

Maternity Leaves, Maternal Becomings:
The Cultural Construction of Mothering in
Present-Day Budapest and Sofia

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Abstract

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This thesis is a comparative exploration of the everyday childcare practices of new middle-class mothers on maternity leave in contemporary Budapest and Sofia. To investigate these practices, I conducted a feminist critical discourse analysis of 35 semi-structured interviews across the two cities. Linking my respondents' narratives about childcare choices to larger socio-political processes during and after state socialism, I provide a historicised analysis of maternal subjectivities as performatively constructed vis-à-vis culturally specific narratives of children's needs, and trace the implications this has for the deconstruction of the concept of subjectivity within feminist scholarship. Unlike the approach of exposing contradictions between maternal and other (perceived as autonomous) subjects, building on psychoanalysis and post-structuralist feminist sociology, I articulate the cooperative maternal subject 'otherwise' as a relational formation that emerges in the process of an ethical encounter with the other.

My research shows that mothers embody a subjectivity that can hardly contain itself within the illusion of a coherent, bounded 'I'. This leads them to un/consciously create complicated chainlike selves, which include the people indispensable in their daily existence as carers. However, respondents fill their narration of motherhood with different meanings in the two locations when it comes to practices on the ground. This is due to the almost opposite discursive conceptualisations of women's role in society under late Hungarian and Bulgarian state socialism, despite their similar welfare policies. I also investigate the hierarchical equation of middle-class motherhood to good motherhood, at the expense of 'othered' practices to challenge the western-centric tradition in the analysis of classed parenting and the practice of lumping post-socialist countries together in a culturally undifferentiated mass. Simultaneously, I conceive a politically relevant Eastern European epistemic perspective, reflecting the marginal position Eastern Europe occupies in relation to the global 'North-West' and its own complicated relationship with racism, as both victim and perpetrator.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Beginnings

Every thesis is a journey, what's not always possible is tracing where it begins and then forcing an end to it. For the sake of finishing this PhD and getting on with my life, let's say this one starts on a busy boulevard in Budapest, suggestively nicknamed "The Champs Elysees of the East", and ends in the attic room of a Dickensian terraced house on a quaint avenue in Leicester city.

Starring: a baby transforming into an outspoken tween; a supportive partner; several love affairs, some with the writings of post-structuralist philosophers, others with psychedelic substances and finally some with actual human beings; broken hearts; laborious healings of primary and secondary traumas; life-saving friendships and mentorships; all the music in the world; a cross-cultural backlash against the very field this thesis belongs to; and, last but definitely not least, a cynical new mother with a flair for the dramatic gradually turned radical feminist zen Buddhist, minus the pretensions to spirituality. A non-spiritual radical feminist zen Buddhist, mind you, may sound like an oxymoron, surfing on a tsunami of inner contradictions. That's OK, so are 'mother', 'subject', 'woman' and 'man' but we'll get there in time.

Alas, this is actually a PhD thesis, so only glimpses of the glorious story behind this sublimated analysis of maternal subjectivity will intermittently become available to you. Sorry about that.

To get to the point, this thesis is a comparative study of the everyday childcare practices of middle-class new mothers on maternity leave in contemporary Budapest and Sofia. My main interest lies in exploring how maternal subjectivities are constructed vis-à-vis culturally specific narratives of children's needs and what implications this has for the deconstruction of the concept of subjectivity within feminist scholarship. My thesis is primarily devoted to teasing out the differences between the childcare practices considered appropriate in two Central Eastern European (CEE from now on) capital cities. However, in order to problematise a still prevalent belief in an Eastern European, post-socialist cultural model of reproductive labour, it also aims to do so from a place of deconstructing the boundary between theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of motherhood. This introduction chapter starts with a general

overview of the theoretical conundrums driving my writing, interrupted by personal stories contextualising the decision to spend over eight years exploring them. I then continue with a short presentation of the methods deployed and finish with a summary of my main findings.

Feminist analyses of motherhood can roughly be divided into two broad fields: a 'theoretical' one, concerned with answering questions about the 'meaning' (or 'experience', 'nature' or 'subject') of motherhood in general (Baraitser 2009, DiQuinzio 1999, Ettinger 2006, Kristeva and Goldhammer 1985, Rich 1976, Ruddick 1989), and an 'empirical' one, producing case studies, normally interested in identifying the differences among women who do 'motherwork' (Byrne 2006, Gabb 1999, Hau-nung Chan 2008, Hill Collins 2007, Lareau 2003). Despite tackling a variety of issues of common interest, the empirical literature tends to simply deploy the categories created by the 'theoretical' one, but rarely with the intention to challenge and critically modify them. The few notable exceptions, originating from an Anglo-American context, include Hays (1996), Lawler (2000) and Wallbank (2001).

My research, hopefully, creates a constructive dialogue at the intersection of these two currents, something reflected in the flow of writing as well - a continuous 'tangoing' between data analysis and academic positioning, where theory and empirics are seen to mutually de/construct each other. I am a firm believer in soft science and a need to embrace the mess in our lives and heads, particularly in the maternal ones (Baraitser 2009). Strict classifications and obsessive-compulsive scholarly rigour may be tempting as they provide a false hope for control over a universe which is incomprehensibly larger than human knowledge. However, these are fleeting, yet costly pleasures for the (masculine) ego. Presenting the world as a series of binary oppositions, clear-cut contradictions and categorical dissimilarities obscures a radical potential for inclusive understanding of social phenomena.

Thus, this thesis takes a deconstructive approach to the analysis of maternal subjectivity. Deconstruction, in the Derridean rather than the anthropological sense (Derrida 1967), is a recurrent leitmotif in my work. Crucial to the way I understand the concept of subjectivity is the idea that the relationship between two entities, considered as oppositional, is always one of power; the dominant one aims to purge from itself the characteristics of the subordinate one, which nevertheless thoroughly permeate it (and vice versa). My thesis aims to transcend the type of analysis of motherhood, so prevalent within feminist scholarship, which is based on the logic of exposing contradictions between maternal subjects and others, usually perceived as 'masculine' subjects. The point is not to disqualify the work of writers who have done so but to go beyond an approach that, while undoubtedly illuminating in the past, in my opinion, has

exhausted its political possibilities in the present. Differences are important, in particular when a variety of human experiences are lumped together in order to fit someone's politically and/or financially motivated classificatory agenda. Similarities, however, are equally important and for the very same reason.

To give some examples and position the issue of the numerous contradictions and binds embedded in mothering ideologies within feminist theory, here is a brief overview of the issue from a variety of feminist perspectives.

Glenn et al. (1994: 11-12) write:

Motherhood ideology certainly encompasses multiple contradictions. Mothers are romanticized as life-giving, self-sacrificing, and forgiving, and demonized as smothering, overly involved and destructive. They are seen as all-powerful – holding the fate of their children and ultimately the future of society in their hands – and as powerless – subordinated to the dictates of nature, instinct, and social forces beyond their ken.

Hays (1996) takes a similar route by claiming that the ideology of nurturing mothering and that of personal gain are two of the major ways in which ambivalence about human relations in contemporary capitalist societies play out. This ambivalence results in women having tremendous practical difficulties when trying to combine career and family life or struggling to feel satisfied with the role of stay-at-home mother or childless professional. Many authors from the empirical strand of work on motherhood, dealing with issues of work-life balance (Hochschild 1997, Hochschild and Machung 1989, Pistrang 1984), have found indications that one of the main reasons workplace gender equality policies fail to make a real difference resides in the contradictory messages women receive from the abovementioned ideologies. Scholars dealing with breastfeeding highlight further contradictions a breastfeeding mother embodies. While breastfeeding re-signifies the female body as more than an object for heteromale consumption, it simultaneously subordinates it to the nutritional needs of an infant (Blum 1993, Bobel 2001, Stearns 1999, Wall 2001). The body work required from a breastfeeding mother and the body work expected of a professional in an organisation are juxtaposed against each other, making the lives of new mothers in paid employment an impossibly stressful juggle between conflicting expectations (Gatrell 2013, van Amsterdam 2014).

These contradictions are not only manifested in women's lives but, as Glenn et al. (1994: 12) assert, "Feminist theorizing [...] has been constrained by the same contradictions". According to DiQuinzio (1999), feminist theories of motherhood are structured according to two main political goals: to dismantle the concept of essential motherhood (as in the works of a number

of second wave authors such as Chodorow 1978, Firestone 1970, Oakley 1974 and Rich 1976), on the one hand, and to critique individualism (as in Hill Collins 1991, Rothman 1989 and Ruddick 1980), on the other. Nevertheless, in order to oppose one or the other, feminists tend to find themselves caught in the trap of evoking arguments echoing those of individualism or essential motherhood respectively. Thus, paradoxically, they lock mothers even tighter into the symbolic prison of never being able to inhabit a subjectivity which would allow them to participate fully in sociopolitical life (Scott 1992). A possible way of escaping this theoretical trap would be to abandon a desire for a totalising understanding of motherhood, which belongs to the same tradition of the imagined coherent subject of the individualist political system, and to focus instead on particular socially and materially determined instances of mothering. Feminism has to simultaneously recognise the 'impossibility' of motherhood and acknowledge the 'impossibility' of the individualist subject (see Baraitser 2008, Cixous 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991, Ettinger 2006, Kristeva in DiQuinzio 1999).

Before I discuss further the theoretical need for research on motherhood done 'otherwise' (Baraitser 2008), for situated research, honest about its own post-traumatic micro politics, where motherhood comes about at the intersection of bodies and discourses, I would like to go back in time to the event on Andrassy Boulevard (yes, the Champs-Élysées of the East) that set off my own PhD journey. I would like to pay homage to a different set of questions, everyday and mundane ones, without which none of this meta-maternal thinking would have been possible. Back then, in 2009, I had no idea 'maternal subjectivity' was a thing. I had a master's degree in Gender Studies, so feminist theory was certainly not foreign to me, but my course at the Central European University did not consider motherhood cutting-edge enough to include it in its emancipatory agenda.

So, there I was, a 26-year old mother, approaching the end of the first of two years of maternity leave that the Hungarian state had so generously bestowed on me, pushing a pram full of groceries and a finally asleep 9-month-old down the street and being very, very angry. Why? Well, for all *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 1963) kind of reasons, of course, but on top of making the mistake of reproducing while female, I had another huge drawback in this unfortunate situation: I was born and raised Bulgarian. Little in my socialisation had prepared me for the isolation to which appropriate, middle-class Hungarian early motherhood sentenced women. You see, despite having other friends on maternity leave (though I admit not many as I had a baby earlier than what is considered ideal for my social class and education level), I was lonely beyond compare, because they rarely socialised outside of their immediate family. The

gravity of my situation was enhanced by the fact that I, like many new parents, didn't think of parenting as culturally specific. On the contrary, I assumed children's needs were universal, and the role of paediatricians and social workers was to facilitate parents to comply with them in ways that suited their individual circumstances. Oh, the naivety! It took my Hungarian partner to join me on that walk and listen to my resentful pondering as to why other mothers around me spent their days home-cooking minuscule amounts of bland broccoli mash and never brought their infants to a bar (non-smoking, of course, I'm not a monster). "What is wrong with them and why do they care what the *védőnő*¹ thinks?" I gasped. We looked at each other and realised that not only the question was all wrong, but it would take a PhD to find out the right one and maybe another one to answer it. I had to stop thinking like a victim of the particularly vicious form of Hungarian patriarchy² and start thinking as a feminist sociologist.

The question began shaping up: it wasn't simply that some mysterious post-partum social forces turned my brilliant, feminist, funny and ambitious female friends in Budapest into Stepford wives, or better Stepford mothers, but for some reason I was immune to those forces. What was at first the curse of my early days as a mother turned later into a researcher's blessing. A researcher is never separate from the discourses she studies. On the contrary, she constitutes a particular actor with particular power within (and across) them. I was living (or rather barely surviving) the contradictions of intercultural middle-class motherhood. If I kept my critical lens well-focused and my sensitivity to detail sharp yet tender on the souls of overtired new mothers, my hybrid standpoint of a Bulgarian, who learnt how to mother in Hungary and later on moved to the UK, a core country, could turn very productive in de-naturalising latent assumptions about 'good' mothering.

For a long time, 'good motherhood' in sociological literature was synonymous with western white middle-class mothering styles. These privileged democratic parenting over strict disciplining, nourished a child's perceived individual talents and provided an array of developmental opportunities in the form of art classes, age-appropriate sports training and other educational activities, apart from assuring the best possible formal education one could afford (Byrne 2006, Hays 1996, Lareau 2002). This parenting style is usually associated with a

¹ A social worker, responsible for following prospective mothers' pregnancies, and consequently, postpartum, supervising and advising on appropriate infant care in Hungary. A longer discussion on the historical role of the *védőnő* during state-socialism and beyond is to come in Chapter 3.

² Little did we know back then that the recently elected prime minister Viktor Orbán was planning on changing the constitution to pre-empt any possibility for the legalisation of gay marriage, introduce the teaching of 'religion and morals' at school, attempt to shut down the alma mater where this PhD was started for being a liberal hub and finally ban Gender Studies from Hungarian universities.

strong concern with nutrition, beyond the obvious need for food (Afflerback et al. 2013, Blum 1993, Bobel 2001). What (organic produce, homemade or homemade-like dishes) and how (baby-led weaning, combined with prolonged breastfeeding) to feed a young child became prescriptive and contradictory sources of anxiety for the western middle-class mother. An endless flow of expert-guided literature catered to the new turn of understanding parenting and the child as a project, which required careful planning and investment (Furedi 2002). Feminist sociologists reacted with insightful critiques of the new trend, arguing that it wasn't only a form of backlash against women's emancipation, but also demonised the practices of working-class mothers, women of colour, immigrant and non-heterosexual parents, in fact, anyone who didn't possess the material and/or cultural resources to fit the "good mother" mould (Gabb 2001, Harwood et al. 1999). Feminist analyses of motherhood, in themselves, seemed to privilege the study of white western middle-class mothering styles, a tendency which itself became a cause for valid criticism by black and working-class feminists alike (Glenn et al. 1994, Hill-Collins 1991). While intersectional approaches to the study of motherhood gradually began appearing, the actual, mundane, repetitive work that went into caring for a child was usually obscured, and never the focus of the analysis itself, but rather used in making a point about the classed or raced character of motherhood (Byrne 2006, Lareau 2002, Lawler 2000, Wallbank 2001).

On the other hand, the newly developing field of childcare cultural studies, emerging in response to the so-called intensification of parenting, seemed to be acutely aware of the narrative changes in the understating of children's needs under neoliberal capitalism and, occasionally, the innumerable bundles of tasks childcare involved (Lee et al. 2014). While not necessarily feminist, those studies put an emphasis on the dynamic character of appropriate parenting, including its culturally specific character across the globe (Faircloth 2013). Even those (with a few exceptions, of course), however, seemed to implicitly operate with a western-centric definition of middle-class parenting. The practices of parents around the world, who fit the local definitions of propriety, remained on the sidelines of what western-centric academia considered worthy of its critical intersectional endeavours. And I knew for a fact, since I was living it, that while in many ways similar, the practices of my well-educated, often professional peers in my two hometowns, one by birth and another by choice, Sofia and Budapest, were also very different from those described in the western sociology of motherhood as well as from each other.

At the same time Eastern European sociology used the term middle-class women/mothers (Goven 1993, Haney 2002) to address locally specific regimes of class and racial domination.

Since knowledge produced in core countries (in this case by child development experts) is often taken not only as universally valid but also as superior, the fact that the practices and overall livelihoods of these women are in themselves in a relation of power to those of their western counterparts, remains unproblematised. However, material privilege is relative, and the locally specific intersections of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc. produce very different regimes of domination. Centres (that is, dominant practices), are multiple and fragile and so is their relation to local subordinated practices. There is a travelling concept, 'middle-class parenting/motherhood' in literature, then, which functions as an empty signifier, while the realities it covers are sociologically fascinating, yet remain obscure. In Eastern Europe in particular, feminist studies largely emerged after the fall of state socialism in 1989, imported by western feminists. Together with interesting new ideas and even more exciting research funding opportunities, these authors brought with them a set of western categories via which eastern women's issues had to be explored. As such, 'middle class' as a cultural phenomenon was still not sufficiently researched when I started this project.³ My goal to do a deconstructive analysis of motherhood, then, had to include a critical class dimension, which understood class as both local and global.

From here, the main research questions organising this study gradually emerged as: What are the dominant ideologies of mothering in present day Budapest and Sofia? What performative relations do new mothers establish between the dominant ideologies of mothering and their everyday childcare practices? How do these relations construct motherhood and how are maternal subjectivities agentically created vis-à-vis these ideologies and practices? What is the link between these conceptualisations of (proper) motherhood and the larger political/ideological/historical contexts in which they unfold? What is middle-class mothering like outside of the oh-so-well documented Western context? And, finally, what implications does all this have for the deconstruction of the concept of subjectivity within feminist scholarship?

While trying to find my voice in order to answer these questions, or, as I imagine Derrida would ironise me, 'exorcise-analyse' the demons of my prolonged post-natal depression, a parallel, epistemological question emerged: how does one know, and consequently write, from an Eastern European perspective? How can I shed light onto Eastern Europe's internal differences while simultaneously retaining a politically significant standpoint which remains critical to the

³ This, I'm happy to say, has been changing rapidly and in the past eight years a variety of studies on the cultural dimension of middle-class habitus have appeared. Some of those relevant to my thesis will be discussed in Chapter 6.

marginal position Eastern Europe occupies in relation to the global 'North-West'? And how can I do all this without succumbing to a romanticised or even masochistic narrative of oppression which obliterates the semi-periphery's⁴ own complicated relationship with racism as both a victim and a perpetrator?

1.2 (Mother)working through the Contradictions

I argue it is very important to move the theorising of motherhood beyond the practice of exposing contradictions, whether they would be 'real life' or theoretical ones. Equating femininity with contradictions and failures to fit a masculinised subjectivity norm has long been a discursive practice that legitimises women's exclusion from full citizenship (Scott 1992). To make this move, I build on Lawler's (2000) and Wallbank's (2001) idea of linking discourses on children's needs and the production of maternal subjectivities. I apply Mahmood's (2005) reconceptualisation of performativity to the analysis of motherhood to explore how maternal subjectivities are produced through performative acts of (child)care. Her definition of performativity deploys a notion of agency as a "modality of action" (Mahmood 2005: 157) that establishes a performative relation between a subject and a norm. As Mahmood argues (in response to Butler [1990]), thinking the subject along the lines of doing and undoing norms follows a binary logic, which obscures the "multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (Mahmood 2005: 15). In her understanding of performativity, the set of particular behaviours and dispositions "that characterize one's relationship to a moral code are not contingent but a necessary means to understand the kind of relationship that is established between the self and structures of social authority" (ibid.: 120).

Through conceptualising motherhood as performative, I hope this study achieves several goals. First, deconstructive performativity has the theoretical potential to tackle the problem of the contradictions of motherhood as an analytical constraint. Studying a certain marginalised subject position, such as the "mother", as performative, obliges the researcher to simultaneously expose the inconsistencies inherent in the dominant position that lies on the other side of an interdependent dichotomous order: in this case the individualised, bounded self. Further, it moves beyond analyses of motherhood that conceive of the production of the maternal self at the intersection of resistance to and subordination by dominant norms. Instead,

⁴ The semi-periphery comprises those parts of the world, which are neither part of the ex-colonies, nor the old empire centres.

I approach women's engagement with socially prescribed childcare narratives as chains of performative acts which structure their maternal selves. I argue that, through establishing a performative relation with these narratives, mothers agentially participate in the construction of a 'culturally sanctioned femininity' (Elvin-Nowak 2001), linked to a variety of discourses on a national level, including those on female employment and the division of labour, on welfare, on the future of the nation, on medicine and so on. Agency is also a concept crucial to the analysis of motherhood. According to Glenn et al., mothering is structured by "material and cultural resources and constraints" (1994: 3), however it appears at the intersection of those conditions and men's and women's actions within particular historical contexts.

Studying mothering practices within this paradigm provides relevant insights about the dominant ideologies of mothering and conventional womanhood in Hungary and Bulgaria. Building on Purvis and Hunt (1993), I choose to retain the concept of ideology within the larger context of treating mothering as discourse. In their understanding ideology has a certain 'directionality' and it can serve as a useful tool to examine how only particular social practices, linked to relations of domination, get reproduced systematically within discourses. Discourse and ideology complement each other and, while discourse can be thought of as a 'process, ideology would be the 'effects' of discursive practices. Paying attention to the specificities of the cultural contexts in question, my research accounts for the multiple ways in which women construct their identities as mothers in relation to the local definitions of good mothering. This leads to an integrative perspective on motherhood, which gives insights into the different historical, social and economic factors which shape the everyday (identity) motherwork of women.

My methodology resembles a net, woven out of three main strands. First, there is a theoretical component, which puts the maternal subject at the centre of analysing subjectivity as a relational formation in the process of the ethical encounter with the other. Second, there is an immediate political component, which focuses on the therapeutic effects speaking about motherhood and being heard could have for the participants in the study. Finally, the analytical bridge between the two comes in the form of approaching the narratives of my respondents via the means of critical discourse analysis (CDA). All this will be discussed in detail in the methodology chapter (Chapter 2) of this thesis.

In practical terms, I based my analysis on about 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews in each city. I used the snowball method to recruit respondents. While I was interested in providing the interviewees with the necessary freedom to create their own narratives of motherhood, I

wanted to keep a focus on the childcare rituals one can find discussed in expert-guided child-rearing literature and relevant academic studies. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions whenever the respondents brought up interesting topics, facts and interpretations which were not in my original interview guide, which I kept modifying as the research progressed. Consequently, I scanned the interviews for recurrent themes, activities, metaphors and contradictions (but not by pre-emptively limiting this list) and mapped their relation to the broader social context (welfare policies concerning maternity/parental leaves, locally important expert guided literature on childcare, medical advice on infants' nutrition, the historical influences of the state-socialist regimes in the two countries and so on) in which Bulgarian and Hungarian women constructed their identities as mothers.

1.3 Spoiler Alert: Thesis Structure and Findings

In the last section of this introduction, I provide a brief overview of the research findings, chapter by chapter. Chapter 3 lays out the theoretical background for the thesis and thus is longer than the rest. While each of the remaining chapters has a separate set of literature that they engage with, Chapter 3 deals with the philosophical and psychoanalytical basis of my deconstructive approach to studying motherhood through Butler's concept of performativity (1990, 1993, 1997). In order to demonstrate the logic behind presenting maternal subjectivity as antithetical to 'regular', typically understood as gender neutral yet implicitly masculine subjectivity, I trace back what Butler (1997) calls 'melancholic subjectivity' to its origins in Freud's work. Through a close reading of some of his seminal writings, I show that the line of feminist thought which considers Freud the founding father of the autonomous, bounded self is at least to some extent misguided. Freud's subject is indeed built around a misogynist bias, but a different one. His work erases the mother from the scene of early childhood subject formation and makes this constitutive of psychic health. The Freudian subject is a 'we' subject, but he can persist only if this remains unconscious. In other words, personal autonomy for Freud is not the reality of the subject, but rather an ideal, the seeking of which is an essential prerequisite for mental health.

Next, I show how Judith Butler has taken this melancholic subject without sufficient feminist critique. My claim is that this works for her deployment of performativity which aims to deconstruct the heterosexual matrix, but it unnecessarily limits the possibilities of using performativity for the analysis of other subjectivities. I then briefly turn to Lisa Baraitser's (2010) attempt to look at subjectivity formation 'otherwise' – that is, putting the maternal subject at the centre of analysing subjectivity as a relational formation in the process of the ethical

encounter with the other. The idea is that if all subjectivity formation is looked at this way, the imaginary divide between a masculine and a feminine subject on which the functioning of the division of labour is predicated will collapse and mothers may be able to 'fit'.

Finally, I look into the speech/narrative patterns of my interviewees from both countries to draw attention to a striking similarity: the troubles new mothers have while trying to narrate their lives from a first-person singular position. Once embodying a subjectivity which can hardly contain itself within the illusion of a coherent and bounded 'I', mothers un/consciously create complicated chainlike selves, which include the people indispensable in their daily existence as carers. Mothers struggle with the confines of phallogocentric languages. Their frantic, multidirectional I-we's reflect not only the dislocating structures of their subjects in metamorphosis but also the limitations linguistic norms set for the possibility to performatively constitute a 'maternal subjectivity otherwise' (Baraitser 2010, Ettinger 2006).

From here on my thesis moves to emphasising the differences between childcare practices and the maternal subjectivities of Hungarian and Bulgarian mothers from Budapest and Sofia with the goal of moving to a historically nuanced and contextual understanding of contemporary post-socialist motherhoods. The post-socialist dimension is central to the way mothering practices are approached. All subsequent chapters look at the specific questions at issue genealogically, tracing the ways contemporary 'good motherhood' exists in a dialectical relationship with the practices and ideas of the socialist past.

Chapter 4 introduces the historical background behind contemporary maternal subjectivity construction in Budapest and Sofia through the lens of Gal and Kligman's (2000) 'fractal' understanding of the so-called public/private divide. According to Gal and Kligman, the public/private divide, and the subordination of reproductive to productive labour integral to it, are structural to the formation of gender regimes in general. That said, the public/private division, or the practices, institutions, individuals, activities and spaces it covers, is culturally contingent and continuously changing. This insight is key to the conceptualisation of the relationship between childcare routines and dominant gender discourses and ideologies, proposed in this chapter. I turn Gal and Kligman's idea around and suggest that wherever dilemmas of public/private emerge within childcare routines, for instance the anxiety lots of women experience in the face of breastfeeding 'in public', they are a matter of managing the burden of one's appropriate gendered performance.

My data shows that women on maternity leave in Budapest and Sofia rationalise differently their decreased financial contribution to the family and engage in different strategies to counter its

effects on both the consumer capacity of the family and the repercussions it has on their sense of personhood and value as people. The public/private problems of 'staying at home with the baby' extend beyond issues of financial and other contributions to the family. During the interviews Hungarian and Bulgarian mothers talked about their social lives in strikingly similar terms, yet those terms were infused with drastically different meanings when it came to practices on the ground. For example, Bulgarian mothers would often talk about feeling socially isolated when they saw friends in the presence of their children or alone three or four times a week. At the same time Hungarian mothers considered socialising once a week a sign of a busy social schedule. Similarly, Bulgarian mothers would claim they are solely responsible for the care of their babies when in fact grandparents stepped in during evenings several times a week. Hungarian mothers on the other hand considered grandparents involved if they were ready to take over childcare in emergency situations (such as a visit to the doctor) or on a monthly or so basis.

This chapter traces the correlation between the similar categories organising maternal experience in Budapest and Sofia and its very different actualisations to certain institutional changes during the two state socialist regimes and their radically dissimilar discursive framing. In the late 1960s both states introduced paid maternity leave up to the third year of life of the child, thus becoming the two state socialist countries with the longest leave in the whole eastern bloc (Haney 2002). In 1985 once again leaves were reconstituted, this time linking benefits to women's wages (see Haney [2002] for Hungary and *Semeen Kodeks* [1985] for Bulgaria). But while Bulgaria strongly encouraged women to return to work earlier and awarded them financial benefits if they did so, Hungary, mostly due to a surplus of workers in the planned economy, emphasised women's maternal roles and their indispensability in the lives of young children. Hungarian women's childcare practices were subject to control by social workers, who had the right to stop their maternity benefits if they didn't deem the motherwork to be performed satisfactorily. It was individual mothers who were considered responsible to provide care for infants, not least because, quite fascinatingly, Hungary was the only socialist country to open an institute of childhood psychology in the late 1960s, which was heavily reliant on the ideas of Freudian psychoanalysis. None of this happened in Bulgaria, where instead women were encouraged by party officials and paediatricians alike to delegate work to the larger kinship network (which in practice transformed into institutionalisation of care by the grandmother) and to raise self-sufficient children who didn't stand in the way of their mother's career. The impact of these models can be seen today: while in both locations mothers are the primary

carers, in Hungary this means they are almost exclusively in charge, while in Bulgaria women retain some social life due to the engagement of grandparents.

Those culturally-specific ways of caring construct different motherhoods and affect the lives of Bulgarian and Hungarian women differently, requiring varying strategies in order to frame and organise their childcare practices as socially acceptable. In Chapter 5 many of those practices are discussed in detail, in an attempt to further unpack the connection between locally-appropriate childcare rituals and understandings of desirable personhood. Here personal autonomy, as an ideological construct and thus a desired aspect of human subjectivity makes a come-back, but unlike the theoretically critical approach taken in Chapter 3, here I look at it in conjunction with childcare practices. Autonomy, in the sense of fostering autonomy in their children, structures my respondents' childcare choices. The way that process occurs in practice carries a clear post-socialist dimension: while autonomy within personhood is central to western understandings of the subject, in Bulgaria and Hungary it occupies a contested space, where notions of the subject often oscillate between communitarian and hyper-individualistic.

Officially, state-socialist regimes tried to erase personal autonomy from 'the heart' of the state-socialist subject (Fodor 2002). The purpose of the individual could not be anything else but to serve the community; in fact, following Marx, any individual's happiness was in a dialectical relationship with the desired progress of society. Nevertheless, despite its extreme investment in ideological uniformity, state socialism failed to eradicate political dissent and dissident thought embedded a western understanding of personhood in its anti-communist sentiment, equating the autonomous self with freedom and democracy. This chapter historically unpacks the processes described above and places these contested understandings of personhood at the core of the Bulgarian and Hungarian 'contradictions of motherhood'. Despite the differences between the mothering styles of my interviewees, a clear majority listed their children becoming happy, independent individuals as their number one priority. Relationality and community are, in many ways, not only devalued for being traditionally associated with femininity but for being framed as backward ideological remains from a shameful state socialist past. Individualism, financial and intellectual autonomy and rationality are therefore markers of western modernity, and important tropes in the phantasmatic creation of the post-socialist middle classes.

This re-prioritisation of mothering strategy occurs in a climate of overall intensification of a particular form of paranoid parenting (Hays 1996, Furedi 2002). The ways intensive mothering practices were deployed to create a happy child, who is expected to turn into a self-reliant, well-adjusted adult, is discussed in relation to theories about the global cultural turn to seeing the

child as a mentally and physically fragile project, the successful completion of which depends on a diligent execution of a myriad of childcare expert advice. Finally, I link the particular practices of intensive motherhood observed in Hungary and Bulgaria, with a special focus on breastfeeding and solid food introduction, with the historical development of the ideal personhood from state socialism onwards. This chapter shows that while women in the two research locations have similar goals for their children's development, the technologies of care through which they expect to achieve them are almost contrary.

A little person in the making, according to the dominant Hungarian mothering narrative, requires a lot of attention and a complex self-managing strategy on the part of its carer. A well-adjusted individual needs the constant presence of an infinitely patient mother, who is ready to make the baby her absolute priority. In that sense, Hungarian mothers, who get almost no help from outside the nuclear family as Chapter 4 reveals, have to exercise enormous self-control to always stay calm and responsive given they hardly ever get a break for self-care. While patience is listed as a top priority quality for a good mother in Sofia, it is far easier to exercise it when you get regular breaks from childcare. Not only does the participation of grandparents in the carework play a role in that, but also the local understanding of fostering independence and autonomy. Unlike in Hungary, where the path to self-reliance is indefinite maternal love and satisfaction of a child's desires, in Bulgaria we see a different approach to fostering independence via deliberately letting a child learn to solve what are viewed as age-appropriate problems, regardless of their apparent discomfort.

The last analytical Chapter (6) of this thesis discusses how those same childcare practices and the narratives my respondents create around them construct them not only as locally adequate mothers, but also as middle-class citizens. Middle-class motherhood has long informed the opinions of child-rearing experts as to what 'good parenting' looks like, against the 'dubious' approaches of both the "promiscuous poor and the frivolous rich" (Hays 1996: 33). While this uncritical equation is more or less a universal trend, not much research has been dedicated to unravelling the locally contextual specificities of 'good parenting' around the globe. Instead, the anxious reproductive strategies of north-western women to secure the best start for their all-important children through the provision of everything from healthy fair trade feeding options (Harman and Capellini 2015), to the right kind of formal schooling and playdate mates (Byrne 2006), as well as extracurricular activities such as swimming, music and foreign language classes (Vincent and Ball 2007, Laureu 2003, Laureu and Weininger 2008, Faircloth 2014), have been naturalised as middle-class parenting per se.

This chapter puts the post-socialist 'condition' at the heart of understanding the cultural construction of the middle classes in the capital cities of Bulgaria and Hungary, through a focus on the 'good mothering' discourse as formative to it. Since at the time of writing this thesis, to my knowledge this is the first study of childcare practices and class in both locations, this chapter articulates a starting point for what I hope would be a more concerted exploration of post-socialist middle-class habitus as a cultural practice in future research, dependent both on the legacy of socialism as well as the power inequalities of global capitalism.

Outside core (post) industrial societies, where the middle class did not emerge organically as a function of industrialisation, middle class formation is often a messy and multi-directional process (Liechty 2002). Relative and often fragile economic privilege is naturalised via presenting it as a matter of morality, individual strength of character and appropriate lifestyle (Liechty 2002, Owczarzak 2009, Tsoneva 2017). Socially valued lifestyle choices, such as consumption patterns, cultural preferences and, of course, parenting practices have increased in importance as they serve to justify, enforce and even create class distinctions. Further, peripheral and semi-peripheral societies exist with acute awareness of their own culturally marginal position. Class performances are, in that sense, also civilisational claims of belonging to the 'developed' world (Liechty 2002). Failing to adhere to the desirable moral code of Bulgarian or Hungarian society is tantamount not simply to losing class privileges, but also to a personal 'third-worldisation'. Marginalised social groups such as the poor and the Roma are thus understood as pre-modern (as in adhering to old state socialist values and modalities of being) and not European enough.

In post-socialist societies the process of class differentiation after 1989 is particularly interesting, because it coincides with the so-called transition to capitalism and (neo)liberal democracy. Chapter 6 discusses the ways in which the new middle class gradually emerges from the ruins of state-socialist intelligentsia. A historical overview of the class structure of supposedly classless state socialism is provided in order to better situate the locally specific performances of appropriate motherhood of my respondents.

Finally, via turning once again to the narratives my respondents create around their childcare choices as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, I show how, without being explicitly racist or classist, they subtly construct their mothering practices as inherently (morally) superior to those of poor and Roma women. Thus, I emphasise that at the core of middle-class motherhoods lie not particular practices, generally naturalised as creating class distinctions in western-based scholarship, but rather locally specific cultural (and occasionally material) exclusions. Once again, the two research locations exhibit great difference in the cultural construction of middle-

class parenting. The reproductive strategies of Bulgarian mothers were based on imagining themselves as modern (as opposed to a socialist past), western (as opposed to Balkan or Oriental 'backwardness') and culturally and morally superior to both the 'poor masses' and the nouveau riche. Hungary, on the other hand, followed a very different model of classing parenting. Due to the heavy state control over mothers' practices during state socialism and beyond, 'good motherhood' is a fairly uniform category which cuts across class status. As it is labour intensive and presupposes the constant care of a domestic goddess-like mother, it does not allow much space for negotiating one's class identity through it. Nevertheless, an implicit distinction from the racialised poor is inbuilt in the image of homely respectability middle-class families attempt to construct. Finally, the inferiority complex of Hungarians towards the west did not translate into a preoccupation with western parenting styles and knowledges as directly as it did in Bulgaria but revolved around the desire for 'normalcy' which grew to be synonymous with (hetero)normative middle-class nuclear family lives as imagined to exist in Western Europe and the United States.

Before proceeding to the main body of this research, I would like to say that this is a text of many voices. I have obviously tried to stay faithful and empathetic to my interviewees' unique maternal experiences, concerns, traumas and hopes. Their words are the thread that weaves the fabric of this thesis. My own nomadic motherhood, however, willingly or not, has informed the critical lens I use to make them academically relevant. Having been completed between locations, geographic as well as psychological, over the course of eight years, my writing has a slightly schizophrenic feel. An initial feminist anger gradually gives way to peaceful determination. After some consideration, I chose to leave my argument as it is, stylistically and affectively diverse, reflecting the voices of the ghostly others of my own maternal subjectivity forever in the making.

I will now move to giving a detailed account of the methodology deployed in this research and the philosophical rationales behind it.

Chapter 2

Supertheory of Supereverything:⁵ Methodology

As I have explained in the Introduction, this thesis is a comparative study of the everyday childcare practices of middle-class new mothers on maternity leave in contemporary Budapest and Sofia and its main purpose is to explore how maternal subjectivities are constructed vis-à-vis culturally specific narratives of children's needs. The concept of performativity is deployed in order to facilitate a critical account of (maternal) subjectivity while simultaneously looking at the specific acts of infant care mothers engage with as structural to the very idea of what it means to be a mother. This approach allows me to move beyond definitions of motherhood based on essentialised commonality between individuals who do care work to an analysis of motherhood as a shifting category, locally and historically defined.

My methodology, therefore, as suggested in the Introduction, resembles a net, woven out of three main strands. First, I provide a genealogy of the concept of subjectivity as deployed by feminist authors analysing maternal subjectivities and a deconstructive reading of the literature identified as theoretically and ideologically (both explicitly and implicitly) informing their understanding (DiQuinzio 1999, Hays 1996, Lawler 2000, Walbank 2001). Briefly, the goal of this more classically 'theoretical' element is to deconstruct 'melancholic' subjectivity, which lurks behind both the mainstream understanding of subjectivity in the psy-knowledges as well as the concept of performativity, introduced into gender theory by Judith Butler (1988). Second, the approach to fieldwork I took was a particular form of Feminist Participatory Action Research (Brydon-Miller et al. 2004, Reid and Frisby 2008) which focused on the therapeutic effects speaking and being heard could have for the participants in the study. This process, apart from providing some psychological relief on a personal level, had the goal of emphasising the value and character of mothering as important, time and effort consuming care work as opposed to a natural predisposition of women. Finally, the analytical method I deploy to bridge these first two strands can be described as Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which I imagine to be a kind of "feminist analytical activism" (Lazar 2007: 145). In the next section I will provide a critical account of each of these strands and eventually bring the three together.

⁵ A song by the US/Ukrainian gypsy punk band Gogol Bordello, a major inspiration behind the epistemic grounding of this research.

2.1 Questioning Motherhood

2.1.1 Feminist Participatory Action Research

McNiff and Whitehead (2002: 16) give the following definition of participatory action research, hereafter PAR: “Action research is not a thing in itself; the term always implies a process of people interacting with one another”. Self-reflexivity, according to the authors, is a key element in this process. The personal politics of the researcher are also crucial because PAR “is done by real people with the intent of illuminating, explaining and improving human interaction...Action research has as a main purpose the generation of knowledge which leads to improvement of understanding and experience for social benefit” (*ibid.*: 16-17). However, this delineation of action research is based on a mainstream ontological understanding of right and wrong as objective, knowable entities, which has been challenged by feminist authors.

