also essential to improving women's health.’¹⁰⁷

The role of families, affected by the state of reproductive rights, just as in articles of Nőszemély, is also highlighted. Besides, the aspect of gender, and the recognition of women’s rights as human rights were also underlined at the conference in Beijing:

‘The UN Division for Women, in its review of the four World Conferences, stated “The fundamental transformation that took place in Beijing was the recognition of the need to shift the focus from women to the concept of gender, recognizing that the entire structure of society, and all relations between men and women within it, had to be re-evaluated. Only by such a fundamental restructuring of society and its institutions could women be fully empowered to take their rightful place as equal partners with men in all aspects of life. This change represented a strong reaffirmation that women's rights were human rights and that gender equality was an issue of universal concern, benefiting all.”’¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Women and Health.

Online available under: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/health.htm> [03.11.2024]

¹⁰⁸ Fourth World Conference on Women, 4-15 September 1995, Beijing, China. Online available under: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/beijing1995> [18.12.2024]

Additional, central aspects present in articles of Nőszemély include the emphasis on women as voters and their rights as citizens, which should be applied regarding the debate on reproductive rights in a democratic system, as expressed by Zsuzsa Béres.

5 Conclusion

Thinking back of the working process and collection of sources regarding pro-choice campaigns in Hungary in the 1970s and 1990s, a huge difference emerges. While the campaign of the 1990s is well-documented, much reflected upon – also internationally – and sought connections outside of Hungary, it was a challenge to find information and reflections of the petition campaign from the 1970s. This was partly due to the relative isolation characteristic of the era behind the Iron Curtain, limiting possibilities of international contacts with other activists and scholars, or the publishing of essays, announcements, journals. Besides, the informal character of the petition campaign of 1973 makes it generally hard to grasp its essence, as its frames were continuously changing. Abortion as a topic had also been a taboo in most eras and societies, although to a varying degree, and second wave feminism meant a milestone regarding a change in this matter. The above-mentioned characteristic of informality, which determined the petition campaign of 1973 is a remarkable difference, when compared to the pro-choice campaign of 1992. The latter was defined by a high degree of consciousness, simultaneously regarding similar campaigns and feminist practice from across the globe in multiple eras, as well as feminist theory and the vocabulary of women's movements from the West. While there are traces of women connected to the Democratic Opposition in the 1970s reading some – presumably excerpts of – Western feminist literature, their lack of vocabulary was reflected upon at the conference Abortuszpetíció⁵⁰. All in all, the petition campaign of 1973 was generally instinctive and informal, while the petition campaign of 1992 rather planned, organised, and complex with its tools, simultaneously collecting signatures, conducting a media campaign, publishing a journal, modifying posters, sending postcards to Members of Parliament, and being in contact with political parties. In this regard, structural changes between state socialist and post socialist Hungary can be observed, partly following global trends of the era. In the 1970s, in a one-party system, where a specific form

of women's emancipation came from above, collecting signatures and intending to challenge a planned restriction was a rebellious act, and also had its consequences for some participants. The System Change of 1989, however, opened new legal doors for both pro-life and pro-choice activists, this time citizens having more of a say, with the help of tools of democracy: involving the media, legally publishing journals and flyers, collecting signatures in public, not only among one's acquaintances. Advocacy directed at political parties was a brand new phenomenon in the former Eastern Bloc, which overlapped with the global trend of NGOization and the role of feminist NGOs as consultants of institutions and political parties on a national, international and supranational level from the 1990s on. A feature that both Hungarian pro-choice campaigns share is their connections to universities, primarily in the capital, Budapest. In 1973, many signatures were collected by students at ELTE, University of Budapest, the same institution that multiple members of the Feminist Network were connected to in the 1990s – a decade, when female circles and lectures in the field of Women's Studies were established in university towns, including Szeged.

Looking back at the campaigns of 1973 and 1992, as well as the months spent working on this thesis, it becomes clear that globally present ideas like feminist never arrive in a vacuum, but to societies with specific gender regimes and frames to either work within, challenge them, or both. The focus of this work, two pro-choice campaigns in two World Systems in one place, Hungary confirmed this thesis. The petition campaign of 1973 and pro-choice campaign of 1992 had both been shaped by current circumstances and, in one way or another, built upon the legacy of previous feminist thought or campaigns, adding their share and trying to achieve as much as possible. Although frames, circumstances and possibilities differed, the results of both campaigns show how much can be achieved with the common effort of many. The central question of this thesis, whether feminist campaigns from Hungary represent breaks or continuities with 1989 being a turning point, another question arises: what do we consider a break or continuity? If the petition of 1973 is seen as a one-of-a-kind campaign, an exception confirming the rule (of having no authentic feminist campaigns during state socialism), 1989 clearly represented a break and the new start for feminism in Hungary. On the other hand, if we consider the petition campaign of 1973 a complete, even though short-lived, feminist project, it is an example of continuity. To my mind, it is the latter, since – even if less conscious, complex, documented and organised compared to the campaign of 1992 –, it had similar goals, involved a high number of participants, and brought the most out of current circumstances, in order to give people the right to have a choice, inspiring new groups of feminists to follow.

A current example of connecting the two pro-choice campaigns was the conference Abortuszpetíció50 1973–2023, initiated by the feminist organisation Nőkért Egyesület [Pro Women Association]. As it was mentioned at the conference, it is planned to dedicate a website for documenting the campaigns – another example of continuity, and a new potential source of motivation for future generations of Hungarian feminists.

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