Reid and Frisby (2008: 93) for example spell out the ideological affinities between feminist research and PAR as both are “critical approaches, that focus on democratising the research process, acknowledging lived experiences, and contributing to social justice agendas to counter prevailing ideologies and power relations that are deeply gendered, classed and racialized”. Both approaches also tend to question the investment in ‘objective’ knowledge and the divide between academia and activism (Crisp 2004). Whilst feminist scholars have articulated the need for constructing politically involved knowledge which would put the perspective of the underprivileged at its analytical core (Haraway 1988, Harding 1987, Hill Collins 1990, Lazar 2007), often the complicated academic language of the studies produced and the primacy of the intellectual endeavour over the political one have ended up alienating the very communities the authors attempted to give voice to (Brydon-Miller et al. 2004, Reid and Frisby 2008). In other words, it has become increasingly clear that critically investigating systems of power and acting upon them in the pursuit of social justice are, sadly, two different things (Rácz 2017). Moreover, as Brydon-Miller et al (2004) argue, often the ‘acting out’ PAR presupposes has been defined in masculinist terms, which, to go back to McNiff and Whitehead (2002), fails to question the systemic power involved in acting on someone else’s behalf and defining what improvement their conditions need. This raises a series of ethical questions, on which I will now elaborate.

When I entered the field, just a couple of years after going through the same kind of experience (that is – giving birth and spending 2 years ‘at home’ with my baby) as my informants, I intuitively wanted to ‘make it better’ for these first-time mothers. Having had to pass a comprehensive PhD exam in Critical Gender Studies prior to starting fieldwork, however, I was painfully aware

of the methodological and ethical issues surrounding so-called insider research (see Barton 2011, Brewis 2014, Rupp and Taylor 2011). Since for practical reasons I had decided to use the snowball method to collect participants (to be elaborated later in the next section of this chapter), a few of the women I interviewed were friends and acquaintances, and virtually all were friends or acquaintances of someone in the chain. Luckily, research on everyday mothering practices between relatively privileged subjects isn't a particularly sensitive topic. Yet, given the gendered character of the work involved and the interviewees being on leave from their paid jobs, I had to enter what is traditionally conceptualised as a person's private sphere. Many of the interviews were conducted at my respondents' homes, in the presence of their children, or at parks, child-friendly cafes and restaurants. A few women used the interview as an opportunity to leave the child with a different carer and enjoy some longed for 'me time'. As such I had to be sensitive in my work. Beyond the usual approach of changing the real names of the participants to pseudonyms in the final version of my PhD thesis and related publications and conference presentations, I made sure that during the interviews I did not refer to participants by their names when I wanted to give an example about a certain practice or opinion to another participant but simply used a phrase such as "another interviewee said...". I treated all the information given to me during interviews as private and confidential and did not share it with other people who knew the participants, whether within or outside the study.

That said, although I did make sure to explain that I will do my best to ensure the anonymity of the participants, only one had any concerns about this⁶. As Joanna Brewis (2014) writes, often enough, we, as researchers, are concerned with ethical issues which appear unimportant or/and self-evident to our informants. It is an institutional requirement in most universities nowadays to request 'informed consent' from all participants in research. Yet, since we cannot be sure that we and our respondents have the same understanding of 'consent' to use the information they share with us, it ultimately lies with us to negotiate the ethical responsibilities involved in analysing and reusing the data. As a feminist I have been trained to see my interviewees as agentive subjects with minds of their own and, besides, I am apprehensive that at least some of the ethical concerns researchers have are largely due to overestimating the importance of

⁶ I have consequently decided to not use the interview with this participant on ethical grounds. She was undergoing therapy to tackle post-partum depression which opened some long-buried childhood traumas. As such, questions which appeared straightforward and innocent to other participants acted as triggers in her case. I felt rapport was compromised and my informant's worry that some of her friends could end up reading my thesis and identifying her made me uneasy and unwilling to bear such responsibility.

knowledge produced in academic settings for people outside of, not simply academia, but our own limited fields. This is, hopefully in most cases, a result of our own political investment in making a change. However, our work's ability to impact, whether positively or negatively, the lives of the groups we research is - at best - extremely limited. In most cases as long as we do not put our own career advancement above the interests of the research subjects, I believe that some sensible practice can be worked out.⁷

To go back to my own desire to make a positive change in the lives of the mothers I interviewed, this was strong but I had little idea about what this improvement could actually entail. It was certainly not about 'illuminating' women on how to perform their childcare the 'correct' way so that I, the heroine of my own maternal emancipatory odyssey, could liberate my poor oppressed informants from the grip of crippling mothering ideologies. Further, as my research tackles the cross-creation of motherhoods and middle-class belonging in different cultural contexts, the women I interviewed were representatives of relatively privileged groups in their respective countries. They were the ones who, with their material acts and symbolic narrations, were agentively shaping what 'good mothering' looked like in Hungary and Bulgaria (see Hays 1996, Lawler 2000). In that sense the traditional 'voicing' of marginalised communities in which feminist social anthropologists engage was not on my agenda. Although my respondents were not necessarily of a higher social class than my own, in many ways my research resembled what Sandra Harding (2005) calls 'studying up': investigating the practices of the powerful groups in society in order to understand how dominant discourses produce ideological patterns (Purvis and Hunt 1993).

Of course, my agenda was slightly more complicated because in turning the analytical lens onto middle-class mothers from Hungary and Bulgaria (Eastern European countries with a standard of living still far below those in Anglo-American and western European countries which produce the lion's share of social theory) I aimed to show how fragile and culturally diverse the idea of 'good mothering' is. In that sense, although far from economically marginalised in their own contexts, my respondents' practices, in their materiality, were in many ways hardly comparable to the practices of Anglo-American mothers around which the feminist critique of normative motherhood is built (Byrne 2006, Faircloth 2014, Harman and Capellini 2015, Hays 1996, Lareau 2003, Miller and Harwood 2001). This is an issue of global class, too (a theme developed in detail

⁷ Barton (2011) for instance did not use sensitive data when she thought there is a reasonable probability people belonging to the social circles of her respondents may read her published work.

in Chapter 6), which translates into an underrepresentation in feminist knowledge production. I discuss this further in the last section of the chapter at hand.

To complicate matters even more, my comparative research was not designed in a dark university study room, three days before the submission of an MA dissertation. It found me on a busy street in Budapest, pushing a stroller. I lived the differences between the Hungarian and the Bulgarian naturalised ideals of motherhood, often as a painful contradiction in my own embodied self. Was I supposed to comfortably breastfeed everywhere, following my baby's own sense of hunger, or, rather, did I have to carefully schedule meals at home so that my unshapely maternal body did not aesthetically disturb innocent passers-by? Was it OK if I spent my days in the company of my other friends who had recently completed their procreative duty or, rather, did the sign that I was roaming the streets of Budapest clearly show I was not engaging in housework and endless preparation of organic baby-food and was thus failing to provide the best start in life for my daughter? This research therefore started off as an attempt to exorcise-analyse (Derrida 1994) my own discomfort as a maternal subject, who was straddling two cultural contexts. Having been socialised in Bulgaria I had acquired a certain habitus (Bourdieu 1984) about what to expect of motherhood; nevertheless, I learned the practicalities around it in Hungary. This 'hybrid standpoint', which I did my best to approach critically and with sensitivity, turned out to be extremely productive in de-naturalising assumptions concerning what 'good' mothering is. De-naturalising does not, of course, presuppose exposing some universal truth. My analysis constitutes a subjective reading of necessarily limited empirical material without any pretence to represent a conclusive account of the mothering ideologies in Budapest and Sofia.

My work in the field too had little pretence to educate, as I suggested above. However, what I expected was a form of mutual co-learning, through openness, self-reflexivity and what I call a commitment to genuine rapport. Genuine rapport is for me a type of intellectual connection which exists beyond the purposes of the research. It is the basis for a two-way conversation that has largely transgressed the power relations between researchers and researched. Both sides benefit from the conversation, albeit differently, and both sides are allowed to ask questions and provide answers and opinions. This style of interviewing is not concerned with keeping the information gathered from the participants 'uncontaminated' by the influence of the researcher (Weiss 1994). On the contrary, it sees interviewing as an interactive process which involves transference of information and attitudes from both sides. Again, this style was born in practice – I quickly realised that the women I interviewed perceived me as someone 'like them' but often

with more experience, since my child was older than theirs. They wanted to know my opinions on the hot child rearing debates, the ways I survived sleepless nights, my tricks for working in the same room as a toddler. Not giving them the answers they requested appeared to me on the one hand dishonest and – on the other – reinforcing traditional power dynamics in the field. In a sense the data one gathers during the process of interviewing is a ‘meta’ text, intersubjectively produced in the affective and intellectual space between a researcher and an informant, called by some ‘dialogical research’ (Anderson 2014, Shotter 2016, Sullivan 2012). My approach to analysis is to be accountable for the situation which produced certain responses – what questions were asked, what opinions were expressed, and so on.

I was also often told that simply having been asked a question about their child rearing practices made my interviewees think in depth about what they were doing and why. For some of them it was a stunning realisation to hear that women elsewhere in the world do it very differently. Mothering is a highly normative pursuit (see Elvin-Nowak 2001, Hays 1996). Therefore, whenever childcare practices are being opened for discussion this involves some sense of going against the grain, of opposing widely accepted social norms. Childcare techniques fall under the category of ‘common sense’ (see Lawler 2000) and as such any form of questioning them (literally, through questions) may be experienced as disruptive, critical, subversive.

Other respondents expressed a strong positive feeling about being asked questions about their everyday life as mothers *per se* – a topic, according to them, they were apprehensive to bring up in social settings due to fear of appearing boring. In this sense my research had a therapeutic effect for those interviewees who needed validation of their mothering as socially important, time-consuming and often not only physically, but mentally exhausting work. Despite not being therapeutic interviews in the restrictive sense of the term (Nelson et al. 2013), those conversations were a positive experience for most of the participants in my research. To paraphrase a common Instagram piece of wisdom, in an environment where guilt is the baseline of the emotional palette of motherhood, which serves to discipline, control and subject women as docile consumer/carers, feeling good about one’s own ‘imperfect’ ways can be a revolutionary act. Making mothers question motherhood while feeling more confident about their own (and any other!) mothering is consistent with the goals of feminist critiques of motherhood (Baraitser 2009, DiQuinzio 1999, Lawler 2000, Rich 1976). Furthermore, and this is particularly true about research conducted in groups where the participants are in some ways related to each other, the field does not disappear after the researcher has left it (Rupp and Taylor 2011). In that sense, bringing in the benefit of the doubt or, rather, making it explicit, is a

form of ‘analytical activism’ (Lazar 2007) – one has no control over the changes (minimal, and yet) one instigates in an environment but it would be naïve to assume they don’t exist. That brings me to the next strand of the methods net: doing feminist CDA.

2.1.2 Feminist CDA

Initially, I planned to do about 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews in each location (Budapest and Sofia). However, I reached saturation much earlier and eventually stopped collecting data when I was just a few interviews short of 40: 19 in Bulgaria and 16 in Hungary. No new themes seemed to appear for a while (Given 2016), and those I was identifying as I kept interviewing did not seem to provide new angles (Drisko 1997).

In terms of sampling, my interviewees all had a sense of belonging to the middle class, despite coming from a variety of economic backgrounds. They were, however, all university educated and were employed in professional or clerical occupations (most full-time) prior to going on leave by the end of their pregnancies. These two (having a degree and being on maternity leave from a paid job) were the only recruitment criteria I set in advance, precisely because I did not want to pre-emptively decide who counted as a middle-class mother in Bulgaria and Hungary. The way motherhood and locally specific claims to middle-class status mutually constructed each other was one of the main themes I wanted to explore in this thesis. Higher education, while not synonymous with a middle-class status, is a key factor in class differentiation in Eastern Europe, due to the historical link between state socialist intelligentsia and the post 1989⁸ emergence of what we currently understand to be the middle classes (Éber and Gagyí 2015, Szelenyi 1982). This point will be explored in detail in Chapter 6. For the moment, it is important to emphasise that, because of their supposed middle-class status, these women were likely to have the necessary material, cultural and intellectual resources to comply with contemporary requirements of childcare and concurrently shape them through their practices (Byrne 2006, Hays 1996, Lawler 2000).

Further, building on a broad understanding of Bourdieu’s idea of social capital (Bourdieu, 1984), I decided to use the snowball method to recruit the participants of this study. People tend to become friends with people who share their values and tastes and have similar disposable incomes, which ensures they can afford socialising in mutually pleasurable ways. Indeed, as Noy (2008) argues, snowball sampling relies on an understanding of social networks as organic and,

⁸ The year the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed.

in line with feminist epistemologies, allows for the construction of dynamic social knowledge. Snowballing is a “tactic” (Noy 2008: 303), often used to access hidden or vulnerable populations such as drug users for instance (Ellard-Gray et al. 2015) as well as privileged populations, groups, possessing ‘in’ knowledge (Noy 2008). It was this kind of mothering ‘in’ knowledge, that middle-class women are believed to possess (Hays 1996, Lareau 2003) I was after: starting with a few acquaintances of mine, whose education and professional status I was aware of, I used several “snowballs” in order to access new interviewees, recognised as the ‘right’ types of mothers by the already recruited participants. This tactical sampling contributed to the creation of ‘genuine rapport’ as well – obviously, only those respondents who enjoyed the experience, or felt positively challenged by it, gave me access to their personal networks.

On the negative side, as discussed at various places in the thesis, in particular the limitations section of the concluding chapter, this sampling method locked my research in a bubble, mostly sharing liberal political values. My respondents’ narrative performances of class exclusions were therefore markedly subtle. Yet their logic was not dissimilar to more obvious classist or racist stances, observable, for instance, on social media. However, while this is a consequence of the sampling method, I do not think it requires special strategies to deal with, rather it is something that I have kept in mind and highlighted for the reader when making generalisations in my findings.

In line with the sampling method⁹, I used in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to balance between allowing the respondents to tell me their own motherhood stories and keeping the conversation theoretically relevant (Lavrakas 2008, Noy 2008). All interviews were recorded with the permission of the research participants and 24 of them were transcribed intelligent verbatim. Since this was around the time when I realised data saturation has been reached, the remaining interviews I only listened to, transcribing particularly colourful examples.

The narratives these women created about their childcare routines were not accounts of norm-free activities but discursive constructs, in which dominant ideologies were continuously re-enacted, resisted and reshaped. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258), language (here the interviewees’ responses) is a “form of social practice”, a conceptualisation which presupposes “a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it”. This paradigm is very much in

⁹ For a discussion about the alignment between in-depth interviewing and snowball sampling see Noy (2008).

line with my understanding of motherhoods being ideologically produced by intersecting national and international discourses. Hence, I have chosen to deploy CDA as a way to disclose the particular connections between women's various accounts of their own activities, the power relations embedded in these and the maternal subjectivities produced in the process (Fairclough 1989). Context (the cultural, historical and political specificities which mould social practices) has a special place in CDA and should be purposely understood as contingent and 'porous', needing a transdisciplinary analytical approach, rather than a conventionally methodologically 'rigorous' one (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2010).

Therefore, I scanned my data for recurrent themes, activities, metaphors and contradictions. I paid special attention to the use of pronouns and other strictly grammatical choices interviewees made without necessarily being aware (Cameron et al. 2009, Lazar 2007,), in particular the use of first person plural instead of first person singular, which I explore in detail in Chapter 3. Some metaphors included describing certain childcare choices as closer to nature than others (including comparing themselves to a 'walking breast' or mentioning 'the animal instincts' of new mothers), or vice versa: describing their role as carers with a vocabulary borrowed from the corporate world (being the 'boss', or the 'manager' of the home). The activities I focused on revolved mostly around the care for the baby: breastfeeding, bottlefeeding and introducing solids, issues around sleep: co-sleeping or sleeping separately, outings with the baby and so on. Other activities included the paid work women occasionally engaged in while on leave, as well as their social life: doing sports, meeting friends, travelling, going out at night and so on. Once these 'codes' came into view, I organised them into themes: the division of labour in the nuclear family, going back to work, kindergarten choice, the participation of other kin members in the care of infants, feeding the baby, the gendered right to having fun, the qualities of a 'good' mother, raising an independent child, perceived material necessities, personality changes that come with motherhood, etc. I approached those comparatively, tracing both the similarities and the differences between my two research locations.

I also paid attention to the contradictions that often transpired in the narratives of my respondents: for example the desire to claim their relationships were egalitarian was very common, yet it seemed to coexist with a deep-seated frustration with perceiving their male partners' contribution to domestic work as insufficient. These contradictions did not, in my understanding, invalidate parts of my respondents' stories. Rather, they pointed to the complicated nature of parenting practices and maternal subjectivities, which emerge at the

intersection of various discourses. In the example listed above, being in an egalitarian relationship is an important marker of professional women's ideas of personal success, and therefore a (moral) claim to middle-class status. At the same time, albeit differently and certainly improving compared to older generations, in both countries care work is still profoundly feminised. In order to make all these nuances explicit, in line with CDA, I only organised these themes into categories of analysis after historicising and contextualising them, via engaging with locally and globally important expert-guided literature on childcare, the relevant academic literature, periodically reviewing internet mum forums in both countries, and so on. Since to my knowledge no research has been done on parenting under socialism in Bulgaria, my field work in Sofia also included content analysis of *Zhenata Dnes* – the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's official monthly (more on this in Chapter 4). Once the contextualisation was achieved, I focused on tracing the ways 'power' was hidden in the stories that emerged around the delineated categories. Who benefited from the state of art of childcare practices in Budapest and Sofia? Who was on the losing end? How did the status quo managed to sustain itself?

This is also an appropriate moment to be explicit about the fact that, while I did all my interviews in Sofia in Bulgarian, my interviews in Budapest were conducted largely in English. I am not a proficient Hungarian speaker and the majority of my interviewees spoke fluent English. Interestingly we would usually speak in English but when the topic switched to the 'nitty gritty' of baby care the terminology utilised was Hungarian. Those women were well educated and many of them used English on a regular basis in their work. Childcare, however, was a 'private' experience, something they were perhaps only aware of in her 'mother-tongue'. Since my daughter was born in Hungary, I had learned to name the dummy a *cumi*, my breast a *cici* and the nappy a *pelenka*, and conversing on that level was not a problem. This trans-linguistic experience is common for educated Eastern Europeans of my generation and feeling comfortable while code-switching (Devereaux 2012, Gardner-Chloros 2009) is probably one of the markers of the 'travelling' middle class, who have often been educated in Western Europe and are required to master several languages for work.

Because of this, and because I use critical discourse analysis to make sense of my data, which, as Macleod (2002) argues, assumes every transcript is a process of translation, I have not put special emphasis on the use of various languages in my work. I strongly feel that approaching multi-lingual communication as something to be thoroughly dissected naturalises monolingual experiences and fails to reflect the transnational lives most non-Anglophone scholars lead. For those of us whose first language does not happen to be English or possibly French, speaking a

second language has been a must in order to keep abreast with our academic fields. Bilingualism, in that sense, is an everyday thing, and not an exciting (or exotic!) diversion from the ordinary (Heller 2007). Putting the experiences of Eastern European women at the forefront of theory is an important part of the political rationale of this research, on which I will expand next.

Since I conceptualise childcare narratives as (at least partially) stemming from gender ideologies concerned with 'proper' femininities, I argue that they work for the sustenance of a form of patriarchy that has gone beyond the actual relations of men and women. Although the child-centred family they promote (see Hays 1996, Lawler 2000) may on the one hand appear as subversive of the previously dominant model of a husband-centred household, it is in fact based on the same stereotypical division of labour which contributes to the exclusion of women from full citizenship. In that sense, I openly acknowledge my political investment in this research and methodologically go with Lazar's definition of feminist CDA as "feminist analytical activism" (2007: 145). This understanding implies "emancipatory critical social science which... is openly committed to the achievement of a just social order through a critique of discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order – relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group, and disadvantage, exclude, and disempower women as a social group" (*ibid.*).

Lazar sees feminist CDA as inherently oriented towards social change, interdisciplinary and reflexivity regarding the position of the researcher. Macleod (2002) also argues that CDA places central importance on the researcher as an important node in the knowledge matrix; however, self-reflexivity and accountability in this sense are not attempts at producing 'objective' analysis but rather a critical recognition that the researcher's 'biases' are an essential feature of every knowledge production. Feminist CDA thus has the potential to tackle the problem of both 'false objectivity' as well as over-emphasis on the reflexive processes of the researcher rather than her political investment in the project (Parker 1992). Macleod (2002) writes that the confessional mode of writing, which puts the emotional life of the researcher on the frontline, must be avoided in CDA for it allows a possibility for a "dizzying regress to residual, difficult-to-comprehend factors like repression and desire" (*Ibid*: 157). In my opinion the problem with this type of writing is that one by definition fails to be fully accountable for their own libidinal investments as they belong to the unconscious parts of one's psyche (Freud and Starchey 1962). That is, one can hardly be held (fully) responsible as to why one has certain values, since they are a complex amalgam of the different influences in our upbringing. Personal politics in that sense is a cloud of ideological interpellations and sublimated desires and can hardly be considered exempt from emotional underpinnings. The twist is, I believe, that (sexual difference)

feminist politics insists on keeping the focus on the other. Thus, while analysis is always a subjective exercise it had better not slip into a self-indulgent account of one's own subjectivity narrative (Fine et al. 2003) The focus should remain, in other words, on the social change sought. As Lazar (2007: 145) puts it, a

radical emancipatory agenda makes for praxis-oriented research, centrally based upon a dialectical relationship between theory and practice [...] This entails mobilizing theory in order to create critical awareness and develop feminist strategies for resistance and change.

That said, in order for theory to be able to serve any political agenda, the concepts it engenders need to consistently travel the distance between the context which produced the theory in the first place and the context where it is currently deployed. Apart from the obvious historicising, this implies a certain de-universalisation of, usually western, theory. In that sense the feminist project is a 'natural' ally of the post-colonial one. In my own work I do this through keeping a deconstructive approach to theory¹⁰ and also going back and forth between theory and my data¹¹. While I obviously use theory to analyse the narratives of my research subjects, I go the other way too – analysing theoretical claims through the words of my interviewees with the hope to enrich, deconstruct and question some theoretical claims which I believe have been built into the foundations of politically incompatible theories. Illuminating those incompatibilities and intrinsic contradictions is key to producing responsible situated knowledges, without necessarily disposing of theories which are valuable in many other ways. One such concept, which has come to haunt both feminist theory of motherhood and queer theory, is the Freudian melancholic subject. In the next section I will try to give an account of my approach to deconstructing maternal subjectivities through making the melancholic subject at their core explicit.

2.2 Deconstructive Genealogies

Building on Lawler's (2000) and Wallbank's (2001) idea of linking discourses on children's needs and the production of maternal subjectivities, I take a step further and, through applying the concept of 'performativity' as deployed by Saba Mahmood (2005) to the analysis of motherhood, explore how maternal subjectivities are produced through the performative acts of (child)care. The conceptualisation of motherhood as performative, I argue, has the potential

¹⁰ To be elaborated in the next section.

¹¹ I don't distinguish between 'theoretical' and 'empirical' literature.

to tackle the problem of the contradictions of motherhood as an analytical constraint, while simultaneously putting the everyday 'motherwork' (Hill Collins 2007) of women in the limelight of 'high theory'. Through studying a certain marginalised subject position, such as the 'mother', as performative, a researcher is obliged to simultaneously expose the inconsistencies inherent in the dominant position that lies on the other side of an interdependent dichotomous order: in this case the individual, masculine, bounded self. Feminist theorists of maternal subjectivity such as DiQuinzio (1999) and Lawler (2000) have suggested that, in order for an analysis of motherhood to be truly emancipatory, it has to concurrently deconstruct both subject positions. Indeed, one of the main rationales behind my thesis is transcending the logic of exposing contradictions between maternal subjects and others, usually perceived as "masculine" subjects. The point is not to disqualify the work of feminist theorists who have structured their studies according to this logic (Blum 1993, Bobel 2001, Glenn et al. 1994, Hays 1996, Hochschild 1989 and 1997, Pistrang 1984, Stearns 1999 among others) but rather to go beyond an approach, which, I believe, has exhausted its political possibilities. Equating femininity with contradictions and failures to fit the norm of masculinised subjectivity has after all been a discursive practice, legitimising women's exclusion from full citizenship (Scott 1989). As Derrida (1982) suggests, every constative use of language (as in 'exposing') is also performative. Reiterating the 'logic of contradictions' therefore does little more than carve into the body of feminist knowledge the injuries suffered by those it seeks to empower. In that sense, showing the inability of pregnant or breastfeeding mothers to claim full control over an individual body (Blum 1993, Bobel 2001, Brewis and Warren 2001, Hays 1996, Stearns 2001) or the structural contradictions which impede the competitiveness of women with children in the labour market (Hochschild 1997, Macdonald 2010), implicitly accepts the bounded, masculine, individual subject who is able to embody those ideals – full possession of one's body, ability to compete unhinged on the labour market and so on – as a norm, whether desirable or not. My approach, on the other hand, focuses on exposing the fact that contradictions are the connective tissue of both subjectivities and the discourses that structure them. Ideologically however, western science, and the masculine subject underlying it, have been built around a strong desire for unity, universality and consistency and as such are invested in concealing their own contradictions (Kamuf 1991). Therefore, on this level of analysis, I focus on the similarities between maternal and 'mainstream' subjects or, even more precisely, I show how the contradictions, the fluidity and the internal divisions with which maternal subjectivity is associated are indeed structural characteristics of subjectivity in general. Attributing these qualities only to femininity, or motherhood, is a way to cleanse the self of any constitutive

otherness. This way of thinking pertains to Derridean deconstruction, on which I will elaborate later in this section.

At the same time, just as much as characteristics traditionally understood as 'feminine' are intrinsic to the masculine subject, my thesis aims to show that even the concept of performativity, summoned by Judith Butler in order to de-naturalise (hetero)normative gender construction, contains a masculine bias. The Butlerian subject is built around an implicit 'melancholic core', the misogynistic traditions of which can be traced back to the work of Sigmund Freud. A 'genealogical' approach to Butler's work (specifically her early work between 1990 and 1997) helps me illuminate the slips through which the spectre of Freud has managed to infiltrate her queer feminist project and has paradoxically limited the liberatory potential of the concept of performativity. While the 'founding father' of psychoanalysis is often accused by feminist authors of making a major contribution to the codification of the masculine individual subject (e.g. de Beauvoir 1989), a deconstructive approach to his work allows me to simultaneously reveal both the multiplicities of the psychoanalytic subject and the processes of female exclusion present, ironically, at its very 'birth'.

Last but not least, Mahmood's (2005) repackaging of Butler's performativity beyond a limited liberal conceptualisation of subjectivity at the intersection of resistance to/subordination by dominant norms into a nuanced, culturally sensitive analysis of the agentic construction of the subject as a dynamic interplay between a contextual self and a specific norm allows me to take a peek into the locally relevant discourses shaping the 'good mother' in Bulgaria and Hungary, without leaving the theoretically relevant section of western thought. As several post-colonial and Eastern European thinkers have attested, traditionally, while western scholars provide theoretical insights, the rest of the world is only allowed to position itself in regard to western theories, as in showing the differences between the local context and 'universally valid' western theoretical abstractions. In brief, while western scholars do 'high theory', the work of scholars from the periphery or the so-called 'semi-periphery' is relegated to the status of case studies, which apply western theory to non-western contexts rather than producing new, original knowledge (Blagojevic 2009, Gal and Kligman 2000, Mohanty 1984, Spivak 1993, Tlostanova 2010 and 2015). Before elaborating on the desire of this thesis to articulate an Eastern European theoretical standpoint which allows the study of motherhood 'otherwise' (Baraitser 2009), I would like to pay homage to the philosophical (and, yes, western) roots of my text.

My project is immensely indebted not only to Mahmood and Butler, but to two French philosophers without whose thinking performativity could not be conceived: Jacques Derrida

and his deconstruction and Michael Foucault and his genealogy as the history of the present (Derrida 1998, Foucault and Rabinow 1984). I will now outline the two 'methods' and make the case for their relevance for this project. Deconstruction as a concept has long transcended its origins in linguistics and is an important approach in post-structuralist social sciences. It generally implies a critical mindset towards the deployment of any analytic category. In my work, despite applying it to a research area that many would consider belonging to the field of cultural anthropology, I use it in a stricter Derridean sense, which I will now unpack. The term refers to the ways in which western knowledges have colonised the very idea of knowledge (Derrida 1998). Deconstruction accounts for the fact that entirely avoiding the conventions of the European scientific tradition is impossible. Complete liberation from the legacies of European ethnocentrism and the underlying regimes of power which sustain it such as patriarchy, racism, capitalism and so on, is indeed unfeasible. However, this does not preclude responsible engagement with philosophical concepts – I would add, building on Haraway (2004) here – through a political commentary which accounts for one's own positionality within a given set of discourses. One of the most important biases of western thought is the deployment, whether explicit or implicit, of a dichotomous way of thinking, where concepts belong in oppositional pairs, with one embodying 'goodness' and the other possessing the negative qualities associated with failing to 'be' the main concept. On a more technical level then deconstruction refers to the recognition that the very conceptualisation of the positive term depends on its opposition to the negative term. In that sense what is defined as 'other' is crucial to the understanding of the self. Otherness is always, already inscribed on the self (Derrida 1982). In addition, according to Hélène Cixous (2008), a thinker very close to Derrida, dichotomous thinking is what sustains sexual difference, because the original opposition which allows for all other conceptual oppositions to exist is always masculine-feminine, where the feminine is othered and equated to all those qualities the dominant masculine position is trying to purge from itself.

For Derrida, western philosophy is the philosophy of presence: it values presence over absence, thus remaining forever haunted by its constitutive lacks. These constitutive lacks are a possible reference to the Lacanian subject, conjured around a primordial absence, forever caught up in a libidinal quest to cover up the void of its own existence (Fink 1995). It is the void that drives the compulsive repetitions of living a life just as much as it is the void that drives the misrecognition of presence as superior to absence. In a less evident way the same logic underlies Freudian psychoanalysis - Lacan in his own words is a Freudian thinker (Lacan and Miller 1988) - and is thus doubly relevant for my attempts to re-articulate subjectivity otherwise. The philosophy of presence appears in some places in Derrida's writing as the 'philosophy of proper

sense' (Kamuf 1992). To take this a little further and give it the due feminist twist, for Cixous (2008) the *Propre* – translated into English as 'proper' - with its implications of closeness and familiarity lies at the core of men's desire to control women, to make women their *PROPERTY* (an idea I develop in detail in Chapter 3). This regime can only be disturbed, according to Derrida, from within, at the same time unsettling the very distinction between inside and outside (Kamuf 1992). In my understanding, the *Realm of the Proper* (Cixous 2008) is the normative realm of life/thought. Normative social practices then are always to be deconstructed – challenged through exposing their instability and dependence on non-normative practices – from within. Feminist authors, especially black feminists such as Hill Collins (2004) and Glenn et al. (1994), have long argued how important the voicing of the social margins is for dismantling the system of privileged knowledges. While this is undoubtedly true, I argue that it achieves little more than just reinforcing the norm if that norm is not simultaneously contested. Norms, like margins, are multiple, unstable and fluid, yet their very sustenance depends on discursive moves which constitute their unshakeable universality. More to the point of my own research, such a move, I argue, is the constitution of white Anglo-American middle-class mothering practices as normative motherhood in feminist theory.

My project, I hope, provides a reading of maternal subjectivities 'from within and from without' (see Kamuf 1992) or - as I like to think of it with Derridean playfulness – from inside out. I deconstruct maternal subjectivity's deployment in various contemporary feminist theories, which of course happen to belong to the western tradition, but through empirically tracing its everyday construction in the paradigmatically murky land of Eastern Europe. While I do research in a region still considered underdeveloped, as a random glance at practically any British newspaper would attest, or, to put it better, a region that is losing out in the system of global inequalities, I focus on the parenting practices of educated, professional first-time mothers from Budapest and Sofia. By all means, and as I have already suggested, these women constitute a relatively privileged stratum in their respective countries. This way I try to turn maternal subjectivity around, inside out: instead of writing an apologetic text which shows how eastern empirics are different from western theory, I use my data as a tool (and not the master's tool)¹² to challenge western theory's claim to universality. Speaking simultaneously from some cores (voicing middle-class mothers) and some margins (voicing subjects from outside the immediate 'First World') is a productive, informative way to disturb the distinction between inside and

¹² I am alluding to the famous Audre Lorde quote here.

outside. It is quite transparent that I sympathise with post-colonial thought but, as much as I do not feel a genuine belonging to the western canon, my alliance with 'Third World' knowledges is always as an outsider as well. At the same time, not belonging does not prevent me from having a strong emotional attachment to some western theories, like the ones deployed in this thesis. Doing research from the semi-periphery (Blagojevic 2009) is a fragmented experience, a nomadic process or writing between the lines in languages never-to-be-fully-mastered. It may be uniquely suited to subverting conventions, because of its constituent "structurelessness" (Blagojevic 2009: 34).

To expand on this point, Marina Blagojevic argues that the East European 'semi-periphery' has been subjected to a continuous process of de-development through the policies of restructuring imposed by the West after the collapse of state-socialism in 1989. Only after the global economic crisis did the fact that the formula of "democratization, privatization and market economy" (ibid.: 28) had generated nothing positive for the region, but simply benefitted international financial institutions and multinational corporations, become strikingly obvious. Still, paradoxically, the contemporary neo-liberal insistence on austerity, embedded in a strong anti-communist discourse, might be even more popular among economists from the semi-periphery than it is in core countries. Of course, once examined through the lens of self-colonisation which Third World feminists write about (Mohanty 1984, Tlostanova 2010), the belief in the path of austerity eventually leading to wealth and prosperity starts to make more sense. From a gendered perspective the 'transition' led to various changes in the power relations between men and women on both sides of the cultural remains of the Iron Curtain. Post-socialist women became cheap care workers in Western Europe, who, similarly to the 'chicanas' of the US, allowed Western women to pursue their high-paying careers without having to give up the enjoyable side of having children or effectively challenge the gendered division of labour in their homes. The East also supplied the West with another sought after 'commodity' – white-appearing sex workers and mail order brides, who promised western men the 'best of both worlds': a socially valued skin tone coupled with colonial servility and a traditional attitude towards work and family relations (Blagojevic, 2009). Parallel to those processes, labelled by some as the "third-worldization" of East Europe (Balibar 2003), a certain 'silencing' of the semi-periphery has also been taking place. Eastern Europe is not recognised as a region participating in global capitalist relations with its own particularities – it is strategically labelled 'north' or 'south' depending on discourse-specific formal criteria. This lack of political focus makes it especially hard to theorise from the East European semi-periphery as an epistemic standpoint. Yet the experiences of eastern European women as both nomadic and immobilised subjects of

global capitalism, whether in terms of locality, status or economic materiality, cannot be reduced to those of either First or Third World women.

As Blagojevic (2009: 33-34) suggests then,

The semiperiphery... is essentially shaped by the effort to catch up with the core, on one hand, and to resist the integration into the core, so not to lose its cultural characteristics, on the other hand. This creates a paradox in the very identity of the semiperipheral nations, since it is not simply one-directional "colonization" as much as it is a "desire for the West" and a "selfcolonizing tendency".

As such, the semi-periphery has a structurally different experience of whiteness which can also add to the project of critical race studies and approaches. According to Blagojevic this is a whiteness that stands in the way of possible alliances between 'Third World' feminists and Eastern European ones. From the perspective of the 'Third World' the European East is "'too white", too industrialised, too developed and it does not share the colonial experience (Blagojevic 2009: 38). However, while I fully agree that cultivating theoretical solidarities along the lines of a shared post-state-socialist present is crucial for the intellectual project of feminism, I believe Blagojevic calls for a simplistic and flawed way of looking at the positioning of post-socialist Europe in the feminist discourse of power under global capitalism. First, the paternalistic attitude of the West towards the East which she describes as organic and unique is not so different to the attitude the West displays towards the "developing" world. Blagojevic conflates the dimension of political discourse with that of the material realities of actual exploitation. The fact that the exploitations Eastern Europe and the 'Third World' experience are different, more in degree than in essence, results more from historical realities and strategic geographic positionalities than some kind of protective attitude of the West towards the East. When it comes to relations with 'Third World' feminists and feminists of colour, Blagojevic seems to idealise post-socialist Europe and be in denial about its racisms and sense of superiority towards the 'Third World', while putting the blame for the lack of cooperation entirely on the scholars from the periphery (which, ironically, proves my point). As I will show in Chapter 6, building on Tsoneva (2017) among others, Eastern Europeans, or at least middle-class Eastern Europeans, are indeed invested in the cultural practice of constructing themselves as 'white', and thus deserving 'First World' privileges. Regardless, I would like to underscore that I do find a certain amount of truth in what Blagojevic is saying. However, the exact formulation of her argument is disturbingly dichotomising, only that in her view Eastern Europe alone seems to be the force of misunderstood goodness, facing a hostile irreverent world.

Instead of romanticising the experiences of eastern European (feminist) subjects, then, I propose a critical articulation of contextual selfhood where, just as Blagojevic (2009: 49) describes, context is not simply “taken as a concrete historical, economic and political context”, defined by “internationally established “indicators” which allow global comparisons for global decision makers. Rather, ‘context’ is itself a theoretical concept, which calls for an integrated and complex approach that will enable vivid and substantial dialogue between local and international, contextual and contextualised knowledges and the knowers (Blagojevic 2009: 49). This understanding is compatible with Fairclough’s and Wodak’s (1997) special emphasis on context as a key element in the production of discourses that I elaborated on earlier.

A particular version of deconstructive performativity which can integrate an eastern European standpoint is potentially a very fruitful concept for the realisation of my theoretical goals and, in line with everything said to this point, I feel obliged to give a critical account of its codification. Performativity is not a tool often used in the analysis of motherhood and I consider this to be an enunciating silence.¹³ Silences, for Foucault, delimit discourse, in a way consistent with Derridean deconstruction. In this sense what is not said is not necessarily irrelevant to what is said. On the contrary, looking at silences systematically can be very informative about the rules of the discourse one studies (Foucault 1972). Following this logic, I assume that the lack of in-depth analysing of motherhood as performative sheds light on the rules that regulate feminist scholarship as a discourse with its own internal divisions. In order to be able to make performativity migrate from queer theory into the feminist analysis of motherhood I need to first trace its genesis within the work of Judith Butler who coined the term. I do this through the use of Michael Foucault’s genealogical method.

Genealogy, for Foucault, is not a quest for the origins of a concept, but rather a particular historicisation of the “details and accidents that accompany every beginning” (Foucault 1984: 80). Those beginnings are always numerous and incoherent, and genealogy should account for this rather than trying to tell a compelling story of uninterrupted continuity. “Emergence is always produced through a particular stage of forces” (Foucault 1984: 83) and in this sense philosophical concepts are not the product of a single overarching ideology, dominant in a specific time period,

¹³ This was very much the case in 2010 when I first conceptualised this research. Since then analyses of motherhood as performative have started to emerge, however, they are often not explicit enough as to what the difference is between treating motherhood as a performance, and as performative. In that sense I think they stay within the usual paradigm of western subjectivity and in a sense simply borrow a ‘sexy’ term without paying homage to what its deployment actually entails. I further discuss this conflation of performance and performativity in the next chapter.

but are assembled in a shifting grid of contested power/knowledges. If this understanding is applied to Butler's work, performativity appears not to simply be a theory of subjectivity and gender construction, but a particular tool, constituted through a process of numerous theoretical interpretations, to dismantle the heteronormative feminism which dominated in the late 1980s. One of the major theoretical goals of Butler's performativity was to put into question the category 'woman', which according to her was a harmful and simplistic naturalisation. Instead of serving as a uniting concept, 'woman' reified stereotypical connotations of (female) cis gender and heterosexuality, which defied the very same goals it strived to oppose (Butler 1993, Mahmood 2005). If, to borrow Foucault's terminology, Butler's 'knowledge' is decoupled from the particular struggle for power pertinent to its birth, the 'linearity' of its theoretical genesis can be easily put into question and the deployment of the Freudian melancholic subject for a feminist goal can be problematised. Again, this is not an attempt at a 'grand' critique which aims to question the virtue of Butler's work 'as a whole'. Rather, in my understanding, genealogical labour is necessary when concepts are detached from their particular contexts.

Finally, conflating Derridean and Foucauldian thought may be problematic in some contexts due to their disagreements on various points, but my work, I believe, can only benefit from the nuances in their approaches to 'singularity and generality' (Derrida) or the dynamics between structure and particular events (Foucault). The affinity of both writers in questioning the common sense, the taken for granted, outweighs the tensions between them. It is probably not by chance that both authors have been accused by some feminists of being apolitical (Ramazanoglu 1993). Yet, the work of Judith Butler is a living proof that the two French philosophers can be made to work side by side for the realisation of feminist goals. Butler's deconstructive performativity (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997) historicises gender construction, at the same time remaining sensitive to the othering processes activated in any gender performance. Deconstruction and genealogy, while different on a technical level, are both concerned with disturbing the 'naturalised logic' of the 'obvious'. The history of the present in Foucault and the philosophy of presence in Derrida can complement each other beyond the issues their forefathers had with each other. In a truly Foucauldian fashion, the deployment of different theories for the realisation of a conceptual goal is messy and ridden with contingencies.

Indeed, as Lisa Baraitser (2009) suggests, one could embrace the messiness of the maternal and produce messy theories which reflect the lack of time and resources of present-day mothers - in particular, I would add, those employed in neoliberal academia with its ever-growing demands on productivity. Mother-writing, according to Baraitser, tends to be marked by a fundamental

incoherence, due to the child's constant, and quite literal, interruptions to the maternal narrative, whether this narrative is a personal attempt to articulate an identity position or a professional engagement with theory. Baraitser, whose own investigation of the maternal takes the shape of what she calls "anecdotal theory" (2009: 12), weaves a highly theoretical account of her own mundane maternal experiences and uses those as a way to simultaneously patch together and interrogate the work of various authors coming from philosophy and psychoanalysis. It is not a field of knowledge that Baraitser engages with. Rather, she sieves through an enormous body of different texts to be able to collect the theoretical bits and pieces that allow her to think (maternal) subjectivity 'otherwise', via a "nexus of ideas about transformation and change, alterity, interruption, disjunction, love, crying, syncope, object and ethics" (Baraitser 2009: 17), themes that all emerged from her own experience as a mother. In a similar vein to what I do in this thesis, she does not attempt to provide a grand critique of the texts she engages with. Rather she uses them for her own theoretical purposes, always staying close to the empirics of motherhood, not necessarily out of some rational academic choice but out of motherhood itself. The inability of the mother-theorist to perform to the standards of contemporary academia may ironically end up being oddly generative, helping to frame more democratic methodologies that stray away from an often suffocating, and quite masculinist, canon. The methods deployed in this thesis are, I'd like to think, an attempt at a step in that direction.

In the next chapter (3) I critically trace the ways the masculine, melancholic subject has managed to infiltrate (queer) feminist theory. Through the work of Cixous (1976, 1981, 1986, 1991), Ettinger (2006) and Baraitser (2009), among others, which I put in dialogue with the maternal stories of my interviewees, I articulate a way to look at maternal subjectivity 'otherwise' (Baraitser 2009). Since 'high theory' is here made to speak directly to everyday empirics, and vice versa, I often find myself writing in *écriture féminine* (Cixous 1976), which instinctively allows me to do step out of academic conventionality.

Chapter 3

Cooperative Subjectivity ‘Otherwise’: Psychoanalysis, Performativity and the Multiplicities of Motherhood

I leak, therefore I am.

This variation of the old Cartesian catchphrase which positioned rationality at the core of human ontology belongs to Katherine Sutherland’s touching exploration of maternal subjectivity. Her article, conspicuously titled *On Milk and Miracles* (Sutherland 1999), argues against (phallic) subjectivity as based on loss and separation and proposes instead a particular reading of the Kleinian model of a breast-based subjectivity of leaking mutuality,¹⁴ where the focus is on the love/life transmitted through the miraculous ‘intraactions’¹⁵ between mouths and glands. These intraactions are not simply pre-linguistic but transcend the primacy of (the father’s) language. Sutherland’s critique of the masculinist assumptions behind Freudian psychoanalysis is repetitively interrupted by emotionally charged narrations of the (painfully embodied) struggles she and her male lover went through when their premature daughter was fighting for her life in intensive care. In my understanding, this article represents a certain, although marginal, trend of academic *écriture féminine* (Cixous et al. 1976) where the author’s argument is let loose, frantically raging against the conventions of scholarly rationality (see also Baraitser 2009). An argument that leaks, as opposed to one that flows. Unrestrained multidirectionality versus a teleological journey from A to B. An argument which is at peace with its own contradictions. The mother who writes. The w/rites of motherhood.

As Hélène Cixous (1981) posits in *Castration or Decapitation*, for Freud and Lacan, woman is said to be ‘outside the Symbolic’: outside the Symbolic, that is outside language, the place of the Law, excluded from any possible relationship with culture and the cultural order. And she is outside the Symbolic because she “lacks any relation to the phallus” (ibid.: 46), she lacks the lack

¹⁴ In my view the mother-child relationship Klein described as ideal is far from based on reciprocity. On the contrary, it very much resembles contemporary, highly normative, ideas of desirable maternal behaviour. The mother functions as a support system for the child, whose well-being is important only in as much as its lack can obstruct the proper development of the child (Klein 1975). Nevertheless, as the foremother of object relations theory her work is often romanticised as one of the first accounts of relationality.

¹⁵ Intraactions is a term Barad uses to emphasise relationships do not simply occur between two or more complete entities (relata), but that those entities are changed in the process of the relationship.

of the transcendental signifier and this, Cixous says, points to the very organisation of the “structure of subjectivity”. A subjectivity based on primordial lack. A melancholic subjectivity.

This chapter is about subjectivity. And about maternal subjectivity. And about what makes talking about the latter so theoretically messy. And about the ways in which it talks itself. To put it differently, the main question this chapter aims to explore is what makes motherhood a subject position that almost ‘naturally’ (I could not resist the pun) challenges dominant conceptualisations of personhood and, of course, how.

It seeks to respond to a certain logic which overarches the majority of feminist work on motherhood, from various theoretical sides, which I call ‘the logic of contradictions’. What these authors do, fixated on their own desire to save *the Mother* from all injustice, is to identify features, characteristics of motherhood and ‘expose’ the way they contradict culturally dominant modes of selfhood - thus making apparent the structural impossibility for mothers to ‘fit in’. I argue that these ‘contradictions’, rather than what has often been termed ‘nature’, were invented to define the ‘core’ of femininity in a move that has ensured the exclusion of women from the realm of the political at the very inception of the modern state. As Derrida (1982) suggests, every constative use of language (as in ‘exposing’) is also performative. I would like to ask then, what is it that the feminist approach of ‘exposing contradictions’ performs? In their desire to somehow liberate women from their inner contradictions, many feminist authors tend to reiterate a logic that has served the purposes of subjugating women in the first place. And save only those who do the saving, the Daughters, the Sisters, having risen above the debilitating silence of femininity (Cixous 1991). Those, who have learned how to speak like the Father: for the Mother, without the Mother! The violent logic of ‘representative’ democracy.

Instead I propose an analysis of motherhood beyond the logic of contradictions, or the attempts at its reconciliation within liberal conceptualisations of self. What is needed is an integrative critique of motherhood in relation to the dominant modern self. In the words of Steph Lawler:

a revisioning of motherhood must entail a revisioning of daughterhood/childhood. And this in turn entails a re-visioning of selfhood so that selves need no longer be understood as the autonomous, bounded, rational self which underwrites most current Euroamerican thinking (Lawler 2000: 172).

To come back to the purpose of this chapter then, my attempt is to problematise subjectivity beyond the incessant chain of clichéd qualifiers along the lines of fluidity. Instead, building primarily on Hélène Cixous (1981, 1986, 1991), Lauren Berlant (2012), Lisa Baraitser (2009) and Bracha Ettinger (2006), I aim to embed a certain ‘dialogical’ concept of subjectivity at the centre

of my analysis, which builds on the insights of both psychoanalysis and a post-structuralist approach to discourse. This (maternal) subject then can be put at the centre of my local, historicised attempt at theorising motherhood as performative.

Blackman et al. (2008) argue that the concept of subjectivity as understood in psychoanalytical accounts and the concept of the subject and subjectification in the Foucauldian sense¹⁶ are in a tension which has the capacity to be tremendously theoretically productive. Lynne Layton (2008: 61) writes that for feminist and generally poststructuralist authors “subjectivity is situated, socially constructed, historically mediated, gendered, raced, classed, etc. – subjected to social norms, to be sure, but not necessarily riven by unconscious conflict”. For psychoanalysis the subject is divided.¹⁷ This chapter examines some of the preconceptions of both positions through what I call the position of ‘maternal subjectivity’. I start with a summary of the way feminist theorists of motherhood who use the term ‘maternal subjectivity’ utilise the concept and the problems, ontological and empirical, such uses create. I continue with an analysis of Freud’s take on subjectivity, focusing on three of his most radically interesting essays from the end of his work/life: *Mourning and Melancholia* (Freud 1957), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud 1961) and *The Ego and the Id* (Freud 1962). The point of going back to Freud’s work would be to show that the general understanding of his accounts of the psyche (at least in feminist theory) as the codification of the bound, masculine, individual, self-contained subject is at least partially misplaced. This is not to say that Freud’s work is without problems for the feminist project but, I would argue, the problems lie elsewhere. Freud’s subject is by definition a fluid, ghostly entity characterised by relationality. However, I aim to show that his melancholic subject is predicated on loss (or as Cixous writes borrowing from Lacan – lack) because of the erasure of the mother from his account of the process of subject formation (Sprenghether 1990). Cixous (1976, 1981, 1986, 1991) mentions the nullification of the mother throughout her work but un/fortunately not in a systematic way. Her work will haunt (as opposed to inform) this chapter because I myself struggle with using her texts in a way she wouldn’t want them to be used, that

¹⁶ Foucault introduces the subject in order to show how power is on the one hand never singular but operates in complicated, historically specific networks where it is directly linked to knowledge and on the other, is not simply restrictive but also productive. In these complex systems of power/knowledge subject positions are being constructed, regulated by a variety of discourses. It is important to note, Blackman et al. (2008) argue, that in his paradigm the subject is not synonymous with the individual. The subject is rather a discursive position (which nonetheless transcends the linguistic).

¹⁷ Traditionally, psychoanalysis is interested in the subject as the individual person. Although this is currently being problematised by a variety of perspectives, Deleuzian psychology being the most salient, it is largely focused on the formation of the psyche in a rather universalistic sense, disregarding the variety of historical-cultural factors that may lead to different ‘normalities’.

is, in a phallogocentric argumentative mode. Bracha Ettinger's (2006) revolutionary 'matrixial theory' will be used towards a critical reconciliation of these various psychoanalytic conceptualisations of (maternal) subjectivity.

Moreover, since at the heart of my analysis of motherhood lies the concept of performativity,¹⁸ as conceived by Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) and later re-framed by Saba Mahmood (2005), I will look at Butler's account of subject formation/performative gender construction in *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997). My aim will be to illustrate how, partially because of her queer feminist liberatory project, she takes the Freudian melancholic subject without the necessary feminist pinch of salt. As Mahmood argues, Butler's subject is predicated on a dichotomous vision of its relation to norms as either being repressed by them or in one way or another accomplishing their subversion. This may be, as Mahmood reasons, a result of Butler's own political investment in undermining heteronormativity. Her theory, therefore, is not an exhaustive account of the theoretical possibilities of the concept of performativity, but rather is a very particular deployment of it in a specific politico-historical context (Mahmood 2005: 21).

3.1 Oh, Mother, Where Art Thou?

Maternal subjectivity is a concept used by a variety of feminist authors doing empirical analysis of mothering. The term has been chosen by the authors because it provides a natural slide into Foucauldian conceptualisations (in the sense of docile bodies) of the subject produced by the power/knowledge of normative discourses (Foucault 1977). In other words, 'maternal subjectivity' allows feminist authors to give in depth accounts of the production of the 'good' or 'bad' mother by the intersection of dominant discourses regulating childcare such as medicine, the law, welfare, (child) psychology etc. (see Lawler 2000, Walbank, 2001). Via the process of subjectivation women who are in charge of children are bound to the 'identity' mother, thus

¹⁸ Although many feminist authors write about 'the performance' of the tasks of mothering or even the performance of motherhood itself (see Blum 1993, Bobel 2001, Hays 1996, Stearns 1999), the linguistic similarity between 'performance' and 'performativity' has not led to any significant analysis of motherhood in these terms. "The performativity of all motherhood" (Gabb 1999: 15) is sometimes mentioned throughout feminist (and especially lesbian feminist) theorising of motherhood. Nevertheless, the focus of these papers tends to lie elsewhere: emphasising the sexual identities of lesbian mothers (Gabb 1999), the performance of other 'identity categories' such as race, class, age and so on (Byrne 2006) or the performativity of motherhood as a virtual identity (Hau-nung Chan 2008). However, the performative character of motherhood (in the sense of Butler's performativity) itself remains an unexamined field. This, I believe, is directly related to performativity being a theory of subject formation, and subject formation being perceived as tied to early childhood (Lawler 2000).

becoming 'maternal subjects' regulated and self-regulating according to the logic intrinsic in the above-mentioned discourses (Lawler 2000).

Authors also seem invested in teasing out the ways the maternal subject is configured as inherently unfit (see Blum 1993, Bobel 2001, Hays 1996, Stearns 1999, among others). Since the mother is produced as a function of her children's needs, which in turn are produced biopolitically (see Baraitser 2009, Lawler 2000), the woman/human inconveniently co-occupying the same physical body as the mother has very little space to pursue her own needs, desires, interests. This impossibility is tightly related to the central position 'autonomy' occupies in the project of the modern (Euro-American) self (see Lawler 2000, Rose 1990). Sharon Hays (1996) calls this structural bind 'the cultural contradictions of motherhood' which stem from the intrinsic ambivalences of human relations in modern capitalist societies. The ideology of intensive motherhood which interpellates an ever-present maternal subject who always puts the 'needs' of her children first is in perpetual tension with the ideology of personal gain, which regulates the sphere of public relations and posits self-interest as *the* basic "natural" drive behind human behaviour. A lot of feminist work has been dedicated to exposing the masculinist preconceptions behind this supposedly universal human being (see Cixous 1986, DiQuinzio 1999, Kristeva 1984, Pateman 1988, Sprengnether 1990, and many more).

According to many (de Beauvoir 1989, Firestone 1971), one of the forefathers of this subject and his indoctrination into the so-called 'psy' discourses is no other but Sigmund Freud. Lynne Layton writes that the unexamined presupposition behind Freudian psychoanalysis is:

a vision in which subjectivity begins and develops in antagonism toward the other. This view, of course, is one that tends to pathologize dependence and vulnerability, or, perhaps more accurately, it is a view that is unconscious of its anxiety about dependence and vulnerability and rids itself of these dreaded states through a particular version of developmental theory and Oedipal law. (2008: 63)

In what follows I aim to show that the Freudian subject is very far from the supposedly bound individual self a lot of feminist critiques have attributed to his psychoanalytic theory. Nevertheless, the Freudian subject contains a masculine bias which, I will argue, is its constitutive melancholia. The Freudian melancholic subject incorporated into Lacanian psychoanalysis and consequently taken upon by Butlerian performativity is, I argue, a phantasm of the masculine preconceptions embedded in psychoanalytic theory which foreground the emergence of subjectivity in the abjection of the mother from the psychic world of the child. In other words, going back to Layton's (2008) argument, the unconscious anxiety of Freudian psychoanalysis is not identical to the production of the self-contained subject but rather the

effect of a long-lasting socio-cultural tradition which renders 'the feminine' antithetical to the agentive subject.

Before deconstructing melancholic subjectivity, however, I would like to show how the Freudian subject is very far from the self-contained image it has assumed in a lot of feminist writing. Instead, I want to propose, it can easily accommodate the fluid subject of post-structuralism, underlying the majority of feminist sociological/anthropological writing concerned with motherhood. The Freudian subject is divided (very close to the post-structuralist fragmentation) from its very inception around the end of the Oedipal phase.

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud problematises the division between a conscious and unconscious systems in the mind (Freud and Starchey 1962). To explain the complexities, he introduces a tripartite structure of the psyche: the id, the ego and the super ego. It seems that one of the main purposes of this essay is to argue for the unconscious or repressed parts of the ego, which is usually understood as the conscious element of the mind. In fact, Freud argues, the conscious ego is "first and foremost a body-ego" (Freud 1962: 26), whose experiences are largely structured around its acquaintance with pain, but on the other hand, both its 'highest' and 'lowest' parts are very likely to be inaccessible for the conscious subject. The ego is, according to Freud, the psyche's mediator between an 'external reality' and the 'internal' life of the psyche. This 'internal life' is dominated by the libidinal impulses of the id and the regulatory functions of the super ego. The ego and the super ego are also related in the way they have been formed: as internalisation(s) of and identifications with lost objects.¹⁹ In fact, Freud says, the ego may be little more than the dynamic sum of those multiple identifications. The super ego, in turn, represents the primary such identification: with the lost father (and mother – interestingly Freud goes back and forth on this point). The super ego seems to be both the result of the law of the father having managed to resolve the Oedipal complex, yet having incorporated the lost maternal object too. Madelon Sprengnether (1990) calls this instantaneous presence and absence of the mother 'spectral', that is – Freudian psychoanalysis is haunted by the foreclosed primary desire for the mother, which it is trying to stuff under the carpet of a theory which ultimately serves the purpose of justifying male domination.

In this sense, the super ego represents that part of the psyche which, in the words of Judith Butler, is "passionately attached to his or her own subordination" (1997: 6), the restrictive force

¹⁹ In that sense the distinction between the external and the internal life of the self is not absolute but rather traces the mechanisms through which the social world is represented in the psyche and the functions those representations assume in the processes of subjectivation.

of parental control internalised as what is now perceived as ‘values’, as that higher ‘good’ which is supposed to limit the selfish pursuits of the ego.

What this account of subjectivity points to is a subject which expands, qualitatively changes throughout his or her life time with the experience of having loved/desired. As Freud puts it (1962: 15): “it makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes²⁰ and that it contains the history of those object-choices”. Subjectivity is far from stable or bound because what we are, literally what “we” are, is the multiple others within the self. These form, according to Freud, what is commonly understood as character. This mechanism of ego formation (through introjection) is the only premise under which the id can give up its objects.

The underlying preconception of this model of subjectivity is that the individual is indeed un/done by the desirous encounter with the other, however, what lies at the basis of subjectivation is not the relationship with said other, but its ending and the resultant loss. This account of subjectivation is based on the initial relationship with the primary objects in one’s life – according to Freud – the parents. Before looking into Freud’s ideas of early childhood subject formation, however, I want to point out that, while the melancholic model of ego production becomes the dominant way of imagining the psyche in Freudian psychoanalysis, in *The Ego and the Id* Freud mentions that there are occasions where “the alteration in character occurs before the object has been given up. In such cases the alteration in character has been able to survive the object-relation and in a certain sense to conserve it” (1962: 29). In this sense, loss is not a necessary precondition for the relational character of the ego, it is the amorous encounter with the other that qualitatively changes the self. This point, however, remains obscured in the Freudian-Lacanian-Butlerian tradition of thinking about subjectivity where the breaking of the primary attachment acquires the status of *the* event which generates the weaving of subjectivity.

I want to argue, building on Baraitser’s insightful exploration of maternal subjectivity in *Maternal Encounters*, that the “subject characterised by emptiness, lack and loss” (Baraitser, 2009: 9) arises from a specific misogynist preconception in this line of psychoanalytic thought, one which posits the mother as the necessary abject on the basis of whose repudiation the subject first starts to emerge. It is not enough, then, to simply point to the masculine bias between the phantasmatic “autonomous, auto-affective, rational” (Baraitser, 2009: 17) subject

²⁰ Cathexis is the process of investing libidinal energy in an object.

of, say, dominant political discourses from the west. It should be recognised that his “post-modern counter-part; the traumatised, split, mournful” (ibid.) subject is also inherently masculine. His insatiable desire, which has no cause, only an (ever replaceable) object has emerged through representing the mutually altering relationship between mother and child as a monofocal site of one-way subject formation.

In other words, as Baraitser also acknowledges, despite Freud’s recognition that the subject is in flux due to his/her identifications with loved (and lost) others throughout his/her lifetime there is a strong trend in psychoanalysis to render subject formation synonymous with the formation of the super ego, that is, the introjection of the assumed loss of the primary attachment (Lawler 2000). In Freud’s words:

But, whatever the character’s later capacity for resisting the influences of abandoned object-cathexes may turn out to be, the effects of the first identifications made in earliest childhood will be general and lasting. This leads us back to the origin of the ego ideal; for behind it there lies hidden an individual’s first and most important identification, his identification with the father in his own personal prehistory. (1962: 30)

This formulation is bizarre, as elsewhere Freud (1977) has argued that at the oral phase, that is, the first phase of sexual development of the individual, the child is receiving libidinal gratification from suckling on the maternal breast. Therefore, the mother is the first object of desire for the infant and this understanding is very salient in Freud’s views on gender acquisition. Yet, here we have a strangely elusive mother, subsumed by the paternal. Freud continues:

But the object-choices belonging to the first sexual period and relating to the father and mother seem normally to find their outcome in an identification of this kind, and would thus reinforce the primary one (1962: 30).

The desire for the mother slips into his narrative, only to disappear once again when he claims that “the super ego retains the character of the father” (1962: 33). In Lacan (Fink 1995), this process is equated with the passage from the real into the symbolic when language – which is always the language of the father, a masculine institution – is acquired by the young child as a way to fill the void of the missing breast - which comes to stand for the mother. Around the same time the infant goes through the so-called mirror stage, when s/he is confronted by the image of a coherent self in the mirror, a fascinating ‘imaginary’ of wholeness which takes the place of the violently real experience of a fragmented body the child has been familiar with until then (Berlant 2012). The language of the father, the fantasy of coherence and the loss of the mother (as an un-representable “real” therefore excluded from the symbolic) constitute the

onset of a subjectivity which will paradoxically transform and fragment through its amorous encounters with the other, often in contradictory ways. According to Freud and Lacan these transformations will not be pathological, and yet will be able to claim them only phantasmatic attempts to fill an original void. The subject, under the pressure exercised by the Real, must engage in the repetitive process of finding love objects/replacements in phantasy of the lost mother and these 'romantic repetitions' will in themselves provide him/her with an identity, that is, make him/her recognizable to him/herself (Berlant 2012). My argument here, therefore, is that Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, while exposing the internal divisions within the subject, simultaneously renders the fantasy of coherence, which contains in itself the negation of the maternal, an intrinsic part of healthy psychic life. Indeed, the main goal of "the talking cure" for Freud would be to deliver more autonomy to the self in therapy – that is, through making conscious some of his/her painful repetitions to provide the tools for more control over his/her afflictive self-performances (Wright 1992). It also forecloses the possibility for a consciously transformative relationship with the other, as transformation has to be hidden from consciousness in order to occur. I am we, only on the condition I am not aware of it. Lauren Berlant reads Lacan's subject as "an effect of the anxiety that is generated by the assumption of an identity within what he calls the Symbolic Order" (2012: 52). Identity, on the other hand is

a mirage — a mirage of the ego that gives you an "I" and a name to protect you from being overwhelmed by the stimuli you encounter, and/or a mirage of the social order, which teaches you to renounce your desire's excess and ambivalence so that you can be intelligible under the discipline of the norms that make hierarchies of social value seem natural by rooting them in the pseudo-natural structure of hetero-sexualized sexual difference. (ibid.)

This position nevertheless contains the assumption that identity (as a coherent tool for separation from the other) is a necessary mirage without which the subject will dissolve psychotically. And since the subject must inevitably enter the Symbolic (in ways determined by sexual difference), a logic which forecloses the mother is established as synonymous with normality, even if this normality is recognizably contingent on a particular patriarchal social order, because it is the only one we have. Freud's elusive maternal becomes a function of the Father.

In Cixous' words:

Ultimately the world of "being" can function while precluding the mother. No need for a mother as long as there is some "motherliness": and it is the father, then, who acts the part, who is the mother...And there is no mother then...She does not exist, she can not-be; but there has to be something of her. He keeps, then, of the woman

on whom he is no longer dependent, only this space, always virginal, as matter to be subjected to the desire he wishes to impart (1986: 64-65).

Desire, based on (an imagined) loss, is then a constitutive part of the masculine libidinal economy, which for Cixous is the machinery sustaining the phallogocentric order that operates according to a logic of “authority”, “privilege”, “force”, “opposition”, “conflict”, “sublation”, “return”, “violence”, “repression” (1986: 64).

To this order Cixous juxtaposes a feminine principle, which functions through ‘the gift’, which is a type of unconditional love for the other, one aiming at the preservation of his/her alterity as opposed to assimilation, which lies at the heart of Freud’s aggression/object preservation vision of love. Cixous’ lifelong work on “the relationship of life to death; the place of love in self/other relations; the notion of justice beyond the law; and the effects of sexual difference upon practices of knowledge production” provides a sustained critique of the Enlightenment’s masculine, “autonomous, singular and rational subject” to which she responds with a proposition of a feminine subject in continual metamorphosis (Renshaw 2009: 99-103). Her concept of love is based on respect for difference and the excess of the gift. Although undoubtedly concerned with critiques of subjectivity as conceived by Freudian psychoanalysis and Hegelian dialectics, Cixous has a clear investment in moving her own theory of subjectivity beyond simply exposing the flaws of phallogocentric thought towards what could be born (in fantasy) at the encounter between self and other.²¹ Cixous’ project includes a re-thinking of desire which transgresses negativity; here a desire based on the appropriation of difference is substituted for a desire which “would keep the other alive and different” (1986: 79).

As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* (1990) the relationship between desire and subjectivity can be found, in Freud, in the incorporation of lost libidinal objects in the fabric of the ego, with the original loss being death where incorporation is being achieved through the work of mourning. Ultimately, this logic establishes a relation between desire, subjectivity and death/loss. When “difference is the occasion of becoming, not annihilation” (Renshaw 2009: 108) what is recognised is the possibility of transformation without loss as a necessary precondition. “For Cixous the maternal or feminine, then, continues to signify an/other way of being with the other” (Renshaw 2009: 112). Cixous is not ‘essentialist’ in the concept of the maternal, but, as Renshaw argues, she is critical towards looking at motherhood and the

²¹ This is very far from the Freudian view of phantasy, where the subject is doomed to repeat endlessly the logic of its founding trauma, under the whip of a super-ego which requires him/her to master its proneness to perversion (Berlant 2012).

maternal as necessarily complicit to the reproduction of patriarchy, capitalism and, I would add – heteronormativity. Following her logic of excess – that is, there is always, no matter how powerful the repressive mechanisms, some amount of difference that cannot be fully appropriated by the system (Lacanian *jouissance* as femininity), Cixous is looking for the openings that the maternal provides, what many years later Baraitser would call a subjectivity “otherwise” (2009: 17).

The metaphor of the maternal in Cixous’ work stands for a different economy of desire, a feminine economy via a relation to love that is generative and oriented towards keeping the other alive. It is a standpoint that allows thinking of subjectivity in relation to the economy of the gift, through the metaphor of “giving birth to the other” which illustrates a relationship where preservation of the other’s absolute otherness is crucial to life itself. The mother’s relationship to her child is, as Baraitser observes, necessarily asymmetrical, therefore the care of the mother takes the form of a gift which is not necessarily embedded in a system of reciprocal exchange (which would be a defining feature of the masculine libidinal economy in Cixous’ terms).²²

For Baraitser, this logic lies at the heart of maternal subjectivity, which, however, is more than the result of a one-sided gift from mother to child. Love²³ is what affirms the two (self and other) and thus, retrospectively, creates the one (the self). Love in this sense is very far from Lacanian desire, which always leads to the constitutive division of the subject and as such is inherently masturbatory. This maternal gift is in line with Cixous’ maternal which keeps the relationship between self and other ‘alive’, thus opposing the Freudian/Lacanian model of subjectivity based on the dissociation from the mother.

I will return to Baraitser later on, but now I would like to turn my attention to Judith Butler’s melancholic (heterosexual) subject and suggest it is precisely its constitutive, foreclosed, unresolvable grief that has deprived ‘performativity’ of some of its analytical potential.

²² Lacking a relationship to the penis/phallus of Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis, woman’s subjectivity is always dispersed as she is denied the privilege of an imaginary of wholeness. Therefore, when woman gives she cannot expect profits to return to her self, as it is unclear which self will benefit from those profits. For woman pleasure and status come from giving itself, from the preservation of otherness, of other life (Renshaw 2009: 114).

²³ Here Baraitser uses Badiou’s understanding, where love is a truth producing procedure executed “step by step”, through the “work of love”, the purpose of which is to overcome the impossible (Badiou 2012: 69). The impossible is in my view precisely the production of what he calls “the Two scene” (2012: 38): a position or a perspective from which the world is looked at intersubjectively, no longer experienced by an individual entity of sameness but through the difference between self and other. This perspective is acquired slowly, laboriously, performatively, to borrow Austin’s term (1962).

3.2 Butler's Freudian Slip

Butler's work *The Psychic Life of Power* is an important link between psychoanalytic and post-structuralist understandings of subjectivity. Butler makes the crucial step of attempting an explanation of subjectivation through dominant social norms on an individual, psychic level – a task not seriously undertaken by authors from either tradition (Butler 1997: 3). Building on Freud, Lacan, Foucault, Hegel, Althusser and Nietzsche, Butler gives an exhaustive account of the variety of paradoxes embedded in the productive force of power, including the constitutive paradox of referentiality: in order to talk about a subject produced by power, one must name what does not yet exist. It could be speculated that this point is already a referential slip pointing to the performative character of all language and is similar to the act of naming a newborn child but I will leave this point for the time being. According to Butler, gender (the performative formation of which is bound to the very production of the subject) is “a kind of melancholy, or ... one of melancholy's effects” (1997: 132). The very resolution of the Oedipal conflict is synonymous with the uncertain and tedious production of a masculine or feminine gender, attached to a body normatively designated as male or female. Further, the “successful” completion of the process is “established in part through prohibitions which *demand the loss* of certain sexual attachments, and demand as well that those losses *not* be avowed and *not* be grieved” (1997: 133, italics in original). According to Butler's reading of Freud, the girl becomes a girl through repudiating her desire for the mother, while the boy attains masculinity through repudiating his melancholic identification with the woman he once loved.

Interestingly, although both gendered positions are achieved through the foreclosure of desire for the mother, this formulation has different implications for masculinity and femininity. While the girl's subjectivity is based on the melancholic identification with the mother, the boy must not have any access to it in order to accomplish heterosexual desire. I see this precisely as the fundament of masculinity not simply in un mournable loss but also in the denial of relationality that the multiple identifications in the ego presuppose in the doing of self. Women, Cixous writes, lose without attaching themselves to loss while men need to hold on to the phallus – what is, was, will never be there. “They have created the loathsome logic of antilove” (Cixous: 1986: 68).²⁴ I speculate that these two concepts of the logic of the primary unfolding of the

²⁴ I want to underscore, endlessly, that masculinity and femininity for Cixous are not the prerogatives of male and female bodies but cultural categories, whose distribution however is not random. While socialisation works for a certain continuity between “sex” and “gender” it does not overdetermine the possibility for another doing of selfhood.

process of gender are not so different from each other; however, Butler is not explicit about the differently gendered relations to the identifications the primary attachment produces. Elsewhere Butler argues that while the boy has to disavow only his primary object, the girl is meant to have no access to both the (same sex) object and (homosexual) desire itself (Butler 1990). This formulation is a different way to articulate my claim above about the relationship between gender formation and primary attachments, yet while Butler puts the emphasis of her analysis on the workings of desire, I would like to focus on the ways continuously, repetitively gendered subjects form ego identifications.

In Cixous' interpretation of Freud, femininity is the "effect of an anatomical 'defect'" (1986: 81), a performative postulate which produces only one type of libido – masculine. She makes the blurry first object of desire, the mother, explicit – and explains the 'normality' of male heterosexual desire through this paradigm. I would argue that ignoring the fundamental (sexual) difference of subject formation lies in Butler's own 'objectless' first passionate attachment. In what follows, I will briefly show how, unconsciously mimicking Freud, Butler performs an erasure of the mother from the primal love scene.

Building on Foucault's theory of power producing a subject in subordination (1977, 1978), Butler introduces the first instance of (unconditional) love into the picture: "a child's love is prior to judgment and decision ... there is no possibility of not loving where love is bound up with the requirements for life. The child does not know to what he/she attaches in order to persist in and as itself" (1997: 8). It is striking, I think, to see that the person to whom or, I would argue, with whom a child forms the first emotional bond is reduced to a thing, as the pronoun 'what' would implicitly suggest. In a sense, this move represents a true objectification of the object and it once again erases the mother as a subject in becoming herself. Her only role is to represent a particular phase in the pre-symbolic order that will determine the child's subjectification. If I can borrow from Austin (1962) and Derrida (1982), 'mother' then becomes the etiolated performative, the role of which is precisely – and solely - to shape the subject from a position of abjection.

Any attachment formation is relational and as such needs an integrative analysis of the subjectivities being formed or (re)articulated in their intraaction (Barad 2003). I will shortly develop this take on maternal subjectivity building on Lisa Baraitser's work. For the meantime, Butler's lack of interest in the mother as subject is stunning. She seems to embody the "necessary repudiation of identities, forms of subjectivities, and discursive logics" (Mahmood 2005: 19) that would form the "constitutive outside to the subject" (Butler 1993: 3).

Butler may be willing to include the possibility of not simply women, let alone (biological) mothers, being the primary caretakers in a child's life. This is undoubtedly true and politically very important a subject to enter the study of early childhood subject formation. Yet, without making that point explicit, her theory of attachment does little more than render the mother invisible in an uncritical re-appropriation of the masculinist preconceptions behind Freudian psychoanalysis. Since the primary argument of *The Psychic Life of Power* seems to be that a critical account of subjectivity must inevitably include the recognition that every subject, no matter its social standing, is perpetually haunted by its melancholic roots grounded in the foreclosure of the primary attachment, Butler is unconsciously foreclosing the critical analysis of that very same primary attachment. In my view, that is also partially a result of Butler's theory of performativity as essentially a stand against the formation of the heterosexual matrix. Performativity builds on a reconceptualisation of agency beyond intentionality that however still keeps its liberatory potential. A mother, who in her very essence is born through the asymmetrical relationship of care with her child, can hardly fit Butler's utopian quest for (sexual) freedom, yet, I argue, that's precisely why a space should be made for her to do so. The lack of such a space paradoxically limits the theoretical potential of the concept of performativity to accommodate the analysis of some subjectivities in the making – in this case the maternal. In what follows, I turn to Lisa Baraitser's (2009) fundamental work on maternal subjectivity, in order to introduce the mother back into the picture.

The purpose of Baraitser's passionate engagement with a set of theorists including Kristeva, Badiou, Irigaray, and Levinas amongst others is – as I have suggested already – to look at (maternal) subjectivity as 'otherwise'. In her encounter with the absolute other of the child for whom she is ultimately responsible, the mother's internal psychic structures are dislocated; that is, subjectivity is in constant de-formation in the relationship with the other, "not only during childhood, but also throughout our lives" (Baraitser 2009: 15). This makes possible the (theoretical/empirical) emergence of "the new, the unexpected, the surprising, or the generative" (Baraitser 2009: 18). Baraitser suggests that maternal subjectivity emerges "as the remainder that is returned to the self through the encounter with the Other" (2009: 36). For her the maternal subject is a Levinasian responsible, ethical subject that is, I would argue, performatively constituted through its daily work to sustain another life, "the mundane and relentless practices of daily maternal care", "an experience that is impossible to anticipate in advance, one that unravels as it proceeds", an embodied experience which is both "singular and multiple" (2009: 22). But Baraitser explicitly conceptualises this maternal subject as more than simply the maternal identity produced intersectionally through gender, class and race, and

introduced into a woman's sense of self. Nevertheless, in my opinion it is not unrelated to these, something Baraitser seems to overlook in her analysis.

The feminine and the maternal, although very much implicated in and by each other, are not the same for Baraitser. She suggests that, in the writings of authors such as Luce Irigaray, the maternal is abjected as 'fixity', expelled from the feminine as it is perceived to threaten its tingling fluidity. Indeed, such feminist writing erases the mother from its liberatory project because this writing is being based on a philosophical and/or psychoanalytical tradition that has repetitively done the same, conceptualising maternal desire as stemming from a woman's attempts to acquire the lacking penis. Baraitser's point is that putting maternal subjectivity, understood as the excessive alteration of self that occurs through the ethical encounter with the other, at the centre of analysis in fact shows how the bound, 'feminine' self prior to motherhood is being produced retroactively and phantasmatically. That is, motherhood, with its interruptions, transformations, love and aggression, and interdependence on people and material objects, automatically questions the individual self – regardless of whether that self is conceptualised as rational or tormented by founding melancholia.

In what follows of this chapter, I give the stage to the participants in this research, in an attempt to allow the mother's narration of her daily challenges and transformations of self, other and beyond, speak directly to (the silences of) 'high theory'. My own analysis, I hope, will serve as a sympathetic translation between the everyday world of CEE mothers and the ivory tower of western academia, which are kept separate out of little more than phallogocentric convention.

3.3 Analysis: The Language of the Mother

Despite the striking differences in the ways first-time middle-class mothers in Budapest and Sofia construct their stories of motherhood (to be developed in the rest of this thesis), this chapter focuses on a structural similarity. All of my interviewees with one exception had trouble narrating their lives from a position of 'I', something so naturalised in the way personal histories are imagined within the language of the father. Instead they jumped from 'I' to 'we' back and forth, as if their maternal subjectivity was leaking uncontrollably, opening and closing to strategically include and exclude significant others depending on the context. Importantly, the 'we' of those mothers did not simply include their offspring as a certain understanding of the child-mother dyad (Winnicott 1960) would suppose, nor was it necessarily sustained within the boundaries of the nuclear family. I argue that once they embody a subjectivity which cannot retain itself within the illusion of a coherent 'I', mothers un/consciously create complicated

chainlike selves (Baraitser 2009), which include the people who are indispensable in their complicated daily existence as carers. Methodologically, I focus on those instances of the use of 'we' which are confusing (it isn't obvious who is included in this cooperative subject) or contradictory in relation to their overall narratives. There are plenty of 'we's' which are simply grammatically obvious choices. Of course, in my paradigm language itself is a masculinist institution, yet for the sake of a sociologically meaningful argument I will omit those.

All interviews start with the same structure: general questions about the interviewee's age, the age of her children²⁵, her education and her occupation. Then we proceeded to talk in more detail, which depended on their willingness, about their paid work. In all the interviews paid work was spoken about exclusively in first person singular. In general terms, the next section was 'everyday life with the baby' – in all but one interviews women switched from 'I' to 'we' here, more or less immediately. This quote from Dóra illustrates the juxtaposition between an earning woman and a family life:

Now we are really happy because we have savings because I worked a lot or there are a lot of positive things behind [our current life] and yes I hate it that I did a lot of overwork and as I mentioned sometimes I felt that it doesn't make any sense. But, yeah, this was the basis for this life (Dóra, Budapest, 37, son 6 months, account manager, Hungarian, living with male partner).

In other words, having imagined, theoretically, a performative maternal subjectivity 'otherwise' does not solve the problems of articulating the experiences of cooperative maternal subjects within the confines of phallogentric languages. My hypothesis is that the frantic multidirectional I-we of new mothers reflects not only the dislocating structures of their subjects in metamorphosis but also the limitations linguistic norms set on the possibility to performatively constitute one (or rather many) self as such.

3.3.1 WE, the Mother

In order to think the cooperative subject 'otherwise', a move 'beyond' (and not necessarily, or exclusively, against) the phallic may be needed. Is it possible to address the 'we' of the mother as a way to articulate Bracha Ettinger's "I and non-I", the "m/other's compassionate hospitality" (Ettinger 2006: 27) in a phallic paradigm where there isn't a language to address the (potential)

²⁵ In these interviews the age of the children varied between 5 months and 4 years.

transformations of the partial subject(s) experiencing encounter-events?²⁶ I will briefly turn to Ettinger's revolutionary matrixial theory in an attempt to talk about the maternal I-we.

Ettinger's concept of the matrixial, a metaphor of the pregnant womb, is a way to think sexual difference not in opposition, but 'beyond' the phallus. It is a "feminine that is neither pre-Oedipal nor an after-effect of phallic or Oedipal structure" (Ettinger 2006: 15). Ettinger does not see a way for the feminine as *jouissance* to structurally reconstitute the historically masculine concept of the human. Her theory marks a turn from the older generation of sexual difference feminists such as Cixous, who found revolutionary potential in the excesses of the feminine that failed to be subsumed by paternal law. In Massumi's understanding from the Afterword of *The Matrixial Borderspace*:

this matrixial "femininity" is not the opposite of the phallic masculine. It is more accurate to say that it is the other of the masculine-feminine opposition [...] "it is *the* sexual difference, as against the difference between the sexes [...] The "feminine" [...] is accessible to anybody – on the condition that it surrenders itself to the several, to its own co-poietic variation and return, intensely, artistically relived." (Massumi in Ettinger 2006: 38).

Ettinger's feminine precedes the phallic in the sense that its transformational effects occur in time before the events of separation such as birth or weaning, which set the stage for the weaving of the subject in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Thus, Ettinger does not deny the (symbolic) importance of the phallic as a way to re/organise subjectivity but instead introduces the idea of the matrix which has always, already, in an archaic beforeness co-shaped two (maybe more?) partial subjects (a becoming infant and mother), who share an affective corpo-Reality, and yet have no access to knowledge of each other. Not recognising the importance of late pregnancy for subject formation (and the mutuality, relationality of subject formation which is always a process between an *I* and a *non-I*) is therefore the result of phallogocentric theories of subjectivation. The traces of this repression "will haunt the subject in a variety of symbolically foreclosed but affectively pressing ways" (Pollock, in Ettinger 2006: 28). A crucial implication of matrixial theory is therefore that the feminine has relevance to all which is human. In Ettinger's words:

I take the feminine/prenatal meeting as a model for relations and processes of change and exchange in which *the non-I* is unknown to the *I* (or rather uncognized:

²⁶ In the matrixial border space all subjects are partial and influence each other on a trans-subjective level. During an encounter-event those partial subjects cross each other, in traumatic, intuitive and usually unrecognised ways. Particularly in the field of art these unconscious transformations are achieved through a process of co-poiesis – sharing the trace of the matrixial.

known by a noncognitive process), but not an intruder. Rather, the *non-I* is a *partner in difference* of the *I*. The *late* intrauterine encounter represents, and provides meaning to internal and external realities related to non-Oedipal sexual difference viewed through the prism of the feminine *beyond-the-phallus*. It can serve as a model for a *shareable dimension of subjectivity* in which elements that discern one another as *non-I*, without knowing each other co-emerge and co-inhabit a joint space, without fusion and without rejection. The matrixial co-emerging partial subjects can simultaneously be seen from the phallic angle as “whole” subject or as each other’s object. A matrixial encounter engenders shared traces, traumas, pictograms, and fantasies in *several* partners conjointly but differently, accompanied and partially created by diffuse matrixial affects; it engenders nonconscious readjustments of their connectivity and reattunement of transsubjectivity (Ettinger 2006: 63-64).

In my interpretation of Ettinger and her re-working of Kristeva’s ‘necessary matricide’ (Kristeva and Goldhammer 1985), the ‘I’ is indeed insufficient as a position from which to think pregnancy, but psychosis or an agentic attempt to re-enter the space of the Law of the Father are far from being the only options for mothers-in-becoming. The women I interviewed, I argue, experience grammatical and other linguistic difficulties in expressing their subjective conditions of im/possibility. Yet, while their struggle reflects on the one hand the phallogocentric boundaries of language, on the other it testifies to mothers’ desire to articulate motherhood, once a compassionate space for such self²⁷-articulation has been provided. During my fieldwork I was thanked countless times by interviewees for “asking these questions”. “Nobody wants to know”, more than one of my respondents said, and “it feels great that someone is interested” in such stories of mundane becomings. This self-regulation of mothers to not burden the rest of humanity with their ‘boring’ experiences has been addressed in sociological enquiries into motherhood (Hays 1996, for example). As such mothers (to be/come) are not simply “unhinged” (Ettinger 2006: 35) from language, it is rather a more or less conscious awareness that language does not want to listen, that there is an excess to their maternal identity construction that can’t be contained or realised through existing linguistic structures. Motherhood then is either silenced into oblivion or it has to stretch language beyond its ‘meaningful’ grammatical limits. Whether the talk of the mother is rendered as psychotic gibberish or an ear stretches itself compassionately to accommodate that struggling, uncomfortably enlarged, seemingly inebriated tongue is a matter of, I believe, feminist politics. In what follows, I will attempt to articulate an analysis of the maternal/matrixial use of the pronoun ‘we’ as an I and its unknown and multiple non-I’s.

²⁷ And other, and other *ad infinitum*.

First, I would like to draw attention to the fluid borders of the maternal 'we'.

Because of the flu we don't go there now but there's this *ringató* [baby singing class] so we went there every Tuesday in the morning... No, nothing else... But we arrived in August. In Canada, we also went to such baby singing, we went to [inaudible] every day, so we tried to be more active but I think now we don't have the time to... with the pregnancy and this whole thing (Kinga, Budapest, 33, daughter 2y, researcher at a research centre, Hungarian, living with male partner).

In this quote the mother's speech oscillates between an I and a we yet, more interestingly, from the context of the interview I extrapolate in the first two uses the pronoun refers to mother, child and possibly the unborn baby she is pregnant with. The third 'we' most likely includes the father of the children, the next three are not identifiable. Interestingly, the interviewee then jumps to first person singular, to insert an "I think" (as a marker of uncertainty) into her narrative. Finally, she switches back to 'we' to indicate that her cooperative, pregnant subject is lacking time for entertainment. This same respondent was particularly interested in talking about her professional experience prior to having children, a conversation in which she firmly engaged in from the position of I. I hypothesise that pregnancy, childbirth and carework for an infant are all part of a process of re-subjectivation of a phantasmatic individual woman towards a mother-in-becoming, a process realised through an "affected matrixial encounter" (Ettinger 2006: 89) between various partial subjectobjects.²⁸ Such an encounter, with its emphasis on borderlinking²⁹ between various relational selves awakens matrixial traces in the psyche of the mother-in-becoming. In Ettinger's words: "A matrixial trace carries a trans-subjective and transgenerational memory through which is engendered an originary psychic-feminine dimension of subjectivity, that of the I-with-some-others" (2006: 81). In my reading of my interviewees' ways to relate to themselves-in-motherhood, their recurrent slippages between I and we testify to the matrixial "Self-with-other psychic dimension of subjectivity" (Ettinger 2006: 81). That is, the becoming mother operates through (border)linking with others, not exclusively the infant. However, this 'sensitivity' to matrixial experiences is triggered by the embodied co-emergence of mother and child-to-be during the late intrauterine period/encounter, which according to Ettinger must not be overlooked in subjectivity theory because it is a crucial part of (feminine) sexual difference. Thus, the subject-with-other(s) precedes "the *emerging-self* versus

²⁸ The term subjectobjects, in my understanding, reflects the fact that when different partial subjects affect each other in the matrixial borderspace, they are simultaneously the subjects or the trans-subjective transformation, as well as its objects – from the perspective of the rest of the subjects, participating in the co-poietic process of subjectification.

²⁹ Borderlinking refers to the linking of different matrixial borderspaces.

the mother/the world" (Ettinger 2006: 81), which is the mainstream individual subject of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, thus making the possibility to relate to others, in the sense of *rapport sexuel*,³⁰ beyond the desire for appropriation an integral part of subjectivity. It is important to emphasise that these co-emerging subjects are in no way fused and that the concept of the matrix has no implications whatsoever on women's rights over their own bodies, something Ettinger is very explicit about.

To further illustrate, the 'we' in this next quote implies a shared experience of interdependent everyday life, where the actions of the subjects involved are often the result of somebody else's needs, desires, interests. As such, who does what individually becomes an unclear and to a large extent redundant category of thinking the self.

He gets up at 7 normally, since he was one or so, then we did some housework, having breakfast, I mean first we have breakfast and then we were playing and I did some housework, washing up, these things, preparing lunch, at about 10 we went out to a playground, usually to the park (Dalma, Budapest, 32, son 3.5y, researcher at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Once again here the acts of carework the mother undertakes for her child are experienced as a shared activity – the constant presence of the infant, his being the recipient of the activities' results and the 'giving' ideological nature of motherhood as a relational existence all make the I's beyond the we hard to differentiate for the speaking subject. Women often started talking about their daily lives in the first person plural but then, startled by their own fluid sense of self, attempted, almost guiltily, to contain their speech using I ("we did some housework [...] I mean [...] I did some housework"), only to slip into an unidentified 'we' again. Another example is as follows: "No, I was going out, it's not like we didn't go out at all. It's just that pushing the pram [in the snow] took such effort and pain in the arms that I gave up. We haven't been to the public canteen³¹ at all this month. Last time I went on January 28th, it was horrible to push" (Mira, Sofia, 31, son 1.5y, credit risk management expert at a bank, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

³⁰ *Rapport sexuel*, or the sexual relation, for Lacan doesn't exist. That is not to say sexual enjoyment isn't obtained during (successful) intercourse, rather that each participant enjoys their own phallic jouissance, without relating to the other in any transformative sense. In Ettinger we have the possibility precisely for this kind of (erotic) transformations.

³¹ These are state-funded or private enterprises preparing age-appropriate meals for infants older than 10 months on a daily basis. They were introduced in state socialist Bulgaria in an attempt to socialise reproductive work and allow women to focus on their work, social activism and educating their own children.

A matrixial subject, Ettinger emphasises, is in no way fused and the uncomfortable slippages between the 'I' and the 'we' of new mothers show that the cooperative maternal subject is also a community of tension. Splits are integral to the cooperative subject of new mothers, which is an I-we-to-infinity and not an idyllic porous multiplicity. Yet loss and a consequent masculine desire libidinally charged by said loss are not the mechanisms through which it operates. As opposed to a Lacanian 'object a' (the trace of the forever lost union with the archaic mother), Ettinger proposes a "link a" – "a trail of separation-in-jointness that is not an incision or a cut from the archaic m/Other [...] It is modeled on a special kind of contact: traumatic differentiation-in-jointness of the I with the archaic m/Other" (Ettinger 2006: 124). Lack, which originates in the traumatic events of weaning or castration, refers to an on/off experience. That, which is desired, is never completely lost, but rather makes itself available to the desiring infant only at times. As such, the same traumatic process(es) approached through a different paradigm can be considered "reciprocal transformations in which the Thing is never completely lost, excluded or fused for all the different partners of the matrix" (Ettinger 2006: 68). The matrixial subject isn't a subject that doesn't lack, but it lacks differently. In my understanding, as a Deleuzian thinker, Ettinger puts the focus on the possibility for interrelations and intertransformations as opposed to repetition based on loss and lack, possibly because outside of a phallic paradigm 'having' and 'possessing' aren't constituted as a fantasy structural to subjectivity. The desire, corresponding to a 'link a' versus an 'object a' is a desire to connect with the other. As such "I am not only concerned with my own traumas; the encounter with the Other is traumatic to me, but I am also concerned with the trauma of the Other" (Ettinger 2006: 125). This dimension is often visible in the maternal I-we, where the painful experiences of mother and baby are so often joint – that isn't to say they are the same, but as the baby suffers (because the maternal cooperative subject is, ideologically, baby-led – I will get to this in Chapters 4 and 5), the mother co-suffers. This maternal empathic pain was often evoked by my interviewees when they talked about, for instance, their infants being sick. I argue, though, that often this different-but-joint pain is of a very mundane, embodied origin, rather than a traumatic matrixial encounter-event. For example, in this quote a mother speaks about her teething baby from a position of we: "We had two months, waking up at 7, but then teething started, in waves. We don't have a single tooth that came out without a sickness" (Mira, Sofia, 31, son 1.5y, credit risk management expert at a bank, Bulgarian, living with male partner). The pain the baby was experiencing due to teething is literally shared, yet not relieved by the mother, who has to suffer through endless sleepless nights. The source of the pain is different, but the experience of togetherness in it is joint and (re)structures the boundaries of self for the mother in becoming –

as Freud argues, the subject's awareness of themselves is largely connected to the experience of pain.

Finally, mothers often include and exclude others from the cooperative subject, unconsciously, yet strategically. For instance:

My grandmother, who is a pensioner, but she is very active, 75 years old, wanted us to move in with her, so that she can help with the baby, day and night, to give herself completely. But we didn't move in with her which was a source of conflict (Kalina, Sofia, 29, son 6m, lecturer in foreign languages at a university, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

In this case the 'we' represents the nuclear family that is being differentiated from another entity – a member of the extended family. Women often invoked a 'we' as a marker establishing a performative border between 'us' and 'them', whenever there was a conflict of interests with Others, perceived as unwanted intruders in the phantasmatically idyllic family. It is crucial to emphasise that these distinctions were arbitrary: the same woman who excluded her grandmother from the space of unproblematic togetherness of the family spoke from a position of a 'we' with her, when a conflict arose with her husband. Often women constructed a shared space with me as another mother and a researcher (a position with some authority in the motherhood discourse in their perception) where they were seeking reassurance about their childcare practices against the intrusion of institutions such as social workers and paediatricians or hostile family members.

It is worth mentioning that the baby wasn't always part of the cooperative subject either: the maternal 'we' appears as a conjugal 'we' as well, where the infant is constructed as an outsider to the intimacy shared between mother and father:

We talked about it with my husband and we decided that we would like him to have his own room because we would like to keep our privacy in bed so of course usually when Dancika [her son] wakes up we take him to our bed, just for 5-10 minutes, to have some fun, and also he usually wants to go everywhere, he is energetic and wants to go everywhere (Klára, Budapest, 30, son 1.5y, administrator at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Quite tellingly, the 'conjugal we' also seems to dissolve when there is a conflict and to reappear again victoriously once peace between the couple has been restored. The only woman who used the first person singular exclusively to describe her experiences of mothering pointed to a complicated and conflict-ridden relationship with her partner. It has to be noted also that she was one of the most well-off women I interviewed and a valued freelance professional. As such she was not experiencing any material need to rely on the extended family for childcare - she

had a paid baby sitter, something quite uncommon in both Hungary and Bulgaria - and she was not removed from the sphere of production, as she could set her own working hours to fit the 'needs' of her family. I return to the construction of family in Chapter 4.

3.3.2 The Haze of Subject De/formation

Even more interestingly, when I proceeded to the next section of the interview which included questions about the post-partum period and the hazy first few months with a new baby, most interviewees switched back to 'I'. For that reason, I argue the matrixial certainly has relevance for women's maternal subjectivities but the process of becoming a mother-in-becoming has several phases. While the period of late pregnancy is possibly important (sociological research such as mine can hardly serve as a test for such a hypothesis), I argue that the performative dimension of care for an infant within a paradigm of intersecting powerful discourses is equally crucial for the anti-individualist conceptualisation of motherhood. This is the period associated with post-natal depression and in some rare cases psychosis, with sleeplessness, physical pain, frequent, often almost incessant breastfeeding, interrupted by diaper changing and chores around the house demanded by the infant's need for a sterile environment, as constructed through a medical discourse. Miraculously, at the end of this traumatic stage, the maternal 'we' appears. I argue that this is indeed the crucial stage of the restructuring of these women's subjectivity: from a subject that conceptualises herself as an individual (that is, a subject, the self-awareness of which is conjured at the intersection of a particular set of discourses), to one that openly, if not necessarily consciously, thinks of herself in relational terms³². As one respondent talks about her feelings from the period:

[I felt] very strange, and the whole thing was kind of... *foreign, crazy*. Even during the days, I remember this period as... *beyond. As if I wasn't in this world*. I remember it as if it was in a fog, in which you start doing something and then it's already time for the next feeding. Very strange... I breastfeed him, hold him upwards to burp, it takes at least 10 minutes, it's already 50 minutes, afterwards I

³² Pregnancy may be considered an intermediate stage in this process. Certainly, there are plenty of discourses which regulate the pregnant woman's responsibilities, pleasures, relationship to the foetus growing inside her (obstetrics, anti/abortion law, political and religious debates on the issue etc.). Yet I think as most of my interviewees had relatively easy pregnancies and continued their employment, the patterns in their daily lives were not significantly disrupted and their sense of dependence on others did not change drastically. Furthermore, I argue, a lot of the 'care' a woman is supposed to take of her foetus during pregnancy can easily be accommodated within the discourse of 'care for the self' (Rose 1990): eating a balanced diet, cutting down on or giving up alcohol and cigarettes altogether, getting enough rest and doing appropriate exercise are all guidelines which concern the woman's well-being itself and fit into what is promoted as a 'healthy lifestyle', even if the new reason behind making such amends is 'the other within'.

put him down to change him, carefully, because he is a small baby, one thing after the other, until I manage to dress him, it becomes an hour. And then what remains is two hours until I “talk” to him, put him down to bed, calm him... Very little time, that’s what I remember, breastfeeding, breastfeeding. Stoian [her husband] does all the other work and I fall asleep, like in a movie. That’s what it was like. And I stay awake, because I am trying to make my days more active, and somehow I can’t... It was very hard to wake up. That was a very negative experience since the hospital: there was this artificial light in the next room, and it was so very ghostly (Kalina, Sofia, son 6m, lecturer in foreign languages at a university, Bulgarian, living with male partner, my emphases).

This foreign, crazy, out-of-this-worldly experience in my view points to women’s struggles to re-frame their selves in a situation where their time has been ‘seized’ (Verdery 1994) by another (discursive) reality. As Verdery argues, different conceptualisations of time work to take control of subjects on an everyday, embodied level. Through the “etatisation” of time which was realised through everyday time seizures such as endless waiting lines and festive manifestations, according to Verdery (1994), socialist Romania ‘immobilized’ the bodies of its citizens, in order to create passive subjects for the regime. As the interviewee suggests: “And I stay awake, because I am trying to make my days more active, and somehow I can’t”.

It also seems contradictory for her to talk about not having any time because her days are filled with endless chores and yet to perceive those days as inactive. If one looks at Cixous’ theory of sexual difference (Cixous 1976, 1981 1986, 1991, Renshaw 2009), active-passive is one of the structural dichotomies which organise the ‘world’ into a masculine and feminine economy:

Moreover, woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy [...] It is even possible not to notice that there is no place whatsoever for woman in the calculations. Ultimately, the world of being can function while precluding the mother (Cixous 1986: 64).

This isn’t a question of doing versus not doing but rather of what counts as active or passive, how these concepts are constructed and what discursive realities they are associated with. Active and inactive are terms which belong to, among other things, labour economics and describe people’s relationship to paid/formal employment. Inactivity typically refers to people who are neither formally employed nor are actively seeking employment, and those doing care work within the home, the vast majority of whom are women in the context I am researching, are a paradigmatic example. They are paradigmatic, because the work of women is not simply devalued (Crittenden 2001, Folbre 2001): instead I would go as far as claiming that it is structural to the way what work is imagined (Federici 2004). Kalina is not capable of making her days more active despite being incessantly busy, because the chores she must accomplish do not count as

(labour) activity under the gendered regime of work in the Empire of the Selfsame (Cixous 1986).³³ The desperate “somehow” she squeezes between describing her various inabilities (to make her days active, to stay awake) refers to the cognitive dissonance emerging from a lived experience which cannot be made sense of through the signifying practices available within the discourses she operates with. The mother, trying to stay awake, is nonetheless put to sleep³⁴: “like in a movie”, while He does all the work. At the same time, strikingly enough, during most of the interview she kept complaining that her partner wasn’t involved enough with housework and childcare. In Cixous’ terms being passive (inactive) and being put to sleep are related to the same process of appropriation of femininity by the masculine libidinal economy. A woman is absolutely passive, yet always doing the invisible, repetitive, never ending work of care which seizes her subject while she, blinded by 21st century discourses on gender equality, dared to imagine herself differently: active, public, self-centred (Hays 1996). She does not notice there was no time for her. Even when she does everything right, as she was told, it is all still “very strange”:

Oh, it was strange. It was strange. Because he [the child] didn’t want to sleep, I didn’t have enough breast milk and we needed to give [him] formula. The first 6 or 8 weeks. And after that I had [enough milk]. But he had a problem, he was spitting up till 8 months, it was very strange... we tried everything, we put books under the bed, he always cried, always, always and we didn’t know why... I remember a day he cried for more than 10 hours. Very strange. I asked my friend, I asked my mum – what, why? What should I do? I asked the doctor. And he told me – sorry, it’s normal, you should do everything, but... so I did everything normally but he was crying and crying (Nikolett, Budapest, 37, son 2.5y, librarian, Hungarian, living with male partner).

The seizure of time by everyday childcare work, I argue, structures women’s maternal subjectivities. Moreover, according to Lawler, what constitutes motherhood is being defined on the basis of the ‘needs’ of an other, which radically changes one’s experience of ‘normality’. This leads to a breach in the self-narrative through which lives are understood and constituted as coherent” (Lawler 2000: 157). The same respondent continues:

It was hard. And I always worried about something. About [him] crying, about going outside, about everything. I can’t tell you everything but it was a very special situation. I felt alone because my mum was there for only two weeks to help me, and my husband’s mother was strange. She was there for one week but I wanted

³³ The Empire of the Selfsame refers to the entire capitalist, masculinist, racist regime, which systematically robs women and minorities from the possibility of forming positive relationships with themselves and each other.

³⁴ See Cixous’ *Castration or Decapitation* (1981) where she talks about women’s role in fairy tales as always being put to sleep or taken to bed, immobilised by a masculine dream of absolute potency.

her to go away, it was not useful for me. So the first few weeks were very strange for me. And I asked my mum – how is this beautiful? What is beautiful about it? It was harder than beautiful. But later it became more beautiful than hard (Nikolett, Budapest, 37, son 2.5y, librarian, Hungarian, living with male partner).

In this self-haze (“beyond” as Kalina called it), another subject is starting to emerge, “more beautiful than hard”, through a performative relation to the heavily regulatory discourses on childcare. Interestingly, the only respondent who describes the first month as calm and unproblematic says the following: “I was really calm during the first month, everything was so natural...the animal instincts were doing the job [...] The first month he was sleeping and suckling at the same time, we let hours and hours pass this way” (Simona, Sofia, 29, son 10m, project coordinator at a cable operator, Bulgarian, living with male partner). In this account there is an immediate emergence of the ‘mother-child we’, explicated through the naturalisation of maternity and instinctual knowledge. The change is not experienced as a crisis but as an idyllic state of timeless togetherness at the end of which the ‘we-mother’ emerges triumphantly. Or as another woman, a self-proclaimed workaholic, who was working from home since the early days after the birth narrates the change:

We went through many phases until I changed myself – that is until I accepted the child is not an extra to my work but part of my life. It has to be integrated into my life, not mine into his, there is a difference but by all means I have to change my point of view... It was a gradual change (Gergana, Sofia, 29, son 5m, company owner, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

In the following quote another respondent spells out that through the ‘doings of motherhood’ one becomes a mother, a someone who she is, and that this can happen even *against herself*:

I don’t know, I am more... I have more [self-esteem] now but it isn’t because I find some great meaning in having become a mother. Simply *the fact I have become a mother is meaningful in itself*, it isn’t the ending of my life and my great deed. It is something that happened almost against *me*. That is – I hadn’t planned to have Bobi [her child], I was pregnant, I was doing everything when I was pregnant, and all that somehow, *I grew as I did it and I realised who I was through all that I was doing...* you do something, you have a baby, you don’t do anything, you don’t have a baby (Kalina, Sofia, son 6m, lecturer in foreign languages at a university, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Being through doing. The endless breastfeeding, food-preparation and/or shopping, diaper changing, putting the baby to sleep several times a day and night rituals, the outings, all the domestic chores surrounding the baby that my interviewees described in great detail ‘realise’ the new selves of those mothers.

However, the variations on these themes which I develop in the following chapters show the differences between women's activities while on leave from their paid jobs are systematic in ways which are culturally specific, classed and reflect their overall value systems which, of course, link to dominant conceptualisations of personhood. In other words, far from being random, these chores are the performative and transformative actualisations of powerful narratives of children's needs. As Steph Lawler writes: "theories of children's needs become so naturalised, so much part of 'common sense' that they cease to be recognizable as theories" (Lawler 2000: 144). Resistance to these theories is not uncommon "but the prescriptive, imperative nature of children's needs means that there is very little space in which to do so" (Lawler 2000: 145). Moreover, resisting as such was far from the agenda of the vast majority of my respondents. The child-centeredness by which they willingly abided is naturalised because, as the logic goes, "child-centeredness is, for the mother, the same as self-centeredness" (Lawler 2000: 150), this way making child-care narratives fit into a liberalist discourse of the importance of the project of care for the self (see Rose 1991). In Lawler's research, this process led to profound contradictions in women's self-perceptions and many of them talked about 'losing' their 'selves' in the process of catering for the 'becoming' selves of their progeny.

This, however, was not spelled out in the interviews I analysed. It could be speculated that this has to do with the post-socialist context of my research where the ideological character of liberalism is far less contested (or at least was until recently, certainly at the time when I did my research) than in the UK where Lawler did her work.³⁵ Nevertheless, the recurrent theme in my research was one of a drastic transformation, of new selves, where losses were spelled out, yet they were not framed as a loss of self. Interestingly, although the political premises of liberalism were largely naturalised in Bulgaria and Hungary by the time I was doing my fieldwork, the socialist remnants in the dominant modalities of personhood with their insistence on collectivity (Berdahl 2010, Fodor 2002, Patino 2008, Verdery 1994) were, I would argue, still salient and informing contemporary conceptualisations of selfhood. This theme will be developed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. The issue of contextualising subjectivity formation, however, leads me to Saba Mahmood's (2005) take on Butler's concept of performativity within non-liberal societies. At the core of Mahmood's critique of Butler's performativity lies the latter's conceptualisation of agency as agency-as-resistance. Its *raison d'être* is therefore the subversion of those social norms that constitute the agent her/himself. "Performativity is always carried out within a set

³⁵ What I am getting at here are the "inner contradictions" of liberalism, where resistance to ideologies is part of the ideology itself.

of already existent workings of power” (Butler 1993); it is the hard, monotonous, repetitive work at the assembly line of possible meanings, materialisations, ontologies or in Butler’s words: “it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (1990: 145).

Interestingly, Butler is willing to drop the intentionality from her conceptualisation of human agency, but the profoundly liberal and, as Mahmood argues, dichotomous vision of the subject’s relation to norms as either being repressed/produced by them or in one way or another accomplishing their subversion, remains at the centre of her performativity. This may be, as Mahmood reasons, a result of Butler’s own political investment in undermining heteronormativity. Butler’s theory, therefore, is not an overarching meta-narrative of the theoretical potential of the concept of performativity, but rather an ideologically charged use of it in a particular politico-historical context (Mahmood 2005).

Mahmood’s work consists of an ethnographic account of the mosque movement in Egypt. While analysing the participants’ practices of piety which aim at morally transforming the subjects of Egyptian society, the author raises important questions about “the constitutive relation between action and embodiment, resistance and agency, self and authority” (Mahmood 2005: 38) which is usually the driving force behind feminist analysis of similar non-liberal movements. By questioning the assumptions which lead some feminists to embark on their political project of gender equality and women’s liberation, Mahmood moves beyond humanist conceptualisations of production of the self at the intersection of resistance/subordination to and by dominant norms. Thinking the subject along the lines of doing and undoing norms follows a binary logic, which obscures the “multiple ways in which one inhabits norms” (Mahmood 2005: 15). Therefore, agency is being re-thought as a “modality of action” (Mahmood 2005: 157), which establishes some performative relation between a subject and a norm. In the case of the mosque movement, the performance (enactment) of norms aims at decreasing the juncture between the (idealised) norm and its inherently-prone-to-failure realisation:

What is consequential in this framework is not necessarily whether people follow the moral norms or not, but what relationships they establish between the various constitutive elements of the self (body, reason, emotion, volition and so on) and a particular norm. In this view, the specific gestures, styles, and formal expressions that characterize one’s relationship to a moral code are not contingent but a necessary means to understand the kind of relationship that is established between the self and structures of social authority, between what one is, what one wants, and what kind of work one performs on oneself in order to realize a particular modality of being and personhood (Mahmood 2005: 120).

In other words, agency within personhood cannot be separated from the specific modes of discursive subjectification at work within the context in question. To put it very simply, when my respondents from Budapest and Sofia passionately, indifferently, resistantly, stubbornly (and so on) engage with morally and ideologically charged activities such as, say, feeding an infant³⁶, they are exercising their agency as ‘modality of action’ to performatively construct themselves within a large, yet limited constellation of “culturally sanctioned femininities” (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001). Having acknowledged this, because by no means do I aim to dispute that mothering ideologies may be experienced by (some) women, myself included, as heavily oppressive, I would like this analysis to move ‘beyond’ the project of liberation. Since the goal of this chapter is to deconstruct the logic of contradictions and I do this through listening to the Mother, I will now attempt to show that maternal subjectivity is far less disconnected from women’s experiences as individual selves. The idea of ‘loss of self’ echoes a Freudian and Butlerian understanding of subjectivity as melancholic by definition and further, I would say, embeds loss as a constitutive element of every relationship, mother/child included. If a mother cannot lose the other, for she is now defined by her function to sustain it, she must, at least lose ‘herself’ – that is, a state of imagined unity must be disrupted in order for the new, maternal subject to emerge. In this sense the lost, abjected unity would be the self-sufficient, bound individual self of the childless woman.

As I have already mentioned, my interviewees do not invoke this image in their narratives of motherhood: instead they talk about a process of intense transformation and learning. A lot of the new techniques of selfhood they have realised are assessed as something which would come in very handy in managing life ‘outside the home’. Of course, one could argue the irretrievable loss of their ‘individual’ selves contradicts the dominant narrative of a coherent self from birth to death and it must be, therefore, disavowed. However, I think such an analysis would follow the masculinist logic of doing violence to women’s language as opposed to critical, yet supportive listening.

For example, when one respondent talks about her work and life as a PhD candidate before having a child, she contrasts the concreteness of motherhood with the abstract preoccupations of the job of a thinker. In relation to not focus properly on writing her thesis:

I was very disconnected from the meaning of the concrete little thing one has to do... I had lost the sense that a person has to be active, and he has to be active in

³⁶ It should be emphasised that each and every one of these time-consuming chores are explained as crucial for the proper psycho- and physiological development of the baby.

little things. For instance, let's say that if you eat an apple, you will feel good, because you feel like eating an apple instead of thinking, oh, now, he left me, how can this happen and how can I even be thinking about eating apples?, this is so vulgar... I was just floating in the clouds, either because he left me, that person X, or because I don't know if this is what I want to do now, is this really what I want to do? It is not very interesting. Maybe I want to do something else, let me think, let me waste some more time (Kalina, Sofia, son 6m, lecturer in foreign languages at a university, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

The question of activity and personhood keeps coming back in various ways in this extract: contradictory ways where Kalina struggles to integrate the knowledge that comes with a new modality of being into the dominant paradigm of selfhood. Some are abstract, some concrete (Cixous, 1986). Phallogocentric knowledge must be capable of abstraction in order to fantasise universality. The "concrete little thing", which brings immediate pleasure (eating an apple in particular, which in Cixous' essay *Extreme Fidelity* stands for allowing oneself a positive relationship with pleasure [Sellers 1994]) is juxtaposed to the insatiable melancholia that seems to accompany the production of knowledge within a masculine libidinal economy. Yet, precisely because it is organised around absence (a lost lover, a longing for something, anything else) it sabotages itself, forever pregnant with ideas, experiencing the pains of *active labour* yet unable to deliver. Quite literally, peace has to be made between the mother and the concrete knowledge she possesses, in order for a thesis to be born. In other words, the new 'person' of the mother does not appear to be radically disconnected from the old one who had lovers and wrote theory – it seems to be able to inform it in new ways. Lawler (2000: 157) writes:

If motherhood is tied to a form of femininity based on relationality, rather than autonomy, then autonomy is impossible from within this position. And because autonomy is held to be a normal and substantive state of personhood, then the take-up of the subject position "mother" – a position tied to relationality – evokes the sacrifice of personhood. If persons are centrally and fundamentally autonomous, mothers, existing only in relation to and in response to children's "needs", are going to have difficulties counting as persons.

And yet, and yet. As the theoretical part of this chapter shows, autonomy is only an ideological prerogative of (capitalist) personhood, a masculinist fantasy belonging to Cixous' Empire of the Selfsame, which does little more than sustain the system of classed, gendered and raced domination.³⁷ In the reality of my research, the contradiction between the maternal and the

³⁷ The "'sameness' and 'continuity' which constitute the sense of one's identity are ensured through a narrative of self, with the autonomy of personhood in the centre, from the cradle to the grave" (Lawler 2000: 157).

non-maternal self, feminist authors tend to write about is far less pronounced. The respondents often framed the transformative project of motherhood as a 'learning about myself' experience, knowledge that would help with various 'non-motherly' endeavours such as doing academic work.³⁸ Or as another respondent puts it:

I know myself better. It was a very interesting... it's a learning period for me. Because before him [her son] I didn't know things about myself. For example, respect. To respect things. About myself and about other people. He's teaching me, for example, respect and patience. To do things slowly, to see things in different ways. This is a glass [she shows it to me] but he sees these things [the drawings on it]. I should change my mind - to do things, to see things from somebody else's perspective (Nikolett, Budapest, 37, son 2.5y, librarian, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Following Baraitser (2009), I suggest approaching maternal subjectivity 'otherwise' than as a narcissistic investment or a phantasmatic union with the pre-oedipal mother and, I would add, an identity crisis in the life of an (adult) woman. Instead, I conceptualise it as a productive ethical encounter with transformative alterity. This way I set the stage for moving the focus of the analysis from 'the loss of self' to an analysis which weaves interruptions and continuities of selfhood into an interpretation of subjectivity beyond contradictions, irretrievable pasts and unattainable futures. I assume a position of affirmative theorising which recognises women's experience of motherhood as transformational as opposed to transitional. As Nikolett puts it, through the experience of seeing the world from the perspective of somebody else, one "learns" about herself, that is, achieves conscious access to what was already there but hasn't been recognised because of its non-dominant status in relation to the Law (that is, in Cixousian terms, the realm of the masculine economy). Motherhood destabilises the fantasy of unity of selfhood, it does not create a radically new self, subject to a radically new logic. Rather, if I reinterpret Baraitser, motherhood illuminates those instances where 'the compulsion to repeat' fails, thus erasing the ideological need of the Empire of the Self-Same to picture lives as singular trajectories (Lawler 2000). As Kalina says,

Keeping my previous life as it was, was not on my mind. Concerning life, I am the kind of person who has a life which is [always] changing but that doesn't mean it's not my life. My life changes all the time, and with every stage I am ready, I am happy to change it... what I want to do I will always be able to do while at the same time

³⁸ Interestingly, in the work of authors coming from the Anglo-American context such as Lawler (2000) and Hays (1996), their respondents often talk about experiencing a "loss of self" experienced together with motherhood. One could speculate about differences along the lines of the importance of individualism in the concept of personhood in classical liberal and post-socialist societies may lead to experiencing being traversed by the alterity of the child as more or less self-shattering.

fully adjust to the people around me (Kalina, Sofia, 29, son 6m, lecturer in foreign languages at a university, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Change is intrinsic to the lives of the women in my research, as is the relevance of people around them. One, who is bound to others is meant to flow as they move in and out of our (daily) lives, women's lives are based on the experience of "positive receptivity" (Cixous cited in Sellers 1994: 135). I interpret this as change, self-transformation which occurs through relationships which keep the other alive, relationships where transformational incorporation is achieved through a positive relationship to the inside, as opposed to the devouring assimilationist incorporation-as-appropriation Freudian mourning theory suggests.³⁹ For the women I interviewed, certainty, stability is an excess, a luxury, which, although in some instances desired, is ultimately unattainable. Here's what this mother has to say about the perceived need to have a certain (financial) security before having a child:

Obviously having a good job so you can go back to it after giving birth gives a certain security, if you have a good relationship instead of not having one is better... but if I look around, speaking of any of these – no. The way I perceive it- what I am saying is that... I am really not the type of person... I never have enough money, in terms of, I don't seem to have enough after 6 months, my relationships don't really last long which is... I get bored after a certain time, so I always have this *constant* feeling that everything is just so *temporary* (Bea, Budapest, 33, daughter 2, project coordinator at a cultural centre, Hungarian, single, living with daughter).

Another one adds: "A material base before having a child? Not necessary, there will always be someone to help if you are really in need" (Nadia, Sofia, 31, son 1y, senior expert at a state agency, Bulgarian, living with male partner). An economy where relationships have priority over careers and money is a topic brought up in most interviews, with some exceptions. And indeed, in those instances where mothers seem satisfied by the amount of childcare their male partners engage in, they talked of 'shared' parenting, of 'involvement', or they specifically outline the various mundane activities their partners regularly do. Whenever they are unhappy with the gender imbalance of the work done in the home, they mention men's 'socialisation' into a different value system in relation to care/work:

Well, it's a stereotype, a generalisation but it often happens. Of course, there are men who are more the taking care type, but those who are not, who were not educated this way, didn't grow up this way, they continue their work, they take 2 weeks leave, but already the fact that they go back to their work, they have many

³⁹ See also "Castration or Decapitation" (Cixous and Kuhn 1981) for a critique of the masculine bias in incorporation theory.

other things in mind (Kata, Budapest, 35, son 3y, lawyer, Hungarian, living with male partner).

The time-seizure new mothers are subject to is generally not present in their partners' lives or at least not to the same extent. They keep very literal connection to the masculine economy through their continuing involvement in paid work. On a more 'meta' level, as Cixous (1986) writes in *Sorties*, the basic problem with (masculine) subjectivity, organised around loss, is that at the symbolic core of its desire for self-same clarity is the fear of castration, which it tries to cover up by a relationship to difference, to otherness, which must return some benefit to the self. A change in lifestyle is not desirable if it will lead to the loss of a controlled environment. In the words of Kalina, describing her husband's fears during her pregnancy:

He was afraid of many things, of this new role of his and if he is delegated things that are not his business.⁴⁰ In general he is sceptical about everything that can stand in the way of the order of his life, his own life. That is, first comes *his* life, and then family life, which unfortunately is the other way round for me (Kalina, Sofia, 29, son 6m, lecturer in foreign languages at a university, Bulgarian, living with male partner, emphasis in original).

The father's relationship with others, no matter how close, is subordinated to the relationship he has with himself. At the same time, care work is conceived as something which is possibly not his business.⁴¹ Care, as the quintessential gift of literally keeping the other alive (the centre of the feminine economy), isn't something he conceives of as his business. The practical result many of my respondents talked about is that their partners resisted change, perceiving the time spent with family as "wasted precious time" (Diana, Sofia, 35, daughter 1, civil servant, Bulgarian, living with male partner). It is crucial to underscore that not all men were described by their partners along these lines just as not all women accepted the fluctuations of maternity unproblematically. Yet, most likely because they had little choice, they learned to embrace the new status quo and re/integrate it into their life (narratives).

⁴⁰ In Bulgarian, where this quote comes from, the word substituted for 'business' in order to keep the meaning of the expression is the same word as 'work' and 'labour'. In this sense, the argument here highlights once again the connection between the gender of work, gendered work and the different libidinal economies.

⁴¹ The gendered nature of the work involved in sustaining a family with children is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

3.4 Summary

How the status quo differed in the two countries, and how those socio-historical differences structured the fluid maternal subjectivities of my respondents and who was, in practical terms, part of their cooperative maternal subjects 'otherwise', will be addressed in the next chapter. This chapter has attempted to show how the ways in which the subject is understood, both in everyday life and in high theory, including a lot of feminist theory, is often unable to contain and appropriately represent the experiences of new mothers. As such, they struggle to articulate their lives through the structures of language/s, which privilege a masculine vantage point on life. These struggles are strikingly similar across my interviews, regardless of the fact that three different languages (Bulgarian, Hungarian and English) were involved in the performance/ expression of these maternal stories. As such, and despite the multiple location-specific difference, I will address in the chapters to come, practically all my respondents pointed to a breach in their narrative of self in the first months of motherhood. That rupture, however, was not experienced as a loss of self, as Lawler (2000), among others, claims, but rather as a 'haze' of self re-articulation which illuminated that change, fluidity and multiplicity are intrinsic to a woman's life, mostly out of necessity. I showed how the experiences of motherhood allowed my respondents to gain a different perspective on their lives and their selves prior to reproducing and, in some cases, like those of Kalina and Nikolett, even become aware of the ideological limitations previously imposed on them, which they now had an idea how to resist. According to my interviewees, their male partners, however, did not seem to go through such profound changes, despite having become fathers. This points not only to the gendered nature of parenting, but to the sexual difference at the core of subjectivity formation.

In that sense, theoretically speaking, this chapter has aimed to shed light on the perspective of the mother in the first days of what is understood in psychoanalysis as the crucial early period of subject formation. At least in classical psychoanalysis, that perspective has been non-existent, and the effects of this lack can be felt until the present day in the texts of feminist authors informed by the Freudian/Lacanian paradigm such as Judith Butler.

In the rest of the thesis, I will use this conceptualisation of maternal subjectivity as 'cooperative' and 'otherwise' to critically approach the social, historical and cultural context which also framed the different ways my respondents from Budapest and Sofia lived their post-socialist, maternal condition.

Chapter 4

The History of Motherwork in Hungary and Bulgaria: State Socialist Inequalities, Democratic Unfreedoms and the 'Natural' Division of Labour

4.1 Fractal Distinctions, Real Differences – Theorising Public and Private in Budapest and Sofia

In this chapter I look at the motherwork, which lies at the heart of Bulgarian and Hungarian women's maternal subjectivities, through the lens of Gal and Kligman's (2000) 'fractal' conceptualisation of the public/private divide. The symbolic public/private division lies at the heart of both the hierarchical understandings of the value of labour and gender formation. The public/private dichotomy is a central organising principle in gender regimes around the world. However, those domains should not be understood as strict and immutable. In fact, a contextual, semiotic approach should be applied to their analysis in order to avoid the imposition of historical western designs on non-western locations. If the labels public and private are not attached to specific places or spaces but are understood as discursive distinctions, a more nuanced analysis of gender construction under different political regimes will emerge.

While I take the hierarchical relationship between paid and unpaid labour to be central to both the symbolic construction and the everyday organisation of motherhood, I try to flesh out the categories deployed in Budapest and Sofia locally. Such an approach falls under the umbrella of treating mothering as culturally and historically specific, yet globally informed, in a system of "global power inequities" (Faircloth et al. 2013: 4). The global perspective recognises that, since the 1950s, the raising of children has, with different intensity, fallen under the scrutiny of experts and become the subject of state policies around the world, who at the same time conflate 'good enough' parenting with middle-class parenting (Furedi 2013: iv). Currently the focus in the field of parenting studies falls more on the interplay between global and local childcare designs, and the (identity work) strategies parents deploy to resist or challenge an ever-increasing demand for intensive parenting. While this is undoubtedly an important element of my research, I follow Mahmood's understanding of (parental) agency as a contextualised modality of action beyond resistance/compliance with social norms (2004). Therefore, I am

more interested in how motherhood and 'proper' femininity are being produced in the process of constructing and controlling desirable childcare practices and the particular ways historical, material causes produce ideological consequences. This chapter constructs a narrative about the historical design of appropriate, middle-class Hungarian and Bulgarian motherhoods, through the lens of locally specific divisions of the so-called public/private.

Perhaps a logical starting point for the endeavour would be to mention that in both languages the colloquial expression for going on maternity leave is 'staying home with the baby'. Home, one would assume, is the epitome of the private sphere, especially when child-rearing enters the picture. What activities one engages with when 'at home', how mothers from Budapest and Sofia negotiate the cityscapes of their respective locations and their relationships with friends and family in order to construct their temporary 'retreat to the private' in socially acceptable and personally meaningful ways are all at stake here. As I have previously argued, the nuances in different ideological contexts can produce very different constructions of motherhood and femininity. Indeed I have suggested elsewhere that "These constructions [...] operate with a notion of (female) subjecthood which is directly related to the multiple ways in which the hierarchical relationship between the value of 'productive' and 'reproductive' work is continuously re-negotiated in women's narratives about everyday life" (Cheresheva 2015: 148). The distinction between productive and reproductive labour is structural to the very existence of the public/private divide, which in turn, according to Gal and Kligman (2000), is central for the organisation of gendered relations. However, different authors remain unclear about what it actually entails: interactions between individuals in actual spatial locations (such as the home or political assemblies etc.), between institutions (the state, the market and so on), or even between debates concerned with political action (ibid). Building primarily on Habermas and Arendt, Gal and Kligman enrich the typological and historical approaches to the public/private divide with a semiotic understanding where social actors continuously change the meaning of the dichotomy via their everyday actions.

The public/private divide is then itself part of the ideological paradigm that it is trying to explain, and the two sides of the dichotomy mutually constitute each other. It is not simply that women and their non-paid labour are excluded from what is considered public; rather it "is the very exclusion of women and the domestic that produces a bourgeois public space" (Gal and Kligman 2000: 40) where important, valuable work is done by men. The activities of women in the household not only help to shape the idea of what productive labour is, but also sustain the system where care work freely given to male labourers allows them to fully focus on their paid

jobs. While very different in content, the public/private divide survived the change of capitalism to socialism in Eastern Europe in the 1940s, which points to Gal and Kligman's argument that

the public/private dichotomy is best understood as a discursive distinction that, once established, can be used to characterize, categorize, organize and contrast any kind of social fact: spaces, institutions, groups, people's identities, discourses, activities, interactions, relations (ibid: 41).

Furthermore, the public/private opposition is a "fractal distinction" (ibid: 41): one can reproduce it perpetually in specific socio-historical contexts, creating a public in the private and vice versa within identities, activities, and interactions. Gal and Kligman provide a compelling example about dissident anti-communist politics being located in the home. Dissidents used to gather in each other's houses to engage in anti-regime activities. That is, politics, the paradigmatic 'public', in fact resided in the home – the most traditional private space. At the same time, while the official party discourse on women treated them as active political agents of the 'public', in those 'private' activist spaces their role was usually a very gender-normative one: to serve food and drinks to the 'public' men.

In this chapter I aim to turn this logic around and, instead of describing how gender and mothering ideologies in different CEE contexts produce their own public/private separations, I build on Gal and Kligman's insight that the public/private distinction is structural to gender ideologies. In that sense wherever dilemmas of public/private emerge within childcare routines, they are a matter of managing the burden of one's appropriate gendered performance. To give an example, my interviewees displayed perpetual concerns over where and how to handle the process of breastfeeding which requires a certain level of baring of the maternal body. A bare breast in a restaurant with a baby attached to it then is never just a breast in an eating establishment: it is a contested performance of motherhood which challenges and reshuffles the gendered dimensions of the public/private divide. Gal and Kligman's semiotic approach is interested not so much in specific public/private distinctions, but in the process that creates them. I, on the other hand, am interested in the particularities of those fractal distinctions in my two research locations, because I assume the way they construct numerous publics and privates will shed light on a set of aspects of two historically produced, culturally specific mothering ideologies. I will now turn to the specific ways those tensions of public/private were performed in Budapest and Sofia and try to link them to the corresponding constructions of appropriate motherhood.

My data show that women on maternity leave in the two locations rationalise their reduced financial contribution to the family differently and engage in different strategies to counter its effects on both the consumer capacity of the family and the repercussions it has for their sense of personhood and value as people. The public/private problems of 'staying at home with the baby' also extend beyond issues of financial and other contributions to the family. As I have established in the Introduction, during the interviews Hungarian and Bulgarian mothers talked about their social lives in strikingly similar terms, yet those terms were infused with drastically different meanings when it came to practices on the ground. For example, Bulgarian mothers would often talk about feeling socially isolated when they saw friends in the presence of their children or alone three or four times a week. At the same time Hungarian mothers considered socialising once a week a sign of a busy social schedule. Similarly, Bulgarian mothers would claim they are solely responsible for the care of their babies when in fact grandparents stepped in during evenings several times a week. Hungarian mothers on the other hand considered grandparents involved if they were ready to take over childcare in emergency situations (such as a visit to the doctor) or on a monthly or so basis.

Before further delineating the discursive differences in everyday practices of childcare in the two locations, I will now try to shed light on the historical construction of the meaning of housework, childcare and paid work in the two countries, and relate those to changes in their welfare regimes.

4.2 The History of Now: State Socialism and the Shaping of the Good Mother

Childrearing, as a discourse, is linked to many other dominant discourses on a national level – the discourses on female employment and/or the division of labour, the discourses on welfare, the discourses on the future of the nation, the medical discourse, etc. As such, it is impossible and even counterproductive to try to find a point of origin of the differences between Hungary and Bulgaria; however, a systematic genealogical approach (Foucault 1972) can help understand the development of these two versions of post-socialist 'good' motherhood.

Gal and Kligman (2000) provide evidence that, prior to the establishment of the state socialist regimes, family life in the two countries followed somewhat different patterns. In Central Europe the middle-class family of the late-19th to early-20th century resembled that of the bourgeois west. However, the changing patterns in agriculture where peasants had to now work for the manor allowed for a different conceptualisation of public/private in rural areas. Work for

the manor, essentially waged work, was devalued compared to work for the family which was cherished and considered indispensable by the peasantry.

Another regional dimension of difference emerges apart from the classed one: Gal and Kligman mention that in the Balkans married peasant women often had access to work and resources distribution within the family due to their high involvement in agricultural work, which was conducted by and for the family unit. Prior to state socialism the south of CEE remained largely agricultural. According to Brunnbauer and Taylor (2004), in 1944, 75 percent of the population of Bulgaria lived in villages. Countries like Hungary, on the other hand, experienced significant industrialisation and therefore experienced the formation of a working class with its own set of gendered relations, which state socialism later set out to incorporate and manage.

In the light of all this, the public/private divide currently underlying CEE's production of gender difference has to be understood historically, as a process where state socialism itself played a key, albeit not exclusive, role. I will now focus on the changes introduced by state socialist welfare policies because, despite the differences of previous periods, during the communist⁴² era Hungary (1949–1989) and Bulgaria's (1946–1989) policies concerning maternity leave underwent similar restructuring as an attempt to boost drastically plummeting birth rates.

In the late 1960s both states introduced paid maternity leave up to the third year of life of the child, thus becoming the two state socialist countries with the longest leaves in the whole eastern bloc.⁴³ In 1985, once again this leave was reconstituted, this time linking benefits to women's wages (see Haney 2002 for Hungary and *Semeen Kodeks* 1985 for Bulgaria). These changes occurred in a cultural context where, due to insufficient resources and housing shortages social interdependencies both between people and between families and the state emerged, or as Gal and Kligman put it, "the private nested inside the public" (2000: 50). Socialist people understood the state to be a powerful (public) 'them' which in a way had to be overcome and its resources channelled for the completion of the private, familial endeavours of the informal economy. The two spheres had different moral codes too – while selflessness, honesty

⁴² In the rest of the thesis the adjectives 'communist' and 'state-socialist' are often used interchangeably. While 'state-socialist' is my preferred term to address the pre-1989 regimes in CEE, 'communist' was the term often used in official discourses at the time. The ruling party in Bulgaria was indeed called Bulgarian Communist Party. Socialism was understood to be a step towards the final goal: full communism. In particular when I talk about the official ideologies of the time, the term communist may be expected to make an appearance.

⁴³ For data on maternity leave in the rest of the socialist countries see Haney (2002).

and reliability were crucial in the private sphere, duplicitous behaviour was perfectly acceptable against an all-controlling state machine.

Such a separation isn't so easy and straightforward to make, however. The private and the public spheres were comprised of the same people, engaged in their multiple social roles. The beloved uncle, on whom the family relied for help with finding construction materials for the family holiday home, was at the same time the director of the brick factory, appointed directly by the communist party and feared by the workers. Similarly, the 'lazy and irresponsible' employee was not putting too much effort in at work because her nights were spent providing care for her ailing grandparents in the nearby village.

The 'private' sphere also kept relying on women's reproductive work contributions despite the official regime's gender equality stance. Simultaneously, it was symbolically re-signified as a place where dissident men did important 'public' organising against the state (Gal and Kligman 2000, Goven 2000). Ironically, while women's unpaid work was exploited, women themselves were often associated with the socialist father-state which provided them with extensive maternity and other benefits. The socialist state empowered women via those benefits, thus 'emasculating' its men, who lost their role of providers for the family (Verdery 1996). In this interesting political amalgam, women occupied a space in between private and public. However, despite it being quite different from the understanding of the relationship between public/private and masculine/feminine in liberal societies (where theories about the social contract come from), womanhood was still devalued and both symbolically and materially subjugated to the masculine position (see Cixous 1986).

During the entire socialist era, the drudgery of housework and childcare fell on women and in countries like Bulgaria - where women's role as activists⁴⁴ was heavily emphasised by the state - it was often grandmothers who provided families with much-needed care work. The female 'brave victim'/'superwoman' who embodied the contradiction of taking communist ideals of gender equality seriously while at the same time resenting the amount and various kinds of work the state imposed on her existed in parallel to a socialist husband, who, while professional at work usually acted as a 'big child', useless and incompetent, around the house. (Verdery 1994 and 1996, Gal and Kligman 2000). Communism was not particularly interested in men's roles within the family. Occasionally socialist fatherhood was mentioned (Gal and Kligman 2000) but

⁴⁴ This is the formulation used by the socialist state. Women could be mobilised to do all kinds of community work, which was termed social activism.

while the regime tenaciously insisted on women's triple roles within society (worker, mother, social activist), men were portrayed as professionals almost exclusively. Despite its progressive stances on many issues, state socialism never questioned a perceived *natural difference* between men and women, which was embedded in the organisation of both productive and reproductive labour. Sectors in production were gendered, as well as work hierarchies, in ways not dissimilar to those in the capitalist west. Better paid jobs in heavy industries were masculinised, and laws even prohibited women from entering those spheres as the work was deemed 'too harsh' for the 'weaker sex', while jobs which required repetitive, manual labour and care work were feminised. Higher on the career ladder in every sector, men were over-represented in senior positions, while lower ranks of the same profession were disproportionately occupied by women (Daskalova 2000, Fodor 2003, Gal and Kligman 2000).

However, within these common ideological and material changes Bulgaria and Hungary exhibited profound differences in their respective gender regimes as well. As Speder (2009) claims, although the two countries faced similar socio-economic problems, they were approaching them from different ideological (micro)paradigms. Kotzeva argues that in Bulgaria under state socialism two antagonistic visions of femininity coexisted. These were "the socialist Amazon" (Kotzeva 2007: 83) – the heroic, socially active figure of the communist project, described as a "virile, conscientious worker" (ibid: 85) and usually operating heavy machinery in the visual imagery of communism – and the caring motherly woman – the bearer of the children of the socialist nation (see also Verdery 1994).

According to Haney (2002), on the other hand, Hungary went through three broad periods of social assistance schemes and family policies, operating with corresponding definitions of femininity. According to her, Hungary moved from a 'welfare society' which defines women as workers, mothers, wives and family members from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, through a 'maternalist' regime which puts emphasis on women's social contributions as mothers from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, towards a liberal one which eventually defines need exclusively in material terms after 1985. In the first period social workers tried to provide women (especially mothers) in difficult situations with stable jobs and secure the participation of their extended families in caring for their children. During the second period all mothers, regardless of occupation, marital and social status, received maternity leave benefits for three years after giving birth. In the last years of state socialism, women who sought the help of social workers were subjected to means tests and only provided with financial assistance if their income was under a certain amount. These conceptualisations of the roles of women follow the overall

economic needs of the Hungarian state and can be seen very clearly in the family codes - collections of laws related to the family - introduced in the 1940s, 1960s and 1980s.

Haney (2002) argues that the introduction of the three-year-long maternity leave in Hungary in 1968 was partly an attempt to push women out of the labour force as a response to the increasing surplus of workers. Ideologically, women's roles as mothers were emphasised at the expense of their roles as workers. Social policies started targeting mothers as a group, while putting their childcare practices under strict state surveillance. Through domesticity tests done by social workers, coupled with the sudden rise of Freudian psychologists' participation in the childcare/motherhood discourse, the 'good mother mould' was discursively produced in the 1970s (Haney 2002, Speder 2009). Childcare was constituted as exclusively women's responsibility but it went further than that. Different state actors in fact discursively defined and codified in social service practices what proper mothering entailed: keeping an orderly flat, cooking for the family, spending time interacting one-on-one with children, being involved in their school and extracurricular activities. At the same time women had always to maintain gender-appropriate behaviour – not going out at night, not drinking alcohol etc. Of course, this process is not unique to Hungary; such practices were encoded in the activities of welfare workers elsewhere too: for instance the US and western Europe in the 1920s, where middle-class women organised visits to poor neighbourhoods to 'educate' working-class, non-white and immigrant women about the 'right' ways to raise a family (Haney, 2003). However, as Haney shows, despite the similarities to western welfare models, Hungary exhibited significant differences too. Most importantly, the 'maternalism' embedded in the Hungarian welfare practices of the 1970s came after years of female participation in the public sphere while, Haney (2003) argues, the activities of women's organisations in the 1920s aimed to shed light on women's contributions as wives and mothers as an attempt to gain the vote. Therefore, unlike in the west this 'retraditionalisation' of women's social roles was not an attempt at their inclusion in the political sphere but rather a "reprioritization" of their roles (Haney 2002: 103). Even more to the point of this research, this situation diverged significantly from what was going on in Bulgaria around the same time.

Bulgaria also changed its family codes around the 1970s but no comprehensive research has been done to explore the discourses (on mothering, childcare, welfare, womanhood, etc.) surrounding those legislative changes. However, analysis of the maternity leave regulations suggests reforms had a somewhat different ideological background. First of all, while a long leave was indeed introduced in 1968, should a woman have gone back to work prior to the end

of the leave she received her full wage plus 50 percent of the minimum wage (Kotzeva 2007). Therefore, one could extrapolate that the Bulgarian policy aimed to tackle dropping birth rates by providing financial incentives for women to have children rather than limiting their participation in the labour force. Special 'prizes', financial and symbolic ones, such as the status of "Heroic mother" or the awards "For Motherhood" and "Maternal Glory", were introduced for mothers with three or more children, emphasising their role as both working women and heroic bearers of the nation (Brunnbauer and Taylor 2004: 299-300, Ghodsee 2014). At the same time when the child-rearing discourse in Hungary was dominated by Freudian psychologists' views on the importance of child-mother bonding interjecting a great deal of mother blame into the culture of caring for children (Haney 2002), in Bulgaria the opinions of party leaders and pedagogues dominated the corresponding discourse (Brunnbauer and Taylor 2004: 293-4). Families were instructed to be stricter with their children, demanding their help with household chores, thus teaching them to be hard working and diligent future members of the socialist society (Brunnbauer and Taylor 2004). Hence, the regime emphasised the maternal role of women but without significantly de-emphasising their role as workers. At the same time, as Ghodsee (2014) writes, due to the clever leadership of the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement (CBWM), the official body of the Bulgarian Communist Party, dealing with the so-called woman's question, the double burden of housework was consistently made apparent in public discourse.

An analysis of *Zhenata Dnes*,⁴⁵ CBWM's monthly periodical, from 1968 (the year when the long maternity leave was introduced) shows that the maternal role of women did not coincide automatically with their role as housewives as it did in Hungary (Anachkova 1995). On the contrary, a number of articles in the magazine accentuate the differentiation that should be made between the two: "Order and cleanliness may be pleasant but the drudgery surrounding them can be paralyzing. Happy, relaxed, cultured adult people are the basis for successful family life" (Anon. 1968: 20, my translation). This idea is implied in a lot of the practical advice given to women. The clever socialist woman manages through organisation and delegation of duties: getting food from canteens, using technology and teaching her children and husband to participate in the housework are promoted as correct choices. But most of all "household chores should be secondary" (Anon. 1968: 21) and free time for culture and pleasure appears to be cherished. Due to the continued work of CBWM, eventually in 1973 Politburo, the Communist

⁴⁵ The Woman Today

Party's principal policy-making committee, found itself pressured to issue a decision towards "enhancing the role of women in the building of a developed socialist society" 'Concept of Increasing the Female Role as Worker, Mother and Social Activist in Building the Developed Socialist Society' which valorised women's roles as both workers and mothers" (Ghodsee 2014: 554). The decision recognises that the reproductive work of women is an obstacle for the development of their social and labour activities as well as their opportunities for professional development and their overall personal growth (Sharkova 2012).

Late socialism in the 1980s did not redefine these constructions of femininity significantly; however, a deeper focus on the 'natural' child-rearing function of women was further emphasised in both countries. 'Mature' socialism was critical of the 'optimism' of its 1940s counterpart which, supposedly, in its hopeful and perhaps rather naïve belief in the emancipation of women through paid labour, failed to secure the growing birth-rate the economy required. Instead of focusing on the failure of communist states to socialise childcare to a satisfactory degree, perhaps not surprisingly the blame fell on women's insufficient commitment to giving birth to and mothering the children of the nation (Anon. 1968, Goven 2000, Haney 2002).

4.3 From COMECON⁴⁶ to the EU: Good Motherhood in Transition

The profound implications of these ideological framings are visible after the fall of the communist regime as well, in two surveys from the early 1990s (cited in Fodor 2005 and Kotzeva 2007). Seventy-three percent of Hungarian women claimed that being a housewife is a valid and satisfactory social position for a woman, while at the same time only 20 percent of Bulgarian women responded that they would rather stay at home given the financial opportunity.

As Fodor (2005) notes, more often than not, statistics are not indicative of what people actually think but rather of what they feel they should be thinking. In other words, statistics reveal discursively produced values and social meanings. For this research it is not that important whether Hungarian women actually retreated to the household or whether Bulgarian women didn't, although some statistical evidence about this can be found in the labour force participation rate of the two countries in 1990. These stood at 57 percent in Bulgaria and 47 percent in Hungary despite overall unemployment being higher in Bulgaria (Speder 2009, UN

⁴⁶ The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, comprised of the CEE socialist countries, under the egis of the Soviet Union.

Statistics Division 2010). The more significant issue is that in Hungary apparently full-time motherhood was valued, while in Bulgaria it was generally considered a personal failure (see Kotzeva 2007).

On the level of public politics those attitudes were visible, too. Joanna Goven (2000) argues that throughout the 1980s Hungarian official discourse openly berated professional women, while promoting a 'good wife-mother-caregiver' model of womanhood. A certain "scientific antifeminism" (Goven 2000: 288) emerged, which used different pseudo-scientific methods to deem female full employment 'irrational'. Dissident discourses did not provide a space for women's liberation either: as already mentioned, during the final stage of the state socialist regime, Hungarian "antipolitics" (Gal and Kligman 2000) idealised the private sphere, which was understood as a refuge from the oppressive state apparatus. Women who did not want to accept their 'natural' role as carers in the dissident private sphere, which was gendered along the lines of masculine political resistance and feminine domestic work, were considered dangerous allies of the communist state.

The good wife-mother-caregiver thus remained the norm for Hungarian femininity with the nationalist opposition openly calling for women to return to the home in the first post-socialist election campaign in 1990. Liberals kept their focus on individual human rights, which, predictably, remained (gender)blind to the specific issues women were facing during the transition period. The socialist party was the only party that kept the 'woman question' on their agenda but only on the level of rhetoric. In fact, during the so called parliamentary 'parental leave debate' in 1993, Hungarian politicians of all parties spoke of a so-called "natural division of labour" and defended mothers' 'right' to stay at home against international funding bodies such as the World Bank, the representatives of which advocated the creation of more crèches and kindergartens with the money rescinding long maternity leaves would save. The unquestionable need of children under the age of three to be with their mothers was spelled out repeatedly and motherwork was implicitly recognised as work as women on leave from their jobs not only retained their maternity benefits but became entitled to pension benefits accrued during this time as well. There was a catch, however, which clearly differentiated between mothers along class and racial lines or, as contemporaneous politicians tended to put it, 'needy' families versus the 'right' families (Glass and Fodor 2007, Goven 2000) to reproduce the nation:

only previously employed women could claim the TGYÁS/GYED⁴⁷ benefit and make use of the full opportunities this kind of leave provided. Unemployed mothers were entitled to another kind of benefit called GYES,⁴⁸ but this did not entitle them to pension benefits. In that sense motherwork was work only if it was done *instead of* a paid job and by an employable mother who, however, 'naturally' prioritised her child's well-being over her career. Those women, although of course not exclusively, primarily belonged to the emerging Hungarian middle class and were instinctively recognised by social workers and paediatricians as legitimate maternal subjects. These subjects were in a position to comply, financially, culturally and time-wise, with their expectations of appropriate childcare but also to concurrently re-shape those discursively constructed expectations via their everyday practices (Hays 1996).

Moreover, in 1996, when then Minister of Finance Lajos Bokros made his infamous attempt to subject maternity benefits to means tests (thus jeopardising the 'right' of middle-class women to paid parental leave), political parties had to realise that cutting these benefits may have impeded their ability to win elections. During the debates surrounding the 'Bokros package' many conservative politicians deemed the change unconstitutional, claiming the state had a responsibility to support the Hungarian family (that is, the 'right', white middle-class Hungarian family) as a way to get out of the perceived demographic crisis which had dogged the country since the 1960s (see Haney 2002 and 2003, Speder 2009). Thus, the 'long-leave mother home-centred policy model' (Kovacheva et al. 2011) remains largely unquestioned in dominant political discourses up to the present day.

As such, and similar to the socialist era, after the fall of the regime, it seemed that although the two countries faced similar problems, they were approaching them from different angles. Hungary had an established ideological paradigm concerning motherhood and not enough means to support it, while Bulgaria had financial problems and emerging ideologies to justify the drastic measures adopted to resolve them. As Braithwaite et al. (2000) show, between 1993 and 1995 Hungary and Bulgaria were on opposite ends of a range among a number of transitional post-socialist economies they examine, with expenditures on family benefits and social assistance of respectively 5 and 2 percent of the GDP (see also Kovacheva et al. 2011). The

⁴⁷ A new mother on TGYÁS/GYED is currently entitled to 70 percent of her salary for six months, then 70 percent for a further eighteen months. However, this payment cannot exceed 70 percent of the minimum wage multiplied by two (i.e. approx. 375 euro a month) (Kovacheva et al. 2011).

⁴⁸ GYES is a universal childcare benefit, available to unemployed Hungarian mothers, which amounts to a flat-rate payment of approximately 90 euro per month, for three years. Women on TGYÁS/GYED are entitled to a year on GYES as well, after their 2-year better paid leave is over. GYES is transferable to fathers and grandparents as well but only after the child has reached one year of age.

fact that at the time Hungary's GDP per capita was more than double than Bulgaria's should also be taken into account. Further, as Braithwaite et al. make clear, the methodologies used in the household surveys in the two countries cited above (Speder 2009, UN Statistics Division 2010) do not take inflation into consideration, they just use nominal values. When the fact that Bulgaria went through hyperinflation in the mid-nineties while Hungary had a fairly stable inflation rate (even if the rate itself was high) in the same period is taken into account, the disparity between the real value of maternity leave benefits in the two states becomes even clearer. In my view, these differences have had a profound impact on how (early) motherwork is conceived and executed in practice in the two countries now, even if policies on paper appear similar.

After 1989, Bulgaria took a severe neoliberal turn, transforming its previously generous maternity scheme into what Braithwaite et al. (2000) call a system of 'irrelevant' social assistance – small benefits to few recipients. The failure of the state to adjust the benefits to surging prices, which eventually escalated into the aforementioned hyperinflation in 1996, made these completely impossible to rely on. The grey economy, which meant that most people employed in the private sector paid social security contributions according to the minimum wage while *de facto* receiving much higher salaries, further undermined the significance of state aid. As Daskalova (2000: 347) argues, the law from 1993 kept maternal benefits for 2 years as introduced in 1985, but inflation reduced them to "practically nil". As a result, most women aimed to return to work as soon as possible after giving birth. "The collapse of Bulgaria's social system" (ibid.) resulted in expenditures being cut on institutional childcare as well, thus further reinforcing the trend of grandparents, and specifically grandmothers, becoming the primary carers for small children. Indeed, currently Bulgarian law allows for grandparents to receive parental leave benefits after the first six months of the child's life, provided they are employed (Kovacheva et al. 2011, Robila 2010).⁴⁹

Ideologically, these changes in Bulgaria were accompanied by a discursive fascination with the US amid strong propaganda that the free market relations present overseas would automatically bring democracy and prosperity to the country (Smollett 1993, Weiner 2007). Neoliberal sentiment took over many national discourses but most importantly it worked for the erasure of people's sense of entitlement. Women's entitlement to decent maternity benefits was framed as a socialist privilege in opposition to the newly promoted individualism (see Ghodsee

⁴⁹ Hungary also provides such an option, but only when it comes to GYES (the universal allowance amounting to about 90 euro per month) and after the child's first year of life (Kormányablak, n.d.).

2005, Kotzeva 2007). As the single (male) breadwinner model was impossible due to low wages, women's retreat to the household was never even a discursive option.⁵⁰ Rather, the dual model of a male breadwinner and a female breadwinner-carer from state socialism remained, this time making childcare mostly a private, familial matter, but the definition of family included grandparents and sometimes other relatives as well (BG Mama Forum n.d., Kovacheva et al. 2011, Sainsbury 1994). During the period of *Acquis Communautaire*⁵¹ adoption prior to EU accession in 2007 Bulgaria reformed its parental leave scheme in ways which complied with the Union's gender equality legislation. Labour law became more strictly implemented, thus mitigating to some extent the effects of the grey economy, especially when it came to middle-class professionals working for international companies in the business sector. The rising individualist sentiment, the financial interdependency of parents, the traditional involvement of grandparents in childcare from the very beginning of a child's life and the socialist legacy of valuing, and even financially rewarding, working mothers, created a climate where middle-class mothers tended to return to work as soon as their 410 days of leave were over, not really making use of the second year of leave.⁵² This second year, while formally available, would have meant a significant change of lifestyle. Bulgarian middle-class mothers therefore understand themselves primarily as providers, whose care for their young children is 'naturally' indispensable, but not all care has to be exclusively provided by them. (see Cheresheva 2015, Daskalova 2000).⁵³

The Hungarian model, on the other hand, which effectively recognises middle-class women's mothering as work on both material and symbolic levels, has had a profound effect on how Hungarian middle-class mothers conceptualise their maternal roles and organise their life while on parental leave. Taking care of children 'the right way' is of course heavily indebted to 'developed' world discourses and promoted as a rational form of self-care (Hays 1996). Class

⁵⁰ According to Ghodsee (2005) and Speder (2009), despite the predictions of many feminist scholars, in Bulgaria after the change of regimes female unemployment was in fact lower than male unemployment. More women did find themselves out of the labour force compared to the previous regime; however, this was due to general unemployment and an even greater number of men lost their jobs.

⁵¹ The accumulated EU law since 1958 until present day.

⁵² Currently in Bulgaria working mothers are entitled to 410 days of leave on 90 percent of their salary. Until the child reaches two years of age, a flat-rate benefit of about 130 euro per month is available to parents (of any gender) on leave. An additional year of unpaid leave is also a possibility, which obliges employers to keep the employee's position available for them.

⁵³ Kovacheva et al. claim that the Bulgarian parental leave model is contradictory, combining the "long-leave mother home-centred policy model" typical of Hungary with a "early return to full-time work leave policy model" (2011: 50). I hope to have shown that this model was well-rooted in the socialist state's practice.

plays a fundamental role in the ways childcare is done on a family (or individual) level (Hays 1996, Jensen 2013, Laureu 2003, Laureu and Weininger 2008, Lawler 2000) and it penetrates maternal identities and experiences to their very (non-existent) core. As I have argued elsewhere, in the Hungarian case, however, this extra layer of recognition of 'correct' mothering adds a dimension to maternal subjectivity as dependent on the execution of a set of chores, codified in the practice of a social apparatus unchanged significantly since its creation in the late 1960s (Cheresheva 2015). This then becomes a source of pride, resonating with the socialist ideals of sacrificial femininity. The 'natural division of labour' allows women to retain a sense of their work in the home as important and significant, but at the same time unproblematically subordinated to the paid job of their male partners. In my 2015 article, I suggest that Hungarian mothers usually spend an extended period on maternity leave and, with the reduction of the associated benefit over time, they become financially dependent on their partners. Thus, when organising their everyday carework schedules and their leisure time, they prioritise their partners' needs. The next section addresses the gendered character of both labour and leisure in the lives of my respondents in Budapest and Sofia.

4.4 All Animals Are Equal but Some Animals Are More Equal than Others

There are different ways in which the devaluation of carework transpires in my interviewees' accounts of their everyday lives, practices and experiences. As I have already argued, while reproductive work is indeed subordinated, practically and symbolically, to paid work in both locations, the specific historical nuances have led to different effects on the socially accepted practices of (good) mothering. Nevertheless, and not unexpectedly given the context of new middle-class heterosexual mothers temporarily out of the labour force, a pattern of sharing domestic responsibilities which privileges the male partner's paid job over the mother's reproductive work in terms of relaxation needs is evident in both countries. In Sofia, as well as in Budapest, for example, mothers often reported sharing a room with the baby while fathers occupied another bedroom.

...we sleep the two of us together, on the same bed, and the daddy is in a different bedroom. This arrangement is since he [her baby] started teething. He is very fidgety: when he is in his own bed, he hits himself against its edges constantly and I have trouble getting up every time (Adriana, Sofia, 35, son 1y, radio presenter, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

The need for the mother to get up is completely naturalised. Indeed, in situations where fathers did share nightly childcare duties, mothers discussed at length their partners' stellar involvement. An example comes from a different respondent: "Oh, he is a huge help to me, from the very start! He used to get up with me in the beginning, changing nappies and such things" (Mira, Sofia, 31, son 1.5 years, credit risk management expert at a bank, Bulgarian, living with male partner). In Sofia, when rationalised, the lesser involvement of fathers in the labour-intensive tasks of childcare, particularly at night, is explained by their need to be productive at work:

It is me [the one who gets up to tend to the baby at night]. When he was a tiny baby, he [the husband] used to help me a lot, he used to get up, change his nappy and then hand him to me to breastfeed him. He used to get up more back then, now less... For instance, when we have a bad night, because of teething, he gets up in the morning, takes the baby, makes his breakfast. At one point we used to take turns – one morning it's me, the other one him, because, after all he works and has to be functional (Adriana, Sofia, 35, son 1y, radio presenter, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

It seems like the main thing Bulgarian mothers on leave sacrifice for their working-outside-the-home male partners is sleep. A job requires a functioning mind, while childcare can apparently be accomplished under any physical/mental circumstances. In Hungary, the needs of working men extend beyond uninterrupted sleep – a father's job requires regular recreational activities too, which mothers 'naturally' give up, as they are "too tired" to socialise:

He tries to do as much as he can but he is working and he is the supporter of the family now so usually he comes home around 7ish and it's always his job to bathe him [the baby]... usually it's my husband who goes out and I'm the one who stays at home but this is just because you know, I am tired by 9. Of course, sometimes I go somewhere but it's really rare, once in two months or something. But I don't even feel like going out – I just want to get to bed, you know (Klára, Budapest, 30, son 1.5y, administrator at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Despite the exhaustion mothers feel, it is clear that the husband's job is considered more important than the care mothers provide. The fact that mothers are too tired to do anything in the evenings can be easily explained by their being responsible for getting up at night with the baby, besides taking care of it the whole day. Yet the link is never established; instead exhaustion is naturalised as part of new motherhood. Mothers often talked about their lives before giving birth and the various types of entertainment they used to engage in, now inaccessible to them: travel, partying, impromptu visits to the cinema and so on. At the same time, the lifestyle change fatherhood brought into the lives of their partners did not seem that totalising, as this quote demonstrates:

He went out more regularly than me, more often than me, I mean alone, with his friends, I don't know, he plays football 2 times a week, and he went out for a glass of beer, whatever, and Marci was like 4-5 months old when I went out for the first night (Dalma, Budapest, 32, son 3.5y., researcher at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Further, parental and especially maternal entertainment is something considered secondary to the perceived needs of the infant for routine, stability and calm environment. Mothering is clearly thought about as work or, better, the labour-intensive aspects of it (such as cooking, cleaning and so on) are considered more important than the entertainment-related ones (unstructured play, long walks etc.), even if it is the infant's entertainment at stake. To a question about playground visits, Kinga (33, daughter 2y, researcher at a research centre, Hungarian, living with male partner) responds: "some people, I don't understand, even if it's snowing, even if it's raining, even if it's minus 20 they go out every day twice, I just don't get it...when do they prepare food?". Food preparation, a chore, is clearly more important than socialising, which Hungarian children are not considered to need outside of their immediate families until they reach three (Ranschburg 2003). Maternal needs for socialising are very rarely mentioned explicitly and are clearly subordinated to the perceived needs of infants, the habit of prioritising their male partners' jobs or leisure and last but not least sleep and personal grooming activities such as sports and hairdresser appointments. These arrangements are not even a cause for a conflict within the family; they are completely naturalised.

Interestingly, while both rest and entertainment seem to clearly be a male privilege in Hungarian heterosexual families, the mothers I interviewed displayed a very strong desire to appear to be in egalitarian relationships. All of them either described their companions as involved fathers and helpful, supportive partners, naturalising their own role as primary, if not exclusive, childminders:

We have an agreement with my husband that since he [the baby] wakes up so early one day I get up with him, and the other day he does. The person who gets up is responsible for preparing his breakfast but, well, usually I do, because my husband prepares for work in the meantime (Hanna, Budapest, 31, daughter 1.5y, lawyer, Hungarian, living with male partner).

On a conceptual level equality is crucial for the harmonious functioning of the family. On the level of practice, however, it is the mother who does the majority of the work, because the husband's job trumps his involvement with his child. I argue that this commitment to gender equality in the private sphere exclusively on the level of discourse (in the everyday sense of the term) is not unrelated to the socialist past of the country, when, as already discussed,

motherwork was recognised as a legitimate, albeit strictly feminine, occupation. This historicisation, however, should not be essentialised and attributed exclusively to a state socialist past: intensive motherhood and women's primary involvement with childcare and housework is the norm all over the so-called 'developed' world. (Faircloth et al. 2013, Hays 1996, Lareau 2003).

That said, the specific socio-historical conditions from which one enters a new discourse determine the 'glocal' character of the emerging set of socially accepted practices. There is evidence that certain parenting styles, aka intensive parenting, are a global trend and not a particularity of privileged western parenthood. But "hybrid ideologies" are created in specific locations which resist and comply with the new norms in culturally comfortable ways (Faircloth et al. 2013: 14). In that sense, the mothering styles we see in Budapest and Sofia are neither simply a progression from a socialist lifestyle, nor a contemporary western imposition. They are an amalgam which emerges as middle-class mothers, as agentive subjects, try to perform their 'good motherhood' at the intersection of class, race, gender and last but not least location, in an unequal world.

4.5 Intensive Mothering in Hungary and Bulgaria: 'All Work and No Play' versus 'All Play and No Work'

The intensive mothering trend fits well in the Hungarian context where the symbolic division on which women's work is conceptualised is not simply paid versus reproductive work but rather the correct implementation of a strong mothering ideology, heavily supported by the state both before and after the fall of state socialism (Glass and Fodor 2007). As already argued, the compliance with a normative set of well-defined practices is a status symbol, a classed and raced performance of appropriate motherhood, which distinguishes the women who practise it from the 'inferior' mothering of less deserving, usually Roma mothers. For the latter group, as popular wisdom goes, childcare benefits are a means to an end rather than a well-deserved modest payment for the never-ending work of a devoted mother (Glass and Fodor 2007, Goven 2000), In appropriate mothering, when one has a baby, one takes care of the baby at all times:

It was natural – we have a baby, we care about the baby, we didn't do anything else... I know that with the second one I will be much more relaxed. We were silly, we were not prepared, there was no example to follow, because all of our friends did it the same way (Dalma, Budapest, 32, son 3.5y, researcher at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

That same respondent, however, was quoted above saying that her husband, apart from going to work, kept meeting his friends and continued playing football for recreational purposes several times a week after their son was born. Clearly the one who “didn’t do anything else” was the mother herself. This quote points to something else as well. In her social milieu, likely comprised of women with a similar socio-economic background, mothering practices tended to be fairly uniform: “all our friends did it the same way”. Indeed, this was a pattern amongst my Hungarian respondents, much more so than in Bulgaria: women exhibited surprisingly few individual differences in terms of their childcare styles. Significant variations were observable only in two cases: a young leftist-activist couple where the mother was doing her MA degree while on maternity leave and who received regular support from her partner and her mother, and a single working mother, who relied on family and friends for help.

Resistance to mothering ideologies per se was not really on the agenda of these women although some tended to differentiate themselves from the “type of mother who only talks about their kids” (Kinga, Budapest, daughter 2y, researcher at a research centre, Hungarian, living with male partner), emphasising their desire to return to full-time work once their leave was over or the small jobs (translations, minor project work and so on) they did on the side: “I tried to avoid this kind of group [of mothers in the park] because I don’t like chatting with other mothers. How he’s growing, how many teeth, etc.” (Dalma, Budapest, 32, son 3.5y, researcher at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

The focus however was never on disentangling the needs of their children from a particularly intense form of intensive mothering. In this sense, I argue that emphasising commitment to one’s career in the long run, while accepting the drudgeries of prescriptive everyday mothering with self-sacrificial stoicism – in a differentiating move from ‘those mothers’ who supposedly enjoy ‘staying at home’ – is not an act of resistance. On the contrary, it is the very essence of Hungarian middle-class motherhood as a complex socio-historical construct. Extended maternity leave spent subjugating all your needs to the perceived needs of offspring according to a heavily-regulated set of childcare practices and returning to work while the child is deemed old enough to start crèche or kindergarten⁵⁴ is the realisation of middle-class Hungarian adult femininity. Not working outside the home beyond the period of state-supported maternity leave is a luxury only the very rich can afford and a state socialist past provides the cultural justification for the currently existing family/division of labour model.

⁵⁴ This is between the ages of two and three, according to my respondents.

The gendered labour of caring for small children is the responsibility of the individual mother on leave. The regular involvement of members outside the nuclear family is not only not well-accepted in wider society but also historically problematised by Hungarian childcare experts who emphasise young children's need for their mothers at all times (Ranschburg 2003). Of course, it is highly unlikely that experts would specifically *discourage* the participation of grandparents and other kin in the everyday work of childcare. However, as mothers were historically the target of domesticity tests by social workers, the recipients of benefits and the subject of heavily psychologised discourses of children's developmental needs, a clear enough message is sent – healthy and well-adjusted future citizens are raised by devoted mothers.

The effects of this are visible today in Hungary: grandparents are very rarely involved in the everyday care of infants, particularly if they are still in the labour force. To a question about her parents' engagement with her son, this Budapest resident responds:

but my mother is working in the same district where they [her parents] live, so she doesn't really move out of it. My father is moving around a lot in the city so he jumped in but it was not like helping in the daily routine, just visiting... Playing with him [the baby] for half an hour and chatting with me, so it's really like...a visit, it's not help... My mother wanted to come here right after Marci was born but... and of course she came for a month or two and she did some ironing but it was not like [a] big [help]... Well, I didn't want her to come actually so we could manage with Andi [her husband] and... (Dalma, Budapest, 32, son 3.5y, researcher at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Most mothers expressed their understanding that childcare must be managed within the nuclear family, which meant, as already discussed, that it was primarily their responsibility. Just like the symbolic and practical subordination of their care work to the paid work of their partners, the 'nuclearisation' of childcare was naturalised and left unquestioned. Dalma expresses her regret about essentially putting her relationship with her partner on hold during the first three years of her son's life (she was heavily pregnant again at the time of the interview):

It was really funny, but for one year we didn't go anywhere together... because we were silly, I think. Because my mother would be there at any time. And when we realised that, that we could bring Marci to their place, when he was around 3, after he started kindergarten, we realised, aha, he can manage without us but actually we just didn't realise that... somehow, because I thought that he needs me all the time and it just didn't occur to me that no [he didn't].

However, other women's testimonies showed that the understanding that grandparents cannot, and arguably should not, be primary carers usually went both ways. Grandparents did not offer child-minding help to new mothers on leave and young parents didn't think, or feel comfortable

enough, to ask. As I will show now, the situation in Sofia is significantly distinct in this respect, being, of course, grounded in a historically different discourse of family and labour.

As I have already argued, new mothers in Sofia often sacrifice their night's sleep in the name of their partners' careers. Socialising and entertainment, however, are not as easily and uncritically given up as in Budapest. Mothers deploy various strategies to battle isolation and retain their social lives. First and foremost, grandparents usually play an important part in family life after the birth of a child. As already mentioned, the multigenerational family has deep roots in South Eastern Europe, a trend which Bulgarian state socialism initially disapproved of out of fear of 'reactionary' influences on the youth by the older generation, but eventually co-opted, mostly out of necessity. Interestingly, and similarly to Hungarian women's formal commitment to gender equality within the family, my Bulgarian interviewees often made the claim to be managing all childcare in the confines of the nuclear family – i.e., by sharing it with their partners. Nevertheless, when prompted, they revealed that their parents, usually mothers, regularly (several times a week, in some cases daily) stepped in to take over the baby minding for at least a few hours. Mothers' need for recreation seems to be socially recognised, as well as the need of young parents to spend time together, without the demanding presence of the infant. Again, the involvement of grandparents is naturalised and, as such, often invisible.

For example, Mira (31, son 1.5 years, credit risk management expert at a bank, Bulgarian, living with male partner) explains that her 1.5-year-old son only has one set of living grandparents, who rarely help out. In a predictably gendered pattern, no justification is given for the grandfather's lack of participation. However, Mira feels the need to 'excuse' her mother-in-law: "She is still employed, but also her [own] mother is very old and unwell. She really wants to [help more with the child], but it is extremely difficult for her... She had her arm operated on as well." However, when asked if and how she and her husband manage to go out at night, she exclaims: "Ah, that's what we have used them [the grandparents] for!". Svetlana's responses follow the same pattern:

Yes, sure, we [she and her husband] went out. We like travelling, going out. Eh, going out, how many times could have we gone out since the baby was born – once or twice? No, actually this is not true at all – in the summer we used to go out a lot, until 10-11 pm, he slept in the pram. And without him too, we go out up to three times a week. Depending on the occasion, his grandparents take care of him then. (Svetlana, Sofia, 32, son 2y, medical doctor, Bulgarian, living with male partner)

The fact that new parents have the need and right for grown up entertainment and it is their own parents' (particularly mothers') responsibility to facilitate that when possible is so self-

evident that Bulgarian mothers don't think of it as 'help'. In the case of Adriana, whose son is a year old while she is heavily pregnant with twins, grandparents are involved daily: her mother comes in every day, changes his nappies, gives him a bath and entertains him. Adriana affirms that her mother also came almost daily before she got pregnant for the second time, as well as her husband's parents. It is the grandparents' job to provide diapers, purees and toys. Yet bizarrely, after giving an account of all the various types of support she receives from her kin, she adds: "In general my husband and I try to manage alone" (Adriana, Sofia, 35, son 1y, radio presenter, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

In a sense the heterosexual nuclear family which manages all childcare in a shared, ideally egalitarian effort seems to function as a discursive point of reference, a phantasmatic norm of 'how things should be'. As I have already explained, an extreme disapproval of everything socialist and a fascination with western, particularly US, capitalism dominated public discourse in Bulgaria right after the fall of the regime (Smollette 1993). The care labour of grandmothers has therefore seemingly become synonymous with socialist backwardness and lack of other (financial) resources. Gergana, a successful self-employed company owner who is eager to go back to work full-time, says:

I am against relatives taking care of my baby... Of course, it has to have contact with its family but a grandmother is not a babysitter... A grandmother is a grandmother, she's been through motherhood, more or less successfully. She has 28-29-year-old views and experience. They (grandmothers) refuse to change those, refuse to understand that things have changed and the attitude towards children has changed significantly... Yet, it's clear why families fall back on using the grandma, they are in such and such financial situation. The state doesn't provide alternative options, either (Gergana, Sofia, 29, son 5m, company owner, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Yet, just like the other mothers quoted, Gergana admits accepting the help of her mother-in-law when she wants to go out in the evenings with her husband. This kind of sporadic babysitting for her falls under the category of allowing the wider family to be part of a child's life. Her financial security also allows her to hire a paid babysitter when she deems it necessary. Like many other mothers she claims to share the childcare with her husband, including leaving him with the baby at night to go socialising, which she refers to as "a woman's, a mother's, need".

The perceived need for socialising with adults is visible in the ways Bulgarian mothers organise their time as well: unlike Hungarian mothers who heavily prioritise the labour-intensive tasks of childcare such as the home-cooking of purees, Bulgarian mothers almost uniformly described spending summer days in the park with other friends with small children. Adriana says:

While the children are playing, we [the mothers] talk to each other. I remember, during the summer we were outside all day long, he was used to being in the park all the time. I used to breastfeed him, change his clothes and diapers, put him to sleep. Everything happened outside because it wasn't worth it closing him in a flat in the warmest weather (Adriana, Sofia, 35, son 1y, radio presenter, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

The needs and preferences of mother and baby are thus discursively constructed as parallel: while the child benefits from the warm weather, the mother engages in adult socialising. This framing is a far cry from Budapest, where new mothers often describe their extended maternity leave as a period of suffering in the name of the baby. Characteristically for a Budapest respondent, Dóra, who has a prematurely born 6-month-old boy, says:

I was at a dance performance once. Till now this has been the only evening that I was out alone but it was a really lucky one because the baby fell asleep and I went out and he was sleeping during the time. But we don't really plan to ask a babysitter or someone, we will survive this period and then we will go with him if we are able to, when he is 1 and a half or 2 or 3, we will go together. Maybe, my husband's sister lives in Budapest, and she really likes him of course, maybe she will help us with a few evenings, I don't know, we have never talked about it but it's not a question at the moment. (Dóra, Budapest, 37, son 6 months, account manager, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Here the mother's social life is put on hold until the perceived developmental needs of the baby permit it to continue. These needs Dóra typically lists as the need for a responsive and ever-present mother and the relaxed and familiar environment of the family home. Especially when solid foods are introduced and mothers also need to cook for their babies (to be addressed in the next chapter), this understanding of an infant's needs practically excludes the possibility of daily socialising with other mothers. While the baby thrives, the parents 'survive'. Dóra continues, giving a very definitive no to a question about spending her days with her friends who also have children:

This is the same as what I said about going out – that I know this is a period when we are home because this is the most comfortable for the baby, so we suffer somehow this one and a half years and then we can do programmes and we can go everywhere and life will be easier.

Of course, socialising and spending time with other friends on maternity leave varied personally and circumstantially, depending on whether my respondents actually had close friends with small children living close by. However, even those Hungarian mothers who considered themselves socially active rarely met friends more than once a week.

In comparison, Bulgarian mothers sometimes mentioned feeling isolated and spending their days alone with their baby, while in practice that was hardly the case:

Maybe I was primarily alone with him. Of course, there are always the meetings with friends in the park, sometimes by chance. [I met friends] Maybe 3-4 times a week. This of course refers to the weekdays because, on the weekends, we travel a lot and were always somewhere, with his father as well (Svetlana, Sofia, 32, son 2y, medical doctor, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Unlike Hungarian mothers, Bulgarian mothers did not construct the physical space of the home as the preferred environment for their small children. On the contrary, my interviewees worried that particularly in winter when weather conditions are often harsh, their babies spent extended periods of time indoors, not getting fresh air or enough stimulation. 'Staying at home', which as I suggested earlier is the expression deployed in both countries to refer to the period on leave from one's paid work, meant very different things in Budapest and Sofia. Bulgarian mothers considered spending their days with their babies in a park while retaining some kind of autonomous adult social life the healthiest approach to raising children and being a mother. Hungarian new motherhood, on the other hand, was often literally confined to the actual space of the home and heavily reliant on the perpetual physical presence of the individual mother. Even when the family travelled, which they did to varying degrees, parents often tried to recreate the familiar environment of the home – using summer houses, the homes of kin, particularly their parents', and so on. In the 'fractal' sense of Gal and Kligman's (2000) public and private, it is obvious how reproductive work can occupy different spaces, some of them undoubtedly public, like the park, the street, the restaurant. Yet they can be re-signified as extensions of the home, precisely because reproductive work takes place there. This resignification allows women in Sofia to retain their social lives to various degrees, in combination with a flexible understanding of the responsibilities in a (nuclear) family. Even though grandparents, particularly grandmothers, regularly lend a hand with childcare, their labour often remains invisible, labelled as 'time spent with family'. The labour of love of grandmothers is then arguably a step down from a mother's carework in the hierarchy of devalued feminine labour.⁵⁵

In Budapest, however, possibly because of a long tradition of policing mothers' childcare practices and docile femininity being synonymous with good mothering (see Haney 2002), the

⁵⁵ This probably speaks about the ways ageism and sexism intersect in the devaluation of women's reproductive work. While very important, this topic is beyond the scope of my thesis.

care of infants is primarily bound to the home. If moved elsewhere, to a public space, it loses its high moral status as (care)work. The value ascribed to it socially and financially by the state is based on its labour-intensive and emotionally taxing character. Having fun while 'staying at home' with an infant, particularly if the infant is not present, is incompatible with the Hungarian version of intensive, sacrificial motherhood. Paradoxically, mothers often emphasised that a relaxed and cheerful mother is indispensable for the proper development of a secure child. Yet this serenity had to be achieved via a Buddhist-like abandonment of desire in the broad sense of the term:

I think if you don't understand that now you are a mother and your needs have to be put at the end of the list and the baby's needs are the first. And if you don't accept it and you are *nervous* then you cannot do this, because he is crying and now I have to be with him and this makes you crazy, then it's not good for both (Dóra, Budapest, 37, son 6 months, account manager, Hungarian, living with male partner, her emphasis).

Nervousness gives away a 'bad mother' who has not learned to subjugate her needs to the needs of others. Bulgarian mothers also single out calmness and patience as crucial emotional prerequisites for a caring mother. Yet, given the entire organisation of life on maternity leave, where mothers are allowed some amount of adult relaxation and alone time, clearly framed as maternal needs, the normative dimension of emotionality refers to differently nuanced practices of agentically constructing oneself as a mother.

4.6 Summary

As Saba Mahmood (2005) argues, agency is a modality of action which constructs the subject in relation to certain contextual social norms. In this chapter I try to illustrate that often childcare norms may appear very similar, especially in historically similar contexts. However, unless practices are qualitatively unpacked and gradually refilled with locally-specific meanings, a very misleading picture of motherhood as performative may emerge. Since Hungary and Bulgaria share a formative and recent historical period under state socialism, and arguably the experience of transformation to capitalism as Eastern European post-socialist countries, many categories organising the understanding and performance of reproductive work in the two contexts appear very similar. Yet, those categories have a 'fractal' character, enlisting a variety of practices under their umbrella. These culturally-specific practices construct different motherhoods and affect the lives of Bulgarian and Hungarian women differently, requiring varying strategies in order to frame and organise their childcare practices as socially acceptable.

In the next chapter some of those practices will be discussed in detail, in an attempt to further unpack the connection between locally-appropriate childcare rituals and understandings of desirable personhood.

Chapter 5

Different Chores, Different Subjects: The Performativity of Post-Socialist Motherhood in Budapest and Sofia

Chapter 4 discussed the recent historical construction of motherhood in Budapest and Sofia with reference to Gal and Kligman's (2000) 'fractal' conception of the public and private divide. I argued that, when analysing the discursively constructed categories which organise the thinking of motherhood, childcare norms in historically close contexts may often appear misleadingly similar when practices on the ground are overlooked. When those practices are dissected next to the discourses that produce them, and with a view of a shifting, cooperative maternal subject which transcends an individual woman, an altogether different picture emerges.

5.1 Why Does Every Childcare Choice Matter? A Local Approach to a Global Trend

This chapter will look further into the specific childcare practices in which mothers of small children engage, such as breastfeeding and bottle feeding, solid food introduction and weaning, visits to the park and so on. Those chores and activities, mundane as they may seem, are anything but unimportant. They are structured by morally-charged discourses on 'good parenting' which treat "child-rearing as a skill rather than as an integral feature of an informal family relationship" (Furedi 2013: xiv). Exhibiting such parental skills, which, despite a seemingly global growing stance for gender equality, still overwhelmingly tends to be expected of mothers, depends on compliantly accepting scientific, professional advice on children's developmental needs (Furedi 2013). According to Furedi, with the growing discursive significance of parenting as the correct completion of a set of child-rearing practices and attitudes, the importance of motherhood or fatherhood as a personal identity has also risen exponentially. While there are numerous culturally specific ways of approaching what parenting entails (Faircloth et al. 2013, Lee et al. 2014), a "certain intensification of parenting is gradually becoming a truly global trend" (Furedi 2013: xiv), something very visible in the contexts of both cities this thesis explores.

However, while small children are now deemed far more needy of incessant adult supervision, control and attention than in the past (Edwards and Gillies 2013), who must be in charge of providing that care differs between social contexts and geographical locations. As Chapter 3

shows, the middle-class mothers I interviewed in Budapest, Hungary, hold themselves almost exclusively responsible for the well-being of their children, transforming motherhood into 24/7, heavy physical, emotional and even intellectual labour (Ruddick 1989). In Sofia, Bulgaria, my interview data suggest childcare is considered more of a shared responsibility between (mostly female) kin, where the mother still holds the role of a primary carer but is considered to be entitled to some of leisure. Exactly how much other family members participate and invest in the raising of children therefore directly affects both the experience and the performance of motherhood. Evidently, despite recently becoming dominated by experts, parenting has always been, and still is, intimately tied to culturally specific “ideologies of kinship, self and politics” (Faircloth et al. 2013: 1). Family and kinship in turn, have been at the centre of political debates, organising and being organised by conceptualisations of citizenship and personhood since the dawn of modernity (Faircloth et al. 2013, Hays 1996, Lee et al. 2014). Immigrant parents are often at the epicentre of these debates, as states invest in policing their ‘dangerous’ practices and ensure the culturally ‘appropriate’ socialisation of their children as future citizens (Berry 2013, Jiménez Sedano 2013).

As Chapter 4 showed, the state socialist governments of Hungary and Bulgaria invested, albeit differently, in the production of their own understanding of good socialist citizens. While Bulgarian politicians insisted on children’s participation in household chores as a way to ensure they would be trained to become hard-working socialist subjects, since the late 1960s in Hungary childrearing was psychologised and constituted as an exclusively maternal responsibility (Brunnbauer and Taylor 2004, Haney 2002). While these socialist regimes obviously believed in the correlation between particular childcare styles and personal development, something else is at stake here as well.

As Furedi argues (2002), contemporary parenting is a disciplining practice, focused primarily on controlling the behaviour of mothers and fathers, rather than children. Following Michel Foucault, Steph Lawler (2000) takes this argument further, linking social control and the production of subjectivity. According to her, what constitutes maternal subjectivity is a certain discursively produced conceptualisation of children’s needs which instantaneously renders the mother the person responsible for meeting them. Lawler, however, like Wallbank (2001), focuses more on emotional labour and identity work, while this research is concerned with the repetitive everyday “bundles of tasks” (Hughes, cited in Thorne 2001: 365) involved in child and, especially, infant care. As Strathern (2005) explains, mothers have a doubly-embodied relationship with their biological children: not only do they share a genetic heritage, but the

body of the child is direct evidence of maternal devotion, or neglect, to diligently execute a set of child-rearing knowledges.

All in all, parenting is profoundly ideological and as such structures the subjectivities of everyone interpellated by it. Other than being “child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays 1996: 8), parenting is also profoundly gendered. As many feminist authors have argued throughout the second half of the 20th century to the present day and despite the growing popularity of the feminist movement, the implicit assumption that childcare is primarily a woman’s responsibility is still going strong (see DeVault 1991, Hays 1996, McMahon 1995, Walzer 1996). As Chapter 4 showed, mothers and fathers in both research locations approached parental responsibilities differently and the care labour resulting from those gender differences fell mainly on the mothers’ shoulders. While fathers were granted sleep and leisure time because of doing paid work outside the home, mothers on parental leave were not entitled to the same privileges - on both practical and symbolic levels reproductive labour is subordinated to productive labour, as I have argued elsewhere (Cheresheva 2015).

As I also argued in Chapter 3, mothering is not only discursively constructed, but also performative. When my respondents from Budapest and Sofia passionately, indifferently or stubbornly engage with, or resist, morally and ideologically charged activities such as feeding an infant, putting it to sleep, entertaining it and so on⁵⁶, they are exercising their agency as ‘modality of action’ (Mahmood 2005) to performatively construct themselves within a large yet still limited constellation of ‘culturally sanctioned femininities’ (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001). Using Mahmood’s critique of Butler’s concept of performativity allows for placing cultural contexts right at the centre of analysing subjectivity formation. A (good) mother is therefore not revealed through her performance of inherently superior childcare decisions. Instead she is made through the repetitive enactment of socially constituted and culturally specific, classed, gendered and also racialised childcare practices, conceived at the intersection of various discourses such as those of medicine, women’s employment, welfare and healthcare, again as I have established in other work (Cheresheva 2015).

Chapter 3 also dealt with the theoretical (psychoanalytical in particular) implications of ‘doing’ oneself beyond a dichotomous understanding of agency as compliance with or resistance to

⁵⁶ It should be emphasised that each and every one of these time-consuming chores gets explicated by experts as crucial for the “proper” psychological and physiological development of the baby.

dominant social norms. It showed that, regardless of my own feminist desires as a researcher, mothers in both my research locations were rarely interested in resisting dominant mothering discourses per se. Instead they established nuanced relationships with the various norms which constitute discourses on proper parenting. Further, as Sharon Hays has argued about the US, motherhood is often articulated as a counter discourse to the dominant modalities of modern western personhood understood as “competitive”, “self-interested”, “efficiency-minded”, “profit maximizing”, and “materialistic” (1996: 9).

But, as the analysis of my data shows, in post-socialist contexts where personhood itself is a historically contested category and where the values of community and individuality are often in (productive) tension, motherhood emerges on a different conceptual plane. In both locations, and particularly in Sofia, my respondents deployed concepts of efficiency, rationality and individualism to frame their mothering choices as modern and educated. Therefore, motherhood in Eastern Europe is not simply a rejection of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. It is often performed as a critique of what is understood as an old-fashioned and ideologically dubious socialist model of raising children. Resistance is then a complex practice which involves the selective use of categories belonging to various (more or less) dominant discourses. Finally, as Steph Lawler (2000) argues, the nature of ‘children’s needs’ is constructed as so imperative that women are left with very little space for active resistance against parenting ideologies. Therefore, while of course keeping an eye on mothers’ stories of resistance, I follow Saba Mahmood (2005) and suggest not making them the exclusive focus of this analysis. Women’s relationships with childcare norms are nuanced and contextual and the agentive performances resulting from those relationships are the ‘essence’ of understanding motherhoods as local, historical and culturally constructed.

5.2 State-Socialist Roots, Neoliberal Realities: Historicising CEE Subjectivities

In this sense, Chapter 5 will continue this line of thought and trace the ways in which the mothers I interviewed in Budapest and Sofia do their everyday motherwork and themselves as mothers through it. Bridging the theoretical insights of Chapters 3 and 4, here I will try to unravel the relationship between historically constructed understandings of personhood, children’s needs and mothering practices. The question of autonomy, something these mothers listed as a priority personality trait they wished to foster in their children, comes back in this chapter of the thesis. Chapter 3 showed that, while in a phallogentric subjectivity personhood is predicated

upon autonomy as separation from the other, thinking subjectivity 'otherwise' (Baraitser 2010) allows for conceptualising subjects as continuously and relationally co-constructed at the borderlines of people, things and discourses. Autonomy, while clearly unattainable, is therefore not irrelevant, but will here be examined as an ideological rather than an analytical category in the study of (maternal) subjectivity⁵⁷.

Further, the masculine bias of the autonomous, rational individual has been criticised extensively by Western feminists such as Pateman (1988), Cixous (1981, 1986, 1991), Baraitser (2009) and many others already mentioned in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Éva Fodor (2002: 241) argues that state socialism replaced the rational individual with a communist subject, whose "political participation was predicated not on his or her rationality or ownership in the body but on total devotion to the communist Party and the acceptance of its leaders as the ultimate authorities on the good of the community". Nevertheless, according to Fodor, what remained unchanged was the implicit masculine gender of the communist subject. Instead of the capacity to act upon his personal interests, ambitions and beliefs, the communist subject was judged upon his perceived ability to contribute to the long-term goals of the proletariat revolution. All subjects of the state, men and women alike, acquired the status of socialist subjects via their participation in social groups defined from above, such as "the youth", "the workers", "the party members" and last but not least "the women" (Fodor 2002: 243).

In the Hungarian context Fodor discusses, women were then made part of the labour force when that fit the interests of the Hungarian state and 'sent back to the kitchen' when the economy did not need the surplus of workers any more (see also Haney 2003). The regime never stopped emphasising women's reproductive responsibilities, simultaneously rewarding and penalising them accordingly. As Chapter 4 shows, the public/private responsibilities of women were not the same in all socialist countries, yet all of them seemed to invest in the construction of a 'natural' difference between male and female populations. Women were associated with 'backwardness', lack of wit and dedication to the party due to their relatively new role as participants in public life (Fodor 2002). More importantly, however, while preserving the implicit masculinity of the socialist subject as a building block of the socialist society, the regime tried to devalue and even erase autonomy as its fundament. The purpose of the individual could not be

⁵⁷ Personal autonomy is, as already explained in Chapter 3, pivotal to liberal understandings of subjectivity. Intellectually I was not particularly interested in discussing autonomy in my thesis, yet it came up repeatedly in my data. As such, I offer a reading of the words of my respondents, which traces the ideological construct of autonomy culturally and historically. I do not understand autonomy to be a key facet of subjectivity, yet the fact that it is generally understood as such cannot be overlooked.

anything else but to serve the community. In fact, following Marx, any individual happiness was in a dialectical relationship with the desired progress of society (Millei and Imre 2010).⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Verdery (1996) and Gal and Kligman (2000) show that, despite its extreme investment in ideological uniformity, state socialism failed to eradicate political dissent and dissident thought. Karin Taylor (2003) shows how Western rock music in particular, and the values it promoted, became crucial for the sense of identity of Bulgarian youth in the 1960s and 1970s, who listened to *Radio Free Europe* and fantasised what their lives would be like had they been born on the other side of the Iron curtain. Thus, anti-communist sentiment in communist Europe embedded a western understanding of personhood in its ideological pursuits, equating the autonomous self with freedom and democracy. This also means that two different conceptualisations of subjectivity co-existed in socialist Europe, informing the imaginary of its citizens.

Those contested understandings of personhood lie at the core of the Bulgarian and Hungarian ‘contradictions of motherhood’, as lived by my respondents, as I will shortly demonstrate. Relationality and community are, in many ways, not only devalued for being traditionally associated with femininity but for being framed as backward ideological remains from a shameful state socialist past. Individualism, financial and intellectual autonomy, and rationality are therefore markers of western modernity, and important tropes in the phantasmatic creation of the post-socialist middle classes. I will return to this argument in more detail in Chapter 6.

In fact, a recurrent theme emerging from the interviews I conducted in Budapest and Sofia was my respondents’ absolute belief in the need to raise children who will turn into independent adults. Mothers described believing they would feel accomplished in their parenting role if their children would grow to be happy, socially adjusted, secure individuals, goals in line with western middle-class parenting as described by Hau-nung Chan (2008). Being hard-working or even having material success in life was not really, or at least not openly, on the mothering agenda of my interviewees, nor were their fantasies of raising autonomous individuals influenced by the (assumed) gender of their infants. As Sharon Hays (1996) argues, US middle-class women raise their children as leaders, believing they will occupy managerial or professional roles in society. For my interviewees, teaching their children to change society, or at least their circumstances, seemed to be understood as the prerogative of being part of a community. Problem solving skills

⁵⁸ Millei and Imre analyse a 1971 programme for Hungarian kindergarten education – after the age of 3 when the maternity leave discussed in this thesis finishes – where the word used to denote the socialist citizen is ‘man’.

rather than normative compliance was what mothers from both cities wanted to foster in their children. However, while the personality outcomes my respondents wished to see in their growing offspring seemed to be very similar, the parenting strategies considered necessary to nourish the development of those traits once again differed greatly.

5.2 Hungary and the devoted mother

In fact, as I have argued elsewhere (Cheresheva 2015), mothering practices in Hungary seem a lot more unified than in Bulgaria – something reflecting the strict control *védőnők* (social workers) had over new mothers' routines at home. My interviewees from Budapest displayed fairly homogenous ideas as to how a parent creates stable, self-reliant individuals, which the following quote exemplifies in detail:

I want him [her son] to discover everything on his own and I want him to, whenever he encounters some problems, like other kids want to take his toys, I just would like him to solve the problem, and for example when we enter a playground, when we go somewhere, I let him go first. So I would like him to be confident in whatever he does. He should not be shy and stand behind me, so I encourage him, I mean I don't push him, it's just, I just noticed that he doesn't need me to be always there, and of course I am always watching. And I also let him play in the sand, eat it a little bit, you know, and I don't mind if he gets dirty, if he wants to go in a puddle, because I would like him to have a really good time and learn a lot because this is his time to learn now and everything is so, I don't want to keep him back, whatever he wants. Of course, I am always there but I want him to stand up by himself. For example, he has a little motorbike and if he falls, I'm like, "it's ok, just stand up", and not "oh my god". I just try to behave like naturally, you know, "it happens, sit back up again" (Klára, Budapest, 30, son 1.5y, administrator at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

A little person in the making, according to the dominant Hungarian mothering narrative, requires a lot of attention and a complex self-managing strategy on the part of their carer. A well-adjusted individual needs the constant presence ("of course I was always there") of an infinitely patient mother, who is ready to make the baby her "priority, and everything else that you do should be secondary", as Klára also suggested. Patience was listed by practically all Hungarian respondents (and many Bulgarian ones) as an essential quality for a good mother. As discussed in Chapter 3 however, unlike Bulgarian women who relied on extended family networks, particularly their own mothers, to regularly get a break from their children, Hungarian mothers considered themselves failing if they didn't emotionally regulate themselves at all times. Hungarian maternal patience was then very similar to Saba Mahmood's (2005) Muslim respondents' piety. It was not a 'naturally-occurring' affective response to a set of lifestyle

choices, but a performative agenda, both a goal and a precondition for successful compliance with childcare duties.

It is worth opening a metaphorical set of brackets here to mention that the majority of my Hungarian interviewees nonetheless exhibited a profound discomfort in defining what a good mother is – that is, they were critical of the disciplining effects of such qualifiers. I did not want to make my respondents uncomfortable, yet I found the resistance against being explicit about the moral judgments they clearly operated with very interesting. Hence, I turned the question around, asking what personality traits may stand in the way of the effective performance of one's mothering duties. Surprisingly, that simple twist proved to instantly ease most of the discomfort: women listed selfishness, nervousness, lack of patience and empathy and inability to put others' needs before their own as the main culprits in bad mothering. A good mother, Hungarian women believe, follows the cues her child gives. When a child needs their mother, and a mother knows that via constantly monitoring the child's behaviour ("of course I am always watching", as Klára said), the mother must be present to comfort, interact or provide other kinds of care. As Kata (35, son 3y, lawyer, Hungarian, living with male partner) also said, "there is close contact, I think it depends very much on the child, but it is true that I don't like, if I am with him, I don't like doing something else. I try to pay attention...".

Still, when the child needs to be left to its own devices a good Hungarian mother steps back and does not interfere. This is considered essential for building independence and allowing the child to get to know the world at its own pace, as evident from Adri's words. In fact, being a 'pushy', ambitious mother (Hau-nung Chan 2008) is another great maternal sin one may commit. In the words of Bea,

Since my daughter is 2 years old, I don't think she should be really disciplined or that parenting should be something really strict. And in my experience, it's either that, or somebody is really over-caring, overcautious. [A good mother] is really paying attention but not putting too much effort into driving the kid in some direction (Bea, Budapest, 33, daughter 2y, project coordinator at a cultural centre, Hungarian, single, living with daughter).

Autonomy is then like a delicate flower, which blooms on its own, but only in the right environment. Forcing independence when the child is (supposedly) too young is a dangerous, possibly damaging behaviour with life-long psychological consequences. Of course, it needs to be emphasised that it is hard to tell where the narrative of good mothering ends and where the everyday practice of actual mothers starts. These principles guide mothers in their actions, but – as some of my respondents would explicitly attest – within limits. Examples include: not

allowing a child on the climbing bars a mother considers, amid a fair amount of self-doubt, too dangerous for his age in the case of Nikolett (37, son 2.5y, librarian, Hungarian, living with male partner); deciding the baby needs to be in bed by the early evening for the mother's convenience, as Bea suggested; or putting a young infant in a separate room in order to have conjugal privacy, as Klára and her husband did. These are just a few of the cases where these Hungarian mothers made childcare decisions which were not necessarily privileging the preferences of their children. As such, the mother who always puts herself last is not an absolute reality. Rather she is a discursively constructed ideal, any deviation from which requires the deployment of justifying strategies. Whether Hungarian mothers fully devote themselves to their infants in practice is not something a small, qualitative research project like this one which did not include participant observation, can answer (if any project can, for that matter).

Nevertheless, analysis of my interview data suggests that the fully dedicated mother is indeed a point of reference with regards to which mothering decisions are being made. Occasionally, as in Bea's case, my Hungarian respondents would make a choice actively resisting her overwhelming image. In most cases, however, women would state mitigating circumstances, like children's perceived needs for safety or educational one-on-one interactions rather than unstructured playtime, which justified not following the Ideal Mother's lead. Similarly, serious financial constraints, according to some, accounted for an 'untimely' return to work. Most mothers from my Hungarian sample would say that the ideal time for a child to join a crèche (and a mother to re-join the labour force) would be between the ages of two and three. They suggested this was because younger children need the constant responsiveness of a dedicated mother, something a teacher in a childcare institution, responsible for 8 to 15 toddlers, cannot provide. As Kata says in response to a question about the ideal time to go back to work:

It's a very personal choice, every mother or every family has to decide for themselves and in Hungary it is quite common to stay at home for 3 years. In other countries it is unimaginable for a mother: it is also a question of how people are socialised. I was happy that I could stay for 3 years. Before my child was born, I had an idea, I had a concept, but in theory it is difficult to decide, you can only decide once you are there. But my initial concept is that I would like to stay at home at least until my child is able to speak and walk because for me the idea of leaving a child who is not able to express himself to someone else, is not able to move the way he wants, so I wanted to wait.[...] But my case is special, I know many mothers, they cannot choose because they have to go back to work, they have financial constraints (Kata, Budapest, 35, son 3y, lawyer, Hungarian, living with male partner).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Hungarian state introduced the three-year-long universal maternity leave in the late 1960s, largely as a way to push women out of a labour force which was experiencing a serious surplus of workers (Fodor 2002, Haney 2002). The process, considered by many feminists a backlash in the country's progressive stance on 'the woman question' (Goven 1999, Haney 2002), was accompanied by a moralistic and heavily psychologised understanding of children's needs. In their study about the deployment of the concept of community in kindergarten education in Hungary, Millei and Imre (2010) show that, while since the late 1960s the educational needs of Hungarian children were very much understood in terms of "natural" needs and individual talents, those were ultimately to be put into service for the socialist 'community'. The making of the socialist citizen required a 'scientific' and psychological understanding of children's needs, which was then to be used to contribute to a Marxist "society of equals and the full development of personality" (ibid.: 134). Children's abilities and worldview were thus put at the centre of education, the goal of which was to produce socialist subjects. Unlike in the immediate post-war period, where the state set out to govern the population through investing sovereign power in a centrally designed and minutely detailed curriculum and in methods for the regulation of young citizens, this reform embodied a shift that represented a sensitivity to individual needs. Still, this was an 'individualism' defined by an expertise that balanced it out with a retained focus on the community's interests.

Moreover, that understanding integrated Freud's theory of the psychosexual stages of the libido as a theory of childhood development (see Haney 2002). Thus, Hungarian psychologists stipulated that the normal socialisation of a child into the world required the constant presence and devotion of a mother for the first three years of life, a position which coincided with the economic interests of the socialist state. Of course, the links between scientific discourses and (state) power is evident in western societies as well (Foucault 1978), but it is necessary to underline that science was openly expected to support the official political line of state socialist countries. It was deemed reactionary and immediately subjected to violent repressions if it didn't (Millei and Imre 2010). In order to be able to join the kindergarten community in a way that would be beneficial for both the community and the child itself, a three-year old therefore had to have had the correct upbringing since birth, provided by his or her mother.

The repercussions of the institutionalisation of this vision can still be seen in Kata's views, who, despite boredom and career ambitions "was happy" to stay home with her child for three years. Even more so, I argue, the automatic link between parental leave length and a naturalised understanding of children's developmental needs becomes apparent. Parental leave is there to

secure the proper emotional and psychological growth of infants and young children (and not for a mother's convenience, for instance). In Nikolett's words, a mother's decision to return to the labour force depends on the family's financial situation and the needs of her child but what becomes even more clear is that the two factors collapse into one:

I think a child needs the company of children. And I had to go back [to work]. We had financial problems. But even before he was born, I decided I would come back when he was two. [...] I'm not enough, the mother is not enough when the child is two, he needs more, more children (Nikolett, Budapest, 37, son 2.5y, librarian, Hungarian, living with male partner).

As explained in detail in Chapter 4, employed mothers in Hungary can go on a paid maternity leave until the child reaches two years of age, plus an additional third year for a significantly decreased rate. As Nikolett's words attest, the construct of the 'good mother' who puts her child's needs first dictates the necessary psychologisation before the child starts crèche. Klára is also explicit about it:

I think it depends on the development of the child. So if the baby enjoys the company of other kids and starts to, you know, communicate, cooperate, can say a few words, then I think he or she needs more activities, needs a community. So I think ideally it should be the development of the child that determines when the mother will go back to work. (Klára, Budapest, 30, son 1.5y, administrator at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

The idea that young children need a community of peers once they reach a certain maturity, as shown by Millei and Imre (2010), is very much present in my Hungarian interviewees' parenting imaginary. While it was firmly stipulated that this need emerges at the age of three during state socialism, it seems to now have shifted to mark the end of fully paid maternity leave. Culturally, what survives the end of the state socialist regime and over 25 years of capitalism is perhaps not the length of the period for which a child supposedly needs the constant presence of its mother. Instead it appears to be the link between paid maternity leave guaranteed by the state and the psychological needs of an infant.

5.3 Bulgaria and the multitasking mother-manager

As shown in Chapter 4, Bulgarian state socialist pedagogy operated with a different child-subject as well as a different mother-worker. According to Scarborough (2012), work, as a value, was one of the fundamental principles structuring Bulgarian socialist subjectivity. While procreation was part of women's 'natural' needs and duties, in the state's understanding those were embedded in their larger role as professionals. Maternity leave was important, but not psychologised in the

same way as in Hungary. Instead it provided a necessary break for the working mother, to re-prioritise her life and get accustomed to her expanded role as a socialist mother-worker. The state provided monetary and symbolic initiatives for women to return to work prior to the formal end of their leave. The good socialist mother never forgot her main function as a worker, while her main function as a mother was to instil a hard work ethos and a sense of responsibility for the family and society in her children, no matter how young. While that social engagement is rejected and sometimes ridiculed by my Bulgarian respondents, it has clear repercussions for the way they conceptualise and perform their maternal roles nowadays. These women's sense of being good mothers then extends far beyond the perceived psychological developmental needs of their children to encompass providing financially for the family, being role models as well-rounded individual women and - last but not least – finding a way to combine their career growth and personal needs with contemporary parenting experts' demand to prioritise their children. The time a woman spends on maternity leave thus is not determined by the psychological development of her child (although ideally it is not irrelevant to it) but comes as a result of a set of social and economic factors, such as the financial needs of the family, the available childcare and the woman's own career needs and preferences. In Desislava's words:

Clearly, [the best time to return to work] is individual for every mother and child. In my case I think it is perfectly normal, given my child's normal pace of development and my desire for career growth, to go back to work after a year. I believe more than a year out of work and [intellectual] development for the mother is harmful for the mother herself. (Desislava, Sofia, 29, daughter 1y, product manager at a software company, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

According to Mira (31, son 1.5 years, credit risk management expert at a bank, Bulgarian, living with male partner), on the other hand, children under two are too attached to their mothers and ideally would not have to separate from them. Nevertheless, she is going back to work after a year and a half and states, without a sense of guilt, that the reasons for this decision are purely financial. Furthermore, she explains: "I am planning to spend the summer on the lower-paid maternity leave", which she later clarifies is because she wishes to have a long beach holiday. As already described in Chapter 4, Bulgarian mothers are entitled to nearly their full monthly salary for a little over a year after the beginning of maternity leave, after which their payments until the child reaches two are substantially cut to the equivalent of less than £40 a month. Therefore, most mothers from my sample did not plan to extend their leave for much longer than a year.

Exceptions, nevertheless, existed. Boryana (25, son 1y, English teacher at an elite secondary school, Bulgarian, living with male partner) says: “There isn’t an ideal time [to return] to work. But I think at one he’ll simply be too young. Maybe I’ll go back when he is two, for his own sake. But it’d be the best for everyone if I could wait until he’s three.” Even the exceptions, however, make reference to the one-year norm, attesting to the fact that, for these Bulgarian middle-class mothers, their first responsibility to the family is a financial one. As I have previously argued (Cheresheva 2015), due to an amalgam of factors, the ‘good mother’ ideal in Bulgaria is far from the ‘domestic goddess’ observable in my Hungarian sample. The denigration of domestic work during the late socialist period, the specific reconfiguration of gender roles during an economically harsh transition to neoliberal capitalism where women often had the ‘soft’ skills required to find work while men found themselves pushed out of their jobs and, last but not least, the ideological fascination with the US self-made man all contributed to the mother-breadwinner model. While Hungarian respondents emphasised, in theory, the right of mothers to make choices beneficial for their careers, they made sure to link their personal choices to the psychological needs of their babies. In contrast, the Bulgarian women tended to emphasise their responsibilities as professionals, including to themselves as individuals.

Of course, as discussed in Chapter 4 and visible in the quotes above, the responsibilities of the ‘good mother’ extend well beyond providing financially for a child. Similar to my respondents from Budapest, amid a fair amount of performative discomfort, Bulgarian mothers list patience and the ability to understand their children and put their needs first as the most important qualities of good mothers. Responses, however, tend to oscillate a lot more. The lack of a unified and continuous system of parental control/support as in Hungary seems to have produced a far more varied palette of socially acceptable maternal practices and subjectivities. Several respondents referred to their childcare practices belonging to either “the new school” or “the old school”. Boryana, the only one who actually qualifies her child rearing decisions as “old school”, says that she does take advice from her maid of honour:

Although she belongs to the ‘new school’ – the kind that breastfeed on demand and carry the child all the time [...]. At the hospital there was a woman who literally fed her baby every 10 minutes, regardless if it was day or night. This woman had no normal sleeping pattern whatsoever. Such things made me give up [the new school option] and act in a strict and disciplined manner (Boryana, Sofia, 25, son 1y, English teacher at an elite secondary school, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

For Gergana, discipline and routines are essential, yet the difference between what she understood as old and new styles of childcare related more to a meta-conceptualisation of childhood and parenting:

For the older generation a 'good mother' means the child is well-fed, with chubby cheeks, with changed nappy and nice clothes, but I don't think this is it. That's a basic requirement and doesn't even enter the category 'good mother'. The 'good mother' is higher up in Maslow's hierarchy of [children's] needs and one can only judge her by her child (Gergana, Sofia, 29, son 5m, company owner, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

As Steph Lawler (2000) has argued, maternal subjectivities are tantamount to discursive conceptualisations of children's needs. In the words of Gergana the 'good mother' and the child as a product of her motherwork literally collapse into one: "the good mother means the child...", she says. Childcare rituals are crucial, however, not in order to provide what for Gergana is basic subsistence, but because via the correct set of rituals the child acquires a value system and the necessary skills to handle life, literally the things that make them into a person.

Several issues transpire in these responses, among which is the deployment of the empty signifiers 'old and new' approaches to understanding childhood and childcare and certain tensions around the ways one is supposed to discipline one's children. Following the tradition of Gal and Kligman (2000) and Burawoy and Verdery (1999) among others, I want to argue that there is no clear cut division between "old" and "new", especially as those are often understood in Bulgaria to mean "state socialist" and "post state socialist" child-rearing practices. Rather, conceptualisations of childhood, motherhood and personhood change gradually, responding to global trends and historical contingencies alike, appropriating the old into the new, rather than simply rejecting and eradicating the old. Old and new, however, are also value-laden, ideological categories, used in a way to discredit certain parenting styles. Moreover, in a different way from Hungary, Bulgaria started to modify its official understanding of childhood well before the fall of the state socialist regime.

In fact the late 1970s saw a new kind of socialist child emerging on the ideological scene under the leadership of Lyudmila Zhivkova, head of the Cultural Committee of the Communist Party and, more importantly, daughter of the head of state, Todor Zhivkov (Gencheva 2012). The obedient, moralistic, community-oriented child of early socialism never fully disappeared from the Bulgarian imaginary, however. Instead it slowly gave way to a child who was simultaneously understood as a knowledgeable and empowered fighter against the oppressive effects of the Cold War, yet possessed a "free, artistic, curious" individuality (Gencheva 2012: 17). Lyudmila

Zhivkova, influenced by esoteric eastern philosophies and Rousseauian understandings of the innocent child, had the ambition to carve out Bulgaria's name on the (high) cultural map of the world. One possible way for doing so while still apparently subscribing to the socialist ideals of the country was the organisation of the so-called Child Assemblies (1979-1988) under the aegis of UNESCO. The assemblies brought children from all parts of the world to Bulgaria, promoting a new cosmopolitan openness and encouraging engagement with different kinds of high art as a way to build world peace. The assemblies as the bearer of the new, however, did not replace the more traditional child/youth association – the Pioneers – which still operated with an image of the child as a disciplined fighter against social injustice. Gencheva attests:

The resulting image of childhood bore ambivalent characteristics: while being imaginative and childlike, it put forth a precociously empowered and knowing child with adult-like conviction and actions that spoke out against Cold War realities. Yet it was a child whose voice grew increasingly scripted by adults. This conceptual ambivalence would later work toward the gradual appropriation of the Assembly discourse into the mainstream discourse of socialist upbringing (2012: 16).

Gencheva's historical analysis emphasises how this ambivalence was inbuilt in the late socialist conceptualisation of Bulgarian childhood. She also describes how the state socialist regime cleansed itself of its inner contradictions via designating a clear 'other' to the desirable artistic, politically aware, socialist child: the gipsy. Morally dubious and impoverished, gipsy children were sometimes aestheticised within the assembly to portray Bulgaria as a multicultural, diverse society, but were not actually allowed as full participants. As elsewhere in the world, despite the official internationalist stance of the regime, the socialist child in Bulgaria was a trope in an exclusionary nation-building process (Gencheva 2012, Stephens 1997).

As also becomes clear from Engels-Kritidis' (2012) analysis of pre-school education in Bulgaria since the fall of state socialism, the ambivalent understanding of children's (educational) needs keeps haunting the country's dominant discourse on child-rearing, caught between a desire to preserve the "national traditions in education" and the "requirements adopted by various European and international organisations" (ibid: 49). According to Gencheva (2012), state socialist Bulgaria's approach to ideological inconsistencies was always practical: appropriating traditional persistent practices and resignifying them as socialist, like for instance the overwhelming participation of grandparents in childcare. In that sense precisely the ambivalent dichotomies of old/new and foreign/local and the openings these create for micro resistances or reformulations of normativity are what constitutes Bulgarian middle-class parenting. In line with Furedi's (2014) observation, the intensification of parenting as a way to respond to a

reconceptualisation of the child as both needier and more valuable starts decades before the fall of the regime. As in Hungary, it is the racialised internal other, the Roma, who delineates the phantasmatic border between appropriate and inappropriate, however. It is therefore the agentic engagement with multiple discourses from the position of a provider and not the performance of specific list of practices as a carer that makes the middle-class mother in Sofia.⁵⁹ This argument will be further addressed in section 5.3 of this chapter which deals with feeding infants, particularly stressing the way this conceptualisation of motherhood, while allowing for certain freedoms in the face of powerful child-rearing ideologies, obscures the actual work women perform in the home.

Two additional implicit discursive assumptions, which I argue have produced lasting ideological effects on the construction of both childhood and motherhood in Bulgaria, have to be underlined here. Unlike in Hungary, the socialist Bulgarian state never linked women's maternity benefits to a performance of a particular kind of motherhood. While of course advice for new mothers was available from doctors and nurses, as well as women's magazines such as *Zhenata Dnes* and *Lada*, the state did not directly interfere in the practices of parents in the home. Instead, in line with the idea of institutionalising child-rearing as a way to allow women to fulfil their roles as workers and social activists, it played a direct didactic role in the formation of the new socialist citizen. In this sense, the Bulgarian state assumed the responsibility for socialising children. While the role of mothers, and to a lesser extent fathers, was emphasised, it was not directly controlled via quality assurance practices. The relative freedom parents had to define the childcare methods that best suited their (working) lives, coupled with the pronounced role of the state as an educator of an ambivalent child which was simultaneously free yet 'scripted' by responsible adults, allows for Gergana's interpretation of old school parenting practices as only invested in securing the necessary materialities for a child's comfort. The same preconditions make possible Boryana's understanding, too, which sees parenting practices as focused on integrating the child into the mother's life and not vice versa, via strict discipline and scheduling of activities:

Generally, I believe it very much depends on the mother, how she's going to arrange things. I don't simply follow [my son], because he doesn't always know what's best for him [...] Because for example, if I give birth again, say in two years'

⁵⁹ The marginalisation of Roma mothers and their practices is explicit and very visible in popular media and web sites for new mothers. My respondents did not make direct references to the mothering of Roma women, on the one hand because I didn't ask them about this explicitly and, on the other, perhaps because while I did try to diversify my sample, the snowball method may have left me with a like-minded group. In any event, more research has to be done in both countries to give voice to minority mothers.

time, I will have to take care of another person too, and this way the first child will have already created a kind of self-reliance, regardless of its young age (Boryana, Sofia, 25, son 1y, English teacher at an elite secondary school, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Yet the focus on raising a self-reliant child is what connects both women's responses:

We are raising our child to be independent; it is not necessary to engage with him all the time... He doesn't need a constant hand there, to stick a pacifier in his mouth, to rock him or whatever. He has his toys. It's not that we neglect him, not at all, but he needs to be self-reliant and that also allows us freedom at home. I believe that one thing we parents try to foster in our children, regardless of their age, is that we are preparing them for being on their own one day, to manage their lives on their own [...] this skill is very important for his survival as an individual (Gergana, Sofia, 29, son 5m, company owner, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Unlike in Hungary, where the path to self-reliance is indefinite maternal love and satisfaction of a child's desires, here we see a different approach to fostering independence via deliberately letting a child learn to solve what are viewed as age-appropriate problems, regardless of its apparent discomfort. Other mothers, however, listed different methods, corresponding more to contemporary Western understandings of a child as a 'competent' manager of its own developmental needs. Mira says that this conceptualisation of childhood, which she read about in a book by a US author whose name she can't recall, has changed her entire understanding of a proper upbringing:

Forbidding as a principle is not a good idea. There's nothing I forbid my child. I don't allow him to touch the TV because he can push it over and get hurt. He can't go to the flower pots because I can't bathe him five times a day but, as I explained, he gradually stops wanting those things (Mira, Sofia, 31, son 1.5 years, credit risk management expert at a bank, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

As in the case of the mothers from Budapest, amid glaring contradictions (a child is not forbidden anything, yet he is not allowed to do what he wants) we see practicalities standing in the way of the beliefs of those respondents who did not want to rely on harsh disciplining methods. Unlike the Hungarian interviewees, however, none of the Bulgarian mothers exhibited maternal guilt about not fully following their children's lead. Practicality took clear precedence over children's desires, in line with state socialist approaches to matters of 'the private'. Acquiring information from various sources, both local and western, was also underlined as a way to keep updated as to the most current child-rearing advice. Modern Bulgarian middle-class parenting, these data suggest, is very clearly an amalgam of approaches, straddling the local and the global and

mothers as agents make use of various discourses to shape their lives and the lives of their children.

Autonomy and self-reliance, as ideological constructs organising subjectivity, are utilised by both sets of mothers to explicate the traits they desire to foster in their children. Yet, despite the similarity of goals, the historical specificities in the construction of childhood and the gendering of personhood lead to very different mothering approaches and, as such, motherhoods. Children's needs undoubtedly structure motherhoods, but unlike Steph Lawler's (2000) findings, my study shows the opposite is true as well – mothers' needs (in the case of Bulgaria, as workers and multi-layered individuals) structure children's needs as well. In line with Chapter 3, subjectivity is relational, cooperative, fused between self and other(s). In the case of Hungary, the same claim is valid: however, no dominant discourse allows for its articulation and as such women use justification strategies to affirm their resistances as subjects to a highly oppressive version of intensive mothering. Chapter 4, nonetheless, shows that these signifying practices may benefit or harm women in different ways. The discourse on mothers as providers in Bulgaria obscures the actual work done by women in 'the private sphere' and naturalises their child-rearing and housework contributions to the economy, something directly rewarded by the state in Hungary.

Regardless of the local ideological nuances, what becomes very explicit from the narrative practices of my respondents is that motherhood and childhood are local, historically-shaped constructs, performed by agentive subjects straddling various experts' demands in a globally unequal world. Conceptualisations of motherhood and childhood are also mutually co-constructing each other, testifying to the impossibility of autonomy as an organising principle of personhood and subjectivity. Both mother and child are discursive categories, the performative realisation of which creates subjects 'otherwise', beyond the dichotomy of relationality/autonomy.

In the next section of this chapter, I will show how providing food, one of the most discussed material needs of infants by childcare experts and sociologists alike, constructs Hungarian and Bulgarian motherhoods at the intersection between the hierarchically positioned productive and reproductive labour discussed in Chapter 4.

5.3 Feeding Children – Practising Embodied Subjectivity Co-Construction?

I would like to place the continuous task of providing food for a baby within the conceptualisation of motherhood as performative: a series of performative acts through which (among other childcare practices) maternal subjectivity is constituted. Feeding infants effectively consists of two, possibly three different chores, which, as I will show shortly, are ideologically interconnected: breastfeeding or bottle feeding and the introduction of solids, which eventually results in weaning. A glance at any childcare manual would make it very clear that probably the ‘most important’ infant ‘need’ is considered to be nutrition. Ideally, according to the ‘experts’, right after birth this need has to be satisfied by the mother’s breast, thus conflating notions of emotional nurturing and physical nutrition in the naturalised image of the mother and her ‘caring’ body. As Dunn (2004) has argued, the symbolic value of breastfeeding as an embodied act of care has marked other forms of food provision later in life as stemming from the same principle of maternal care. However, breastfeeding holds a special place in feminist analyses of motherhood for other reasons as well.

5.3.1 Breastfeeding Means Breastfeeding

Bobel describes breastfeeding as “as a feature of motherhood...perhaps the most tangible embodied act a mother performs” (2001: 5) The embodied character of breastfeeding seems to indeed be what sets it aside from other acts of childcare in the minds of feminist authors. According to Blum, breastfeeding may bring forward:

the most intense experience of conflict over what the late-twentieth-century American mother is ought to be. Any exploration into the realm of breastfeeding, however, hazards a slip to essentialist, biological deterministic portrayals of motherhood. Breastfeeding, then, perhaps more than any other aspect of motherhood, forces us to reckon with the ambiguities “built into” motherhood (1993: 292).

The discomfort Blum is trying to articulate has a lot to do with one of the rationales behind this thesis: theorising motherhood beyond a dichotomous understanding of relationality versus autonomy. The embodied nature of breastfeeding bothers Blum, who does not want to risk further ‘naturalising’ of women’s caring role. As Brace (2007) has argued, the naturalisation of maternity has served as a political tool to exclude women from the realm of the political since the dawn of modernity and that has been done precisely by denying women autonomy while

simultaneously constituting it as a fundament of citizenship. Breasts, according to Stearns, also exemplify another 'contradiction of motherhood' via blurring the boundary between the erotic and the maternal which in contemporary western society are expected to be independent from each other "despite the obvious facts of human reproduction" (1999: 309).

In her analysis of the mothering ideology promoted by La Leche League,⁶⁰ Bobel claims that, despite the problematic message it sends to women, the League has certainly managed to oppose "sexist portrayals of women's bodies as primarily objects for male consumption" (2001: 135). Still, she is concerned with the implications breastfeeding on demand - which the League promotes - have for the control women exercise over their bodies. Doesn't the infant whose hunger has to be satisfied at all times simply replace the sexual domination of a heteromale? So, as a result, "increasingly, women are confronted with the dilemma of the sexual or the nurturing, maternal breast" (Stearns 1999:309). Indeed, Stearns concludes:

Women accomplish the breastfeeding of their children with constant vigilance to location, situation, and observer. Women breastfeed in anticipation of, and reaction to, the male gaze and the possibility of inappropriate responses or censure. Women spend a lot of time hiding the breastfeeding, attempting to be discreet, and being careful around situations where there are men and therefore the possibility of their breastfeeding being misread as sexual. [...] As long as women's breasts are defined exclusively as "for the other," women will likely feel the need to negotiate their breastfeeding carefully. (Stearns 1999: 322-3)

Stearns then goes on to cite Linda Blum, one of the most prominent contemporary US sociologists researching breastfeeding. In their article "Mother-to-Mother", another analysis of La Leche League's take on ideologies of maternalism, Blum and Vandewater (1993) argue that women who choose to breastfeed in the US nowadays do so at the borderline of two competing ideologies: the dominant one promoted by medical discourse, the vision of a superwoman/mother who juggles unproblematically the demands of breastfeeding and career; and the League's exaltation of an essentialist, romanticised vision of women's capacity to mother. The League originally promoted stay-at-home mothering, but in the 1990s, Blum and Vandewater are shocked to find out, a set of "ambiguous and contradictory statements" dominate its rhetoric, instead of providing breastfeeding mothers with a feasible way to 'exist' in the real world (ibid: 288). What seems to be salient, however, is a type of mothering which defines itself against the discourse of a self-interested, materially oriented individual.

⁶⁰ A worldwide organisation, supporting mothers in breastfeeding, created in the 1950s in the US as resistance to ever-increasing medicalisation of infant feeding.

Bobel (2001: 142), who is concerned precisely with the broader implications of the League's "good motherhood through breastfeeding" for mothering ideologies, asks the following:

What are the implications for women if, once freed from cultural expectations of being "super women," they receive League expectations of being "super moms?" Are women simply throwing off one unrealistic role for another? In this regard, LLLI [La Leche League International] presents a paradox.

In both of my research locations breastfeeding seemed to be the unquestionable norm for infant feeding. Not a single one of my respondents formula-fed, except in special circumstances, such as the mother's sudden serious illness, which required medication understood as incompatible with breastfeeding. Even supplementing with formula was looked down upon, with both Hungarians and Bulgarians preferring to introduce solids earlier than planned in the face of insufficient milk supply, rather than turn to what was perceived as "unnatural" nutrition. In the words of Luca, an activist and MA student from Budapest, who needs to go to classes several times a week and leaves her 3-month-old either with her partner or mother:

I would prefer to breastfeed for as long as I can. I will try to only breastfeed until he is 6 months old, I mean not give him anything else. I don't know if I can manage but I hope so; so far, he got formula once or twice. [...] I can't always pump enough so once or twice he had to taste this "milk" (Luca, Budapest, 27, daughter 3 months, social worker, Hungarian, living with male partner her quotation marks).

Even in the face of extreme difficulties such as hospitalisation or a baby's inability to latch on, which at least half of all respondents experienced, women did not give up the idea of (exclusive) breastfeeding, often spending days and nights expressing milk, in some cases for months on end. In the words of Desislava, breastfeeding is exhausting, often painful, and its success requires the use of pumps which, according to her, is both annoying and arguably detrimental for breast firmness. Yet, she adds that

recognising that this is the healthiest option one could give her child, a mother sucks up the inconvenience, so if I have a second child I am going to breastfeed for sure, for as long as possible. My mistake with the first one was that I could not overcome my own hang-ups and feed her in public, which limited my moving around a lot. With the second one I believe I will "break through" and breastfeed outside, for my own convenience (Desislava, Sofia, 29, daughter 1y, product manager at a software company, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

The supermom discussed by Bobel (2001) is clearly visible in the quote above, as well as the tension between 'the sexual', firm breast and the feeding breast. The supermom, however, just as with the need for rest or entertainment, discussed in Chapter 4, must put her child's need for "the healthiest" nutrition before her desire to conform to dominant standards of female beauty.

Yet, in line with Stearns' (1999) argument, the sexual breast is not fully erased from the social imaginary just by attaching a baby to it. The majority of my respondents, irrespective of location, as visible in Desislava's words as well, experienced various levels of discomfort about breastfeeding in public. While some women never fed outside of the comfort of their own homes, most managed the collapsing boundary between public and private breastfeeding by trying to be discreet about the display of their bare bodies and/or recreating some of the perceived features of the private such as intimacy and calmness in a public setting. The supposed gaze of the other, here random passers-by, was overwhelmingly present in my respondents' answers, and women often thought it was their responsibility to not disturb these others' supposed comfort by exposing them to the act of breastfeeding:

In most cases, for their [passers-by] own comfort I am trying, you know, not to be, like, breastfeeding at the most open bench in the park, but rather, do it more *naturally*, somewhere where it is... less loud, more intimate, more secluded. So that Bobi [her son] doesn't get distracted, so that I don't get distracted, or if I see a judging gaze, I will feel bad and uncomfortable. (Kalina, Sofia, 29, son 6m, lecturer in foreign languages at a university, Bulgarian, living with male partner my emphasis).

Indeed, the "judging gaze" does not actually have to be 'real' to structure women's breastfeeding performances. None of my respondents mentioned ever actually feeling judged about breastfeeding in public, yet, the very idea of it seemed to elicit in them a sense of transgressing boundaries and resultant self-disciplining actions. In the quote above it is also evident how, as a Bulgarian mother, Kalina tried to create a 'nesting' private space in the public park. This process was haunted by a sense of 'naturalness' thus alluding to an archaic, in the psychoanalytic sense, conflation between motherhood, nature and the private. Whenever mothers reject formula then, it is more on the grounds of being "unnatural", rather than it actually being perceived as harmful in itself. 'Natural is best' as an assumption remains unquestioned, despite the fact that the majority of my respondents did not think the occasional consumption of formula could be detrimental to their babies' health.

Hungarian mothers, in line with the findings presented in Chapter 4, on the other hand tended to either rule out breastfeeding in public completely or found a way to re-signify it as a children's need, requiring immediate satisfaction.

I never really thought about breastfeeding him in public, I just thought we first eat and then, whenever we went somewhere, I knew that first I have to breastfeed him and then change his diaper and then breastfeed him again [beforehand] and he can go (Klára, Budapest, 30, son 1.5y, administrator at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

As such, their actions were justified on the grounds of putting their own need for privacy behind the nutritional needs of their infants, quite unlike Desislava from Sofia above, who cited her own convenience as a major reason to consider breastfeeding her second child outside the house.

The desire for keeping it 'natural' comes back with the process of weaning, too. While some mothers listed disturbed sleep and the need to go back to work full time as legitimate reasons to stop breastfeeding, the ideal scenario for most, both in Budapest and Sofia, was for a 'natural' ending, where the child gives up the breast on its own. In the words of Klára:

he was not eating so much and then he started to teethe you know, and he was biting and stuff and it was OK, and also I noticed that my milk was decreasing. That also went naturally, I tried to pay attention to him and also to myself and to my body as well, I think that natural is the best way. (Klára, Budapest, 30, son 1.5y, administrator at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

The desire of the mother to wean a teething child who bites is dressed in a narrative of bodily mutuality, where the child's needs coincide with the natural decrease of a mother's milk, a process managed to perfection by a benevolent Mother Nature. As previously mentioned, Dunn (2004) argues that the perceived naturalness of breastfeeding organises contemporary ideas of appropriate infant feeding choices in general.

5.3.2 Introducing Solids Kind of Means Breastfeeding Too

I will now outline Dunn's discussion of the relationship between motherhood and feeding, connect it to DeVault's (1991) ideas about feeding a family as emotional, reproductive and thus 'gender' work and see how its naturalisation has worked ideologically to create the 'disappearance' of mother-work as work (Crittenden 2001). Dunn's research, although conceptually different from mine, comes to similar empirical conclusions about motherhood and feeding infants in another post-socialist country, Poland. Therefore, I think it is crucial to engage in a dialogue with her analysis.

Privatizing Poland (Dunn 2004) is an ethnographic study of the Alima Gerber baby food factory in Rzeszow, South Eastern Poland. The book deals with the changes in personhood which accompany the attempted transition from a socialist to a post-Fordist mode of production at the factory. The author explores how new policies of quality control, US training methods and job evaluation techniques aim not only at changing the work process in the factory but at re-defining workers' identities as a whole. In the chapter "Ideas of Kin and Home on the Shop Floor", Dunn explores how female factory workers (and other women living in Rzeszow) conceptualise their identities as workers as inseparable from their identities as mothers in their strategy to oppose

western visions of the individual, profit-maximising worker. This process, Dunn claims, is facilitated by the fact that the product of the company is jarred baby food.

According to Dunn (2004: 134–135), feeding a child was seen by her research participants as “the most essential act of motherhood because it was understood as part of the feminine biological nature”, a sort of extension to pregnancy and breastfeeding. Dunn (2004: 136) finds evidence that in the Polish context food provision for the household is an ongoing process, tied to the very idea of creating the home and the family as women’s work. For my purposes, the example of a Rzeszow librarian, is particularly interesting. She is a wife and mother of three children, who, unlike most of the other women who Dunn interviewed, exhibited a strong belief in the need to divide housework between the various members of the family. Despite this equality stance, Katarzyna insisted on doing all the cooking for the family herself and, further, grew her own fruits and vegetables and canned them for the winter. While expressing strong criticism of Alima Gerber, Katarzyna insists that giving babies commercially prepared food is enough to qualify someone as a bad mother. Interestingly, her reasoning is not so much that industrially prepared food is unhealthy (although it lacks the nutritious benefits of a homemade meal) but that it is not as tasty, because it does not stem directly from the (bodily) work of a loving mother. As Dunn (2004: 139, her emphasis) suggests,

For Katarzyna, her food is more than just a part of her personality. It is part of her *person*, her physical being, as well as her soul. Breast milk is part of her body, which she gives to her babies. Other foods, however, are also a part of her body and person, although one step removed from the literalness of breast milk. Through her physical labor in her garden and in her kitchen, she makes food for her family. This bodily labor makes her fruits and vegetables also part of her body and a part of her unique self, which she gives to her children.

Further, “the transference of the body’s energy to another body via food means that mother and child” are not individual beings, bound in the separate bodies that western liberalism assumes, but linked in a certain mechanism of togetherness that ensures children’s survival in the Polish context (Dunn 2004: 139). The maternal and the individual body within liberalism have a problematic and indeed contradictory relationship (Bobel 2001, Hays 1996, Lawler 2000, Stearns 1999). The mother as a subject position, claims Lawler (2000), is always relational to the ‘the self’ of her child. Dunn takes this even further, to an embodied subjectivity ‘otherwise’ co-creation:

As Katarzyna gardens and cooks, she believes she is creating not just the persons of her children but her own person as well. She does that in a simultaneous reference to jarred baby food, which, produced in the impersonal setting of a global factory, belongs to a system which denies the relational, interpersonal value of people. (ibid.: 140–141)

I find the section of Dunn's study on the relation between visions about factory produced and homemade baby food very useful for my analysis because this relation is at the centre of the debates structuring possible interpretations of (good) mothering. These interpretations are, as it happens, quite different in Hungary and in Bulgaria, as my data analysis will show shortly. But, to reinterpret Mahmood's (2005) idea about the various possible ways one can establish a performative relation to a norm, they seem to function as a symbolic point of reference constitutive of the 'thinkability' of motherhood. They also, however, raise important questions about the actual labour involved in mothering an infant and its connections to specific economic issues, like food prices, the real value of maternity leave benefits and so on.

Indeed, as DeVault (1991: 230) has argued,

Feeding a family involves not only the physical care and maintenance of household members but also the day-to-day production of connection and sociability. The physical tasks of food preparation – essential as they are – combine with equally important coordinative work that produces a group life within a complex market society.

Housework of any kind, according to DeVault, presupposes the performance of both interpersonal relations and particular material tasks. Nevertheless, because historically housework has been rendered unproductive in an ideological move assuring the economic subjugation of (married) women, it often goes "unnoticed and unacknowledged" (DeVault 1991: 228). Also, the subjectivity of the mother as always relational (as opposed to autonomous) can easily accommodate housework as representing family relationships. In DeVault's words, "It is an activity essential to producing central cultural rituals of everyday life, but also activity whose invisibility makes it appear 'only natural' for women" (ibid.: 228). This invisibility, as well as the increasing child-centeredness of western societies, is reflected in the majority of academic literature dealing with solid food introduction to infants. This research appears to be concerned primarily with the perceived adequacy, from a medical point of view, of the food intake of babies in light of the feeding practices of mothers/parents (Brown and Lee 2011, Brown et al. 2008, Kramer and Kakuma 2002, Rapley and Murkett 2008, Rowan and Harris 2012) . Brown and Lee (2011), for example, focus on how maternal styles of feeding impact children but not mothers.

In their exploration of the various consumer choices middle-class southern US mothers make about the nutrition of their babies within an environment structured by the intersecting ideologies of intensive mothering and risk society, Afflerback et al. (2013) give a more nuanced account of infant feeding. As a result of these ideologies, they suggest mothers have to single-handedly take over the responsibility of minimising the health risks presumably inherent in

feeding small children. Thus, providing food constructs both the family and the identity of the mother doing the work of feeding:

Research also shows that the association between feeding, risk society and intensive mothering extends beyond the decision to feed by breast or bottle. Mothers are accountable for the size and perceived health of their babies and are observed taking into account the taste preferences of family members when purchasing food. (Afflerback et al. 2013: 390)

Therefore, as DeVault also shows, cooking, with its special relationship to the nurturing of human beings, serves as an activity through which women produce “meaningful lives for themselves” (1991: 232) but at the same time it can reinforce their subjugation within the family.

However, in my view this subjugation should not be taken at face value but should be thought about critically as appearing at the intersection of the symbolic value attached to the meanings of productive and reproductive work. The relation between the meanings of paid and unpaid work is not as straightforward as DeVault (1991) assumes. Instead, there is a shifting boundary which is continuously negotiated on a personal and family level. The negotiation itself is socio-culturally conditioned. DeVault (1991), as well as many others (e.g. Crittenden 2001, Fürst 1997, Hochschild 1989, Laureu and Weininger 2008, Pateman 1988), explore the implicit privileges hidden in defining certain activities as ‘work’, while others remain outside of this “honorific label” (DeVault 1991: 238). In order to avoid contributing to making the chores traditionally done by women invisible, DeVault suggests looking “beyond access to existing ‘slots’ in the social division of labor, toward a concern with the ‘shape’ of the division of labor itself – a concern with what work needs to be done and how tasks are combined”(1991: 241). Following DeVault’s logic, if feeding implies the mandatory preparation of meals, usually on a daily basis, and involves various “bundles of tasks” (Hughes cited in Thorne 2001: 365), it can serve as a means for women to negotiate the care they provide for their babies as (socially valued) work, as shown in Chapter 4. However, in order for such a definition to be possible at all, the ‘cultural’ conditioning for it should be already present. If the negotiation of care as work is already foreclosed for a variety of socio-historical reasons, my data shows that mothers find other ways to signify their daily life, and as such their ‘doing’ of themselves, as personally and socially meaningful. For instance, neoliberalism, the economic model in Eastern Europe that is currently dominant to varying degrees, strongly discourages a definition of work done at home as an

important social contribution. Instead, housework and childcare are largely represented as materialisation of 'love', thus making sure no demand for paid housework will emerge.⁶¹

Of course, neoliberal capitalism has only been present in Bulgaria and Hungary since 1989. The nuances in the way paid labour and housework were valued and conceptualised under these countries' different state socialist regimes, as well as their divergent paths towards neoliberal capitalism, have allowed for variations between the negotiated significations related to the chores involved in feeding small children. Nevertheless, feeding practices, as the existing research shows, are constitutive of the social identities of mothers and, as DeVault has argued, "when people talk about their activity, they refer, in various ways, to the recurring features of the social context that organize that activity" (1991: 229)). Feeding a baby then, and especially creating a narrative about it, is not simply (an account of) a norm-free activity which satisfies the infant's material need for food. It is an activity that is discursively defined and as such inseparable from the power relations which structure both its organisation and the subjectivity of those supposed to perform it (Foucault 1972).

As I have previously argued (Cheresheva 2015), and indeed as Chapter 4 suggests, the different conceptualisations of the relationship between the social role of women as mothers and housework in Hungary and Bulgaria in my data have produced very different understandings of appropriate and healthy baby food and feeding practices. While in Hungary homemade food (many times explicitly mentioned as prepared by the individual mother) is undisputedly perceived as a baseline, deviation from which requires the deployment of legitimisation strategies, in Bulgaria what constitutes a reasonable feeding option is rather the ability of the mother to have made a choice that is 'rational' and well-researched, relatively 'free of financial concerns' and which fits with her overall lifestyle. The debate about homemade or commercially prepared meals (Cheresheva 2015, Dunn 2004) is a salient category in the way maternal feeding choices come about. For my interviewees from Budapest homemade food seems to be an unquestionable norm – only a few of them admitted occasionally using jarred food, as an exception while travelling or on a longer outing. Klára's criticism of jarred purees exemplifies almost entirely the opinions expressed by my Hungarian respondents:

I don't like it. Because I don't think it's like... OK, of course, they say there are no additional flavourings, there are no preservatives or anything but then still, you put it in there, you know... I don't know, I just don't trust it. And I think fresh is always

⁶¹ For a discussion of the appropriation of women's labour for the benefits of the capitalist economy see Crittenden (2001) and Pateman (1988).

best because it has more vitamins and everything (Klára, Budapest, 30, son 1.5y, administrator at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

A 'good mother' from this perspective makes herself fully responsible for satisfying her child's needs and as such cannot put trust in delegating an important activity such as preparing food to someone else.

Quite contrarily, Bulgarian mothers seemed to primarily rely on either jarred food or the so-called baby canteens which were discussed in Chapter 4. According to Kalina, the commercially-prepared versus homemade baby food debate is "pointless".

Pointless, because firstly contemporary everyday life, in particular everyday life with a baby, makes making baby food at home unthinkable. Second, modern women are not used to preparing all the food at home, for each family member, for every meal and there is no need to force them do so. I believe ready-made purees are good enough, good enough for babies. True, I don't really know what they put in them or what the exact process of preparation is [...] I know that but overall, I trust the producers and I see my child accepts the food well (Kalina, Sofia, 29, son 6m, lecturer in foreign languages at a university, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

The role of the contemporary woman in my Bulgarian data seems to be constructed very differently from the role constructed in Dunn's (2004) observations about Poland: the domestic goddess is not on the minds of Kalina and the rest of my Bulgarian interviewees, who ideally see themselves as active modern women whose time is too precious to be wasted on avoidable housework activities. Exceptions of course exist – two of my Bulgarian respondents – Maria (29, son 9 months, PhD candidate, Bulgarian, living with male partner) and Nadia (31, son 1y, senior expert at a state agency, Bulgarian, living with male partner) explicitly stated they prefer to cook at home as a way to avoid the unknown preservatives in commercially prepared purees. The same reasoning, as suggested above, was used by virtually all Hungarian mothers. However, Bulgarian women, regardless of whether they cooked at home or not, pointed to the need to use organic, preferably home-grown fruits and vegetables. Hungarian mothers tended to dismiss organic produce as unnecessary given its high cost, although a few who could afford it preferred it to the non-organic variety. Interestingly, and in line with Dunn's research, it was the act of choosing and buying the food oneself that constituted quality control. As evident from Klára's words, commercially prepared food standards were distrusted, while in Bulgaria they were understood to ensure babies consumed safe products, something one could not otherwise know when shopping at the (super)market: "Jarred food is at least subject to some kind of control and certification, supposedly the fruits are grown according to some rules" (Svetlana, Sofia, 32, son

2y, medical doctor, Bulgarian, living with male partner). Ultimately, feeding a baby in Bulgaria is a question of time management, financial calculation and, last but not least, a sense of complying with some form of “objective”, external quality control. In the words of Daniela:

Homemade food is not bad if you have the right products, but it takes a lot of time to prepare. On the other hand, I like an English brand of jarred purees, which are organic, tested and have many certificates. In that sense, if I have [another] child, I'd wean on those, because I trust them (Daniela, Sofia, 37, dentist, daughter 1y, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Hungarian mothers construct their everyday childcare work as essential for the emotional and physical well-being of their baby but also as ultimately creating the (middle-class) family (DeVault 1991), while Bulgarians seem to conceptualise their contribution to the (middle-class) family as primarily financial and organisational. Since in both cases these symbolic signification processes exist in a situation where housework and childcare chores are gendered and devalued in relation to wage-earning work, they achieve little regarding the betterment of the lives of mothers. While (middle-class, white) Hungarian mothers manage to get some credit for the relentless work they put into feeding in particular, and caring for their children in general, the price to pay is exhausting, round the clock, labour intensive mothering. While Bulgarian women seem to have more freedom in defining how they spend their time on maternity leave, without this necessarily depriving them of the honorary label ‘good mother’, they are only allowed to do so as long as the lifestyle of the family does not change significantly. The actual work that goes into feeding infants – and about half of my respondents testified to doing some cooking for the baby and/or their family – remains invisible. Finally, those who did not cook did a lot of ‘maternal thinking’ (Ruddick 1989) around feeding instead: researching the market options and making sure they provided the best, often expensive, alternative for their babies as well as reading expert guidance in several languages to back up their opinions.

5.4 Summary

This chapter shows the ways in which the discursive formulations of children’s needs and ‘good motherhood’ in Budapest and Sofia performatively shape the cooperative maternal subject ‘otherwise’. Childcare rituals structure mothers’ and children’s subjectivities alike thus pointing once more to the relational nature of subjectivity. However, my respondents believe that fostering autonomy and independence in their infants through their maternal practice is what will make them happy and successful future adults. Different technologies are utilised to raise an autonomous child in the two research locations. Mothers from Budapest maintain that

complete maternal devotion is the path to creating a self-reliant child. In Sofia, on the other hand, stepping back and allowing a child to solve what's perceived as age-appropriate problems despite apparent discomfort, is considered to be building independence. Those understandings result in different everyday practices, which in turn organise maternal subjectivities differently. Particular understandings of autonomy, relationality and dependency underlie my respondents' feeding choices as well. The all-giving Hungarian mother gives her embodied work to her infant, thus building its person. The managerial Bulgarian mother tries to prioritise and rationalise food provision, thus making the creation of her baby's embodied person a step less literal. As promoted by childcare experts since the late 1960s, good Bulgarian middle-class mothering in my data is based on outsourcing labour-intensive tasks and focusing on being a successful role model for one's child. In tandem, the last chapter of this thesis will focus on the way these mothers constructed themselves not only as good mothers, but also as middle-class citizens. As Hays (1996) has argued, the dominant discourse on mothering, at least in the USA, is historically linked to the practices and morals of the middle class as opposed to those of the "promiscuous poor and the frivolous rich" (Hays 1996: 33, see also Lareau 2003, Thorne 2001, among others). The material conditions in which women mother also influence the legitimacy of childcare decisions they make in other parts of the world (Byrne 2006, Glenn et al. 1994, Harwood et al. 1996).

It is worth mentioning that the middle classes in societies with newly built capitalist arrangements and socialist cultural legacies certainly differ from their Western counterparts (see for instance Tilkidjiev 2000). However, class is still a salient part of the dominant political and media discourses in Hungary and Bulgaria and is often linked to discourses on reproduction – i.e., who are the worthy ones to reproduce the nation? The good middle-class mother, I will also argue in Chapter 6, the last analytical chapter of this thesis, is locally specific, produced by the particular regimes of domination at work within the societies in question.

Chapter 6

Creating the Middle-Class Mother: Global Hierarchies, Post-Socialist Differences and Local Distinctions

6.1 Introduction

A lot has been written on the relationship between mothering styles and social class, by both critical and mainstream sociologists. All motherhoods were surely not created equal and in a growing global culture of expert guided 'intensive mothering' (Hays 1996), the more intuitive approach, typically associated with the lower strata of society, is often valued less by childcare experts than the heavily rationalised, labour intensive practices of middle-class women (Faircloth et al. 2013, Harman and Cappellini 2015, Hays 1996, Lareau 2003, Vincent and Ball 2007). As discussed throughout this thesis, the intensification of parenting methods is a global trend, becoming more pronounced with time (Furedi 2013). While the previous two chapters positioned the childcare work Bulgarian and Hungarian mothers perform in the private sphere in relation to gendered work within the (extended) family and beyond, and the complex relationship between the idea/I of autonomy and personhood, this chapter will focus on the culturally specific class distinctions produced by everyday motherwork.

As suggested above, the classed character of parenting has been studied extensively. However, not surprisingly, the literature is heavily biased towards western, and particularly Anglo-American, contexts. One of the pioneers of the idea of classed motherhoods is Sharon Hays (1996), who claims that US parenting styles are in fact classed reproductive strategies: working-class women prepare their children for being employees/the managed, while middle-class ones try to foster in their offspring the personal qualities required for managerial work. The personal qualities valued by middle-class mothers are simultaneously naturalised by childcare experts and child psychologists as essential features of a psychologically healthy individual. Thus, the compliance with the currently prevalent ideology of intensive mothering in the US, which is quite obviously only accessible to financially secure women, is what grants a woman the label "good mother". Other (classed, raced and so on) practices exist of course, but they don't have equal status with the dominant ones and women who mother in such ways are marginalised as less deserving. Black feminists like Hill Collins (1990) have argued that feminist analysis of

motherhood has also been biased in a way which privileges the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual mothers over those constructed as 'different'. In Glenn et al.'s rendition of Hill Collins' point, "what may be needed to emphasise the social basis of mothering is attending to the variation rather than searching for the universal, and to shift what has been on the margins to the center" (1994: 5). The motherwork of women of colour, immigrant women and non-heterosexual women has since then been the primary object of research of many (Faircloth et al. 2013, Feldstein 2000, Gabb 2001, Glenn et al. 1994, Harwood et al. 1999, Hau-nung Chan 2008, Hill Collins 1991, Koggel 2003).

The anxious concerns of middle-class mothers to secure the best start for their all-important children through the provision of everything from healthy fair trade feeding options (Harman and Capellini 2015) to the right kind of formal schooling and playdate mates (Byrne 2006), as well as extracurricular activities such as swimming, music and foreign language classes (Faircloth et al. 2013, Laureu 2003, Laureu and Weininger 2008, Vincent and Ball 2007), have also been the subject of a plenitude of studies.

In this chapter, however, I contest the straightforward equation of the practices described by the above-mentioned authors and the idea of middle-class parenting. Through comparing the practices of middle-class mothers in two different CEE countries, I aim to show how centres (dominant practices), just as margins, are multiple and fragile. Analyses of motherhood have to take this into consideration when trying to theorise the experiences, subjectivities and material difficulties of women who mother. Knowledge produced in 'core' countries (in this case by child development experts) is often taken not only as universally valid but also as superior (see, for instance, Mignolo 2000) By studying the local discourses in Hungary and Bulgaria, my goal is to account for the fact that the type of mothering described as dominant in feminist literature, that is, Anglo-American and to a lesser extent, western European middle-class mothering, is in a relation of power to other practices around the world. That said, dominant practices are locally specific and shaped at the intersection of a variety of discourses (see Glenn et al. 1994, Hays 1996). Class is indeed performed through mothering (Byrne 2006) and one can logically assume that the practices of more privileged social groups will have a higher chance of fitting the locally dominant idea of proper motherhood (Harwood et al. 1999, Hays 1996, McMahon 1995, Wall 2001). However, material privilege is relative, and the locally specific intersections of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality etc. produce very different regimes of domination.

Following a similar approach to the one taken in Chapters 4 and 5, I start by analysing the childcare practices of my interviewees and look at the ways in which they created cultural

distinctions (in the Bourdieusian sense – to be elaborated shortly) through their preferred styles of mothering. Against whose parenting they implicitly if not explicitly wanted to juxtapose their practices, and with whom they aligned themselves ideologically, are the foci here. A tale of social class creation emerges, which positions Hungarian and Bulgarian new mothers' carework at the intersection of state socialism and capitalism and a desire for re/occupying a cultural space in the European imaginary. Finally, the reader gets to learn something about the ways Eastern European middle-class women imagine the mothering of their less privileged counterparts - lower class women and the Roma. While some of those discriminatory attitudes transpire in the narratives of my interviewees, I feel it's very important to emphasise that the women in my sample made close to none explicitly classist or racist remarks. Whether this is a result of a rising culture of political correctness or of genuine accepting attitudes is hard to tell at this point and will definitely be a focus of my future research.

6.2 Class, Cultural Practices and Reproductive Strategies – Theoretical Considerations

According to Bourdieu (1984) social classes differentiate themselves via taste, and in a broader sense cultural practices. Those 'preferences' – in art, food, design and so on – often understood as natural dispositions, are in fact in direct correlation with people's educational level and social origin. The reason taste appears natural, however, is because it is embodied and continuously lived and re-iterated. This internalised set of socially desirable attitudes, dispositions and behaviours is what Bourdieu calls habitus: the embodied dimension of socio-economic class. Habitus is unconscious, but far from insignificant: in fact, it is closely related to the ways cultural capital is (re)distributed between unequally positioned members of society. Cultural capital is one of the forms of capital Bourdieu recognises, together with social and economic capital. While economic capital relates to one's material possessions, social capital has to do primarily with valuable connections, which can help one get a prestigious job, marry into wealth etc., while cultural capital is the subtle hierarchical myriad of knowledges, tastes, values, hobbies and so on that form one's habitus. The different forms of capital are mutually transferrable: that is, social and cultural capital can be transformed into economic capital while high economic capital usually correlates with the privileged forms of cultural dispositions (Bourdieu 1986).

In that sense middle-class mothers' childcare practices, as reproductive strategies, aim at ensuring their children will grow up with 'the right' kind of tastes, beliefs, attitudes and even bodies. If examined through the lens of cultural capital, wealthier mothers' obsession with

'clean' and/ or organic feeding has to do with the development of particular tastes for expensive, gourmet kinds of food, while the 'correct' nutritional value such foods supposedly provide will ensure their children will end up neither malnourished nor overweight. Further, the 'right' kind of extracurricular activities secure the acquisition of socially valued hobbies and skills, whilst also ensuring children will grow up in the preferred social circle of like-minded (and usually relatively affluent) families (Afflerback et al. 2013, Byrne 2006, Lareau 2003).

Aside from a reproductive strategy, the aim of which is to sustain or improve the class position of the child, as the literature discussed in the introduction to this chapter shows, mothering can be approached as a Bourdieusian 'field' (Hilgers and Mangez 2015). Within it, mothers agentially perform their own class dispositions and aspirations, in a constant struggle to re-negotiate the power relations between themselves, childcare and medical experts, local institutions and global knowledges and so on, which structure the ideas about both children's needs and maternal contributions.

6.2.1 Constructing the Middle Classes – a Non-Western Perspective

In his ethnography of middle class formation in Nepal, Mark Liechty (2002) explores the ways in which the newly emerging discourses on consumerism, 'the youth' and media in the country don't simply reflect, but rather construct the evolution of the middle class as a socio-cultural entity. The particular instabilities and ambiguities that the middle classes experience in relation to market capitalism find their 'natural' response in discourses that moralise relative economic privilege and the lifestyles that come with it. The moralisation of social exclusion is, for Liechty, crucial to the very genesis of the Nepalese middle class, and both this moralisation and the middle class itself have a particular 'global inequalities' dimension. Similar to post-socialist Eastern Europe, the Nepalese middle stratum did not emerge gradually and organically but had to invent itself rapidly within the modernising project of the 1950s as a carrier of the culturally correct amalgam of western modernity and local tradition, in a space carefully carved out between the urban poor and the rich elites.

As I show later in this chapter, this is not to be taken as a claim that the middle classes in Hungary and Bulgaria emerged from one day to the next after the fall of state socialism. Nevertheless, on the level of official discourse, the middle class became an important topic of public discussion and therefore an explicit identity category only after the change of regimes. From occupying a marginal space in specific anti-communist dissident discourses, the moral desirability of a

middle-class status as the epitome of western normality took a central position in the social imaginaries in both post-socialist Bulgaria and Hungary (Éber and Gagyi 2015, Fehervary 2013). Similarly, Liechty (2002) shows that, within the cultural construction of legitimacy, those wanting to claim middle-class status had to deal with the global symbolic position of Nepal as an underdeveloped nation. Indeed, Liechty recognises that the old caste system continued playing a significant role in everyday Nepali life. Thus, the formation of the middle class does not directly replace the old regime of social relations here. Rather, it emerges from the caste context, which both informs it but also works as its abject reality, the cultural rejection of which produces the new middle-class subject. In that sense, I suggest looking at middle class construction in my CEE contexts as both a rejection of the communist (supposedly) classless society, but also as its logical continuation (Konrád and Szelenyi 1979, Owczarzak 2009, Szelenyi 1982, Tsoneva 2017). Further, following Liechty's method of focusing on the cultural creation of class distinctions within specific discourses, I suggest looking at mothering in Hungary and Bulgaria as a formative discourse in the construction of the middle classes between a socialist past and a neoliberal capitalist present, in a global world structured by inequality (Éber and Gagyi 2015). In Liechty's words, the third world experiences "processes of urbanization, market penetration, bureaucratization, industrialization, and class formation [which] play themselves out in ever-changing power relations that bring the local and global together in explosive and unpredictable ways" (2002: 9). According to Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley (1998) among others, those same processes characterised the transition to market capitalism in Eastern Europe. Indeed, there are multiple parallels between the post-socialist and the postcolonial condition (Blagojevic, 2009, Tlostanova, 2015, Verdery 1996), as I have already explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

6.3 The Post/social/ist Middle Class – In-Between, but In-Between

What?

Owczarzak (2009) has pointed out that, despite its critical potential, post-socialism has been used primarily as a geographical term to designate certain parts of CEE and Russia, rather than as an analytical category. The author focuses on four key areas pertaining to post-colonialism and explores their relevance to the study of post-socialism: orientalism, nation and identity, hybridity and voice. For my purposes, the lens of orientalism is crucial to emphasise, because it allows a glance into the specific local translations of the symbolic global inequalities I mentioned above.

Owczarzak provides evidence that the so-called 'winners of transition' – usually the educated (upper) middle classes - have adopted an orientalising discourse towards those who fared worse from the collapse of state socialism: the working classes, people living outside big cities, pensioners etc. Their relative marginalisation is the direct result of a drastic restructuring of the economy (Ghodsee 2005, Haney 2002) yet their misfortune is explained largely through a moralising logic which equates lack of economic success with personal qualities such as laziness and an ideological failure to move away from the old ways of communism. Essentially, a personal association with the old socialist regime is considered a 'pre-modern' belonging, similar to the ways in which Liechty's (2002) Nepalese middle-class urbanites treated their more 'traditional' and less economically advanced peers.

The orientalism both Owczarzak and Liechty describe is not directed towards the people of a faraway land but serves as an othering technique right at the heart of home, which produces the upper/middle class sense of self-worth. When it comes to middle-class identity construction specifically, as Liechty testifies, "the middle class pioneers a new space of cultural "betweenness" – between high and low, global and local, new and old, "tradition" and "modernity" – as it struggles to produce itself in cultural life" (2002: 25). In that sense class becomes more than a product of economic power relations and is best understood as a 'cultural practice', evident and continuously reproduced in people's performances and narrations about self and other (Liechty 2002). Those narrations "place individuals within the flow of cultural time, carrying them along with a tide of cultural inertia that is difficult to resist" (ibid: 25). That cultural inertia, in other words, puts a limit on people's unique performances of self, which are thus always constrained by the particular context in which they occur. Context – historical, cultural, geographical - therefore structures the performativity of class and must be analysed meticulously together with the analysis of cultural practice rather than ignored or simply taken for granted.

Looking at the post-socialist context as structural to my interviewees' classed performances of motherhood contributes to a broader understanding of the part social class plays in the construction of motherhood beyond the global north-west. Instead of naturalising certain practices such as baby-led weaning and organised extra-curricular activities as inherently middle class, a researcher rather needs to look at what kind of symbolic micro-exclusions and phantasmatic inclusions are performed through someone's mothering practice. Who are the objects of her baby minding choice? Is her idea of 'good motherhood' actually shaped by a particular version of 'the good life'? Is there a hidden class agenda behind the supposedly

universal values she tries to transmit to her offspring? Therefore, following Liechty (2002), I propose focusing on the parenting performances of individual subjects while keeping an eye on the 'cultural inertia' that informs their narratives of social reproduction because it allows me to provide an insight into the processes of middle class formation in Budapest and Sofia. Social class is thus specifically local and at the same time always a function of a system of global inequalities, both symbolic and material. Before going into data analysis, however, I first turn to the historical background of middle class formation in Hungary and Bulgaria.

6.3.1 The Genealogy of the Post-Socialist Middle Class

To a large extent, the difficulties in classing contemporary East European cultural practices, and in particular the local version of 'good mothering', stem from an insufficient focus on the historical formation of what we currently refer to as 'the middle class'.⁶² How did the middle class emerge, if at all, after 1989, from a supposedly classless society?

For Eastern Europeans it is common knowledge that state socialist society, despite what official party lines claimed, was hardly equal or classless. There are differences in the ways state socialist social stratification is conceptualised. In their famous samizdat publication from 1974, Konrad and Szelenyi (see Éber and Gagyi 2015, Verdery et al. 2015) argued that the intelligentsia, which they defined as comprising of all technocrats, high level state administration, artists and academics, was on the road to consolidating itself as the new ruling class. Szelenyi himself later rejected this hypothesis, admitting to being "moderately embarrassed" about assuming class domination could happen strictly on the basis of cultural capital (Szelenyi 2013: 10). Buchowski (2008), in turn, differentiates between the party officials and high-level bureaucrats and other professionals, thus accounting for the power differential between the former and the latter. He identifies three social classes: *nomenklatura*, comprised of the party affiliated bureaucrats, intelligentsia, comprised of other highly educated professionals, and, of course, the working class. According to Éber and Gagyi (2015), officially Hungarian early state socialism in particular recognised two classes, workers and peasants,⁶³ and one social stratum, the intelligentsia⁶³. It

⁶² There are, of course, plenty of studies dealing with class formation in post-socialist Europe, many of them quoted in this thesis. However, most of them are interested in historicising newly forming stratification patterns, and the economic power relations that structure these patterns, rather than the everyday mundane class performances of people (for an overview of the former see Ost 2015).

⁶³ While the authors do not explain the distinction between class and stratum, in my understanding the use of the latter term here alludes to the prestige the intelligentsia possessed under state socialism. Its members did not necessarily earn more than the other social classes, yet they were well respected and enjoyed some privileges, unavailable to either workers or peasants.

wasn't that classes were claimed to be non-existent, the authors argue, but communist propaganda insisted they were non-antagonistic. In this official vision, the party nomenklatura is of course rendered invisible, supposedly simply serving the interests of the working class. Attempts were made to reintroduce class analysis into Hungarian sociology in the 1970s, but eventually they were repressed by the state, which returned to the official two classes-one stratum narrative (Éber and Gagyi 2015).

In reality, however, no reforms were executed to strengthen the position of the working class and/or the peasantry across CEE, and the slow introduction of the second economy – the partial legalisation of private property and businesses - reinforced the leading positions of the professional class after the fall of state-socialism (Buchowski 2008, Róbert and Bukodi 2000, Schröder 2008). Building on research done in Ukraine, Poland and Hungary, Lane (2005) shows that in the early 1990s people from post state-socialist countries self-identified as belonging to four different social classes. Each had different opportunities in the newly forming market capitalism and consisted of entrepreneurs/managers, the intelligentsia, workers and peasants. While the entrepreneur/manager class clearly had advantages in every possible way – the highest income, prestige, control over their working environment and leadership positions - the intelligentsia, while earning only slightly more than the workers and the peasants, enjoyed the rest of the class position benefits almost to the same degree as those in business. For Szelenyi (2013), this particular class hybridity after the fall of communism is at least partly explained by Weberian theory which differentiates between 'class societies' where economic capital is the leading criterion for distinction between people (like the west in general), and 'rank societies', where individual status is acquired primarily via social/political capital (like in socialist Europe).

Perhaps for that reason Max Weber happens to be the preferred starting point for many Eastern European and particularly Bulgarian class commentators (Tilkijev 1998). Weber distinguishes between class and status distinctions – that is, while in the long run they often coincide, the honour that accompanies a status distinction is not directly related to the property one owns. In fact, sometimes it “stands in sharp opposition to the pretensions of sheer property” (ibid: 187). It is the adherence to similar values and the practice of culturally appropriate rituals, or in other words, a shared lifestyle, that secures one's position in a particular status group. Eventually, the display of “correct” behaviour opens doors to the desired status group, whether through employment, marriage or other social intercourse. The goal, according to Weber, is the transformation of this status privilege into a 'legal' privilege: the solidification of power, material possession and cultural practice into one (Szelenyi 2013, Tilkijev 1998, Weber 1964). This may

be particularly true for post-socialist CEE, because, as Szelenyi testifies (2013), the transition to neoliberal capitalism in the region was dominated by people with personal connections to those with a high rank in the old socialist regimes. In other words, social capital was of utmost significance for accessing economic privilege in the new capitalist order. When it comes to the new middle classes, social capital was coupled with both technical know-how and cultural capital, as a form of teleological knowledge, driving social change, very much in line with Weber's approach to social stratification (Szelenyi 2013). Those three, however, mattered in different proportions in Hungary, which at the beginning of the transition followed a more neoliberal model (economic capital mattered most), and Bulgaria, where social connections played the most important role (*ibid.*).⁶⁴

In this sense, Weber's understanding of social stratification is not, strictly speaking, in opposition to Bourdieu's but, in my understanding, it allows for a more fluid relationship between economic and cultural capital. While on an individual level the struggle may well be to ensure material privilege and social status, some would argue that the connection is not necessarily straightforward. Pellandini-Simányi (2014), for instance, contends that Bourdieu's insistence on equating all qualities worthy of esteem with symbolic capital (which, as explained earlier, is in direct relation to economic capital and thus material privilege and social power) does not in any way stem from his empirical data. Instead it is in fact due to a fault in what turns out to be his circular argument, which defines symbolic capital as those personal qualities which are worthy of respect and admiration. For Pellandini-Simányi this formulation is not only tautological but makes Bourdieu's logic, in which ethics and ideology coincide, essentially unfalsifiable. People's ethical self-actualisations, Pellandini-Simányi claims, cannot be reduced to a quest (although not necessarily conscious) for class power. Sometimes, in accordance with Weber's theory, the status benefits which come with being a good mother (which interestingly is the example that Pellandini-Simányi gives) are simply an unintended effect of a moral stance. Incidentally or not, Pellandini-Simányi happens to be both a mother and a Hungarian. There is something in her particular epistemic position, in my view, which allows her to denaturalise the apparent link between "goodness" and a middle class belonging, as I will show in the next section.

⁶⁴ Both countries are now moving to a model, which Szelenyi (2013) calls Putinist, where faithfulness to the leader in power, in Hungary's case Viktor Orbán, and in Bulgaria's Boyko Borisov, plays a decisive role for anyone's economic well-being. This turn, however, had just started when I conducted my interviews and therefore its effects cannot be seen in my data.

For the time being, however, I will turn to the work of Beverly Skeggs (1997) and discuss how, from the UK perspective of a class society, if we follow Weber's taxonomy, being a 'good mother' has a lot to do with gaining respectability. Respectability, of course, is only a concern of those who have not been born with it, whose bodies, dress and homes have been marked at birth as inappropriate and undeserving (Skeggs 1997). Historically, Skeggs shows, respectability, defined as the esteem that comes, socially speaking, with individual morality, has been ingrained in the definition of 'Englishness', while at the same time denied to the lower classes.

This exclusion has, for Skeggs, two significant effects. First, individuality, that is, the right to be an individual, was only available to the middle and the upper classes. Therefore those not possessing economic privilege (as well as all those not white, heterosexual and so on) were understood to be a dangerous mass in need of control. The second significant effect of classing respectability while simultaneously assuming it to be synonymous with Englishness questions the lower classes' very right to citizenship. I want to stress this dynamic, because I find it is very salient in the class struggles in both Budapest and Sofia. According to Skeggs this process of 'othering' the working classes is still dominant in the UK, and it has gendered aspects, in particular presenting working-class women's sexuality, homemaking abilities and childcare practices as deviant. As such, gaining (some level of) respectability becomes highly desirable for those women, because it loosens the controlling grip of public institutions over their personal and family lives (ibid.). Further, building on Skeggs, Crean (2018), writing about Ireland, argues that class identity itself is developed not only through waged relations, but through the practices of care and love in our 'private' lives. The sphere of care work is, as the work of Lawler (2000), Skeggs (1997) and Lareau (2003) among others shows, profoundly classed. The painful identifications produced through engaging with it affectively replicate the structural inequalities that organise it. Shame, judgement and feelings of inadequacy shape lower- and working-class maternal subjectivities as much as the material struggles involved in caring for others with few resources to hand (Crean 2018).

On the other hand, studying, controlling and excluding the lower classes is a classic technique of abjection, which helps the middle classes define themselves against an undesirable demographic (Skeggs 1997). I would argue that in the class-constructing mothering practices of my interviewees both tendencies were present, albeit very differently than in Skeggs' study. Being from post-socialist countries, my respondents were profoundly aware of their own (relatively) marginal position in a world organised by global inequalities. In line with Owczarzak's (2009) and Liechty's (2003) arguments about orientalising of the lower classes in peripheral

societies, I would like to place my discussion of Bulgarian and Hungarian middle-class cultural formation within a framework of thinking class simultaneously globally and locally. Class should be considered locally, in the sense of being constructed around specific events and institutions, and the discourses which make sense of them, and globally, because those formative circumstances occur in a globalised, connected, aware world, where symbolic capital is distributed along power, colour and poverty lines. Lives around the world do not matter equally, and we all carry the marks of global inequality in our bodies, habits and accents. Thus, although my interviewees came from locally privileged contexts, the implicit all-seeing western eyes under which they performed their motherhood, still put them in a position where they felt they needed, at least to an extent, prove their respectability. The orientalisation of Eastern Europe is an extra layer around which my respondents had to design their mothering, yet, in one way or another, they found a way to 'pass it on' to their poorer local counterparts. In the next section I will show how, although present in both countries, that mechanism – being both the orientaliser and the orientalised – was also very different in Budapest and Sofia.

6.3.2 Hungary: Invisible Social Classes, Respectability and Motherhood

As argued in the previous chapters of this thesis, since the late 1960s under state socialism, Hungary re-framed the social role of women as both mothers and workers, putting an emphasis on their maternal responsibilities, the appropriate performance of which the state defined and controlled (Haney 2002, 2003). To go back to Skeggs then, institutional control was exercised not only over the lower classes, but literally everyone. Respectability then was obviously easier to earn if one possessed the right cultural capital, but it was still something one had to prove on a fairly regular basis.

Kispéter (2012) argues that this same conceptualisation of the re/productive duties of women still defines the working lives of Hungarian women from all social classes. Her research in a factory in Dunaújváros, an industrial town close to Budapest, reveals that both white- and blue-collar female workers construct their subjectivities as mother-workers on the basis of the same "ideology of maternalism" (ibid: 111). The female CEO of the company, a mother of three children, does not see her mothering responsibilities as any different from those of the manual workers in the factory. In turn they respond with the same attitude: treating her as a role model for a successful career-mother. Despite the glaring material difference between a CEO and her underpaid employees, their shared maternal identities trump the possible class conflict. As Kispéter argues:

The rhetoric of maternalism is part of the labour control strategy for eliciting workers' commitment to the company, and it is successful because workers recognize the ideology of maternalism as their own – they can be successfully addressed through it. The fact that they also share this ideology with the CEO, who draws on the ideology herself, adds a special layer to the maternalist labour control. (2012: 111, see also Dunn 2004)

From my perspective, that is, placing the focus on the construction of motherhood via the different modalities of work in a mother's life, it is crucially important to think daily routines and work-life balance decisions as everyday realisations of gender ideologies. When it comes to the intersection of social class and motherhood, those realisations become markers of the classing of appropriate practices. In western literature one is used to seeing working-class mothers invested more in the management of the 'here and now', and middle-class mothers who perceive the child as a project, whose future success requires investing in pricey and time-consuming childcare and educational strategies (Ball 2006, Hays 1996). In Kispéter's (2012) account, however, working-class mothers justified their childcare decisions along the same lines as my middle-class interviewees did: according to their children's perceived needs for a strongly present maternal figure (see Chapters 4 and 5). 'Family friendly' working hours trumped higher wages and possibilities for promotion and in a similar way the emotional development of their children defined my respondents' decisions as to when to go back to work after parental leave. To reiterate that differently, 'good motherhood' in the specific Hungarian post-socialist context is a concept that cuts across social class. In Kispéter's words "blue-collar women draw on the ideology of maternalism, just as the CEO does when she talks about women workers as mothers" (2012: 117).

Since the dominant ideology governing work-life balance decisions for Hungarian women is maternalism, the materialities surrounding the care children receive from their devoted mothers are not considered structural to the quality of the parenting provided. Similarly, as Chapters 4 and 5 showed, discourses on appropriate autonomous personhood (typically described in the literature as a middle-class prerogative – see, for example, Hays 1996) and the strategies for its development in young children are secondary to the efforts and sacrifices a mother puts into the struggle to achieve it. That is not to say that the middle-class mothers in my sample did not make attempts at shaping their children's habitus according to their understanding of culture and lifestyle. Literally all my respondents took their babies to *ringató* – which, as Chapter 3 establishes are weekly baby-singing events, typically organised at large cultural centres, despite quite a few of them not enjoying the experience particularly. They endlessly tried to reason with toddlers in order to foster their independent thinking abilities.

Nor does it mean that working-class women don't face harsher realities in their attempts to fulfil their children's supposed needs but, as such research has not been conducted on the practices of working-class mothers in Hungary, I have no clear evidence that their early years childcare rituals differ significantly from those of their middle-class counterparts. Further, the generous maternity leave schemes still present in the country (discussed in Chapter 4 in detail) and the generally low pay blue-collar female workers receive make staying at home for several years after their babies are born not only possible, but in fact an economically sensible option. As Kispéter (2014) attests, for quite a few of the working women she interviewed the difference between maternity leave pay and their wages was negligible. Economically speaking then, working-class mothers may experience fewer tensions when trying to juggle the materialities around fulfilling the motherhood ideal promoted by state maternalism, because middle-class women are expected to handle a significant drop in their standard of life with grace, ingenuity and maternal devotion.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Hungarian middle-class mothers accepted that drop and changed their consumption patterns accordingly. In the words of Dóra:

Till the end of May I got quite a good salary, even more than my salary before but now the bad time is coming so I will receive 90 000 forints.⁶⁵ So this will be really the hard part, and now we are preparing for this period. That's why I didn't spend so much, saving, you know, and my husband is also trying to work from home So we knew we'll have a financially difficult period so we prepared for that and when we knew that the baby is coming we just decreased the spending (Dóra, Budapest, 37, son 6 months, account manager, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Or, as Hanna (31, daughter 1.5y, lawyer, Hungarian, living with male partner) shares amid some middle-class maternal guilt, when asked if she misses anything from her pre-baby lifestyle: "It is not really nice, but I miss the money. My financial independence, that we could go to some island and spend a few weeks there. We can't afford that now."

In comparison, one of Kispéter's respondents shares that her family contested the financial viability of her going back to work, as she only earned 270 euro⁶⁶ in her semi-skilled factory position. In contrast, at the end of her maternity leave when she received the flat-rate payment available to all mothers, regardless of their employment status, she was paid 120 euro.⁶⁷ In that sense, although middle-class women receive about double the maternity benefits compared to

⁶⁵ £256 per month, at the time of writing.

⁶⁶ £237 per month, at the time of writing.

⁶⁷ £106 per month, at the time of writing.

those of working-class women, in absolute terms the difference is not so significant. Of course, middle-class women tend to have middle-class partners, whose earnings make an important difference in the family lifestyle, yet, one can clearly see how the maternalist policies of the state act as a tool which unifies the experience and performance of 'good' motherhood for all Hungarian women. Indeed, again and again, my Hungarian respondents emphasised how material possessions and financial stability are good to have, but they are not crucial prerequisites for starting a family, as I will show shortly. The uniform mothering standards, established by the socialist state and kept practically unchanged ever since, continue to work for an ideological, if not practical, equality of good motherhoods.

Goven (2000) agrees that the ideal Hungarian motherhood may not be classed along the lines of working- and middle-class status: however, there is an ideological division between the so called 'needy' population and the rest, who manage to make ends meet without relying on public welfare. The 'needy', Goven claims, is a euphemism to refer to the Roma, whose reproductive practices are considered inferior to those of 'ethnic Hungarians' and implicitly and explicitly discouraged by the state. In that sense being Roma is not an issue of straightforward ethnic belonging - it is a racialisation of poverty and simultaneously its labelling as reproductively undesirable. As Goven argues, during the parental leave debate in 1994, Hungarian good motherhood was constructed in opposition precisely to the practices and lifestyles of the lowest social strata – in line with Owczarzak's observation about the internal orientalisation of the so-called losers of transition across CEE (2009). And while my liberal, educated respondents were very careful about passing judgement on other mothers, this division still occasionally transpired. In the words of Luca:

I used to work in this ward, like not with orphans, but you know – when the state takes away the kids from the families who don't take care of them, so I used to be a ward's teacher. So, I met a lot of bad parents and they were 99 per cent assholes... Like, rude with their kids and alcoholics and cheating and beating up the mother and kicking their kids out on the streets so I know an extreme edge. I definitely can't consider these people as parents. Besides, well I don't know, there is this scale, there are this kind of people, but I also worked with homeless people and a lot of stories start with being kicked out at the age of 16, at the age of 10. But I really can't consider the more inner edges of this scale, like at which point you get from the worst to an acceptable and from acceptable to a nice or good parent (Luca, Budapest, 27, daughter 3 months, social worker, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Luca, otherwise an activist and self-proclaimed anti-capitalist, places parenting abilities on a scale, the lower end of which is comprised of, quite obviously, the lowest classes: homeless

addicts and so on. Yet the structural inability of these people to provide ‘good enough’ childcare is explained exclusively in moral terms – they are reduced to “assholes”, whose inability or unwillingness to comply with dominant standards of monogamous coupledness is placed on the same unacceptable footing as their violent ways. Intriguingly, Luca implicitly refers to men (beating up the mother), sub-consciously once again refusing to be judgemental about mothers specifically. Even more interestingly, however, she feels uncomfortable in claiming where, on her imaginary scale of quality parenting, “acceptable” becomes “good”. In my view her scale reflects the official discursive lines of classing of Hungarian motherhoods: the morally despicable ‘needy’ versus the hard-working, ethically sound majority.

Relatedly, the implied focus on the indispensability of a stable, monogamous and heterosexual relationship as a basis for valid reproductive decisions is visible in the words of plenty of my respondents. Klára (30, son 1.5y, administrator at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner) puts it quite bluntly: “For me a strong relationship is the foundation for a family. A mother and a father.” This is not to say that most of my respondents were openly or even latently homophobic but rather that, as heterosexual women, they were often uncritically susceptible to the powerful heteronormativity of Hungarian maternalist ideology (Takács 2011) Klára continues her middle-class reiteration of the ‘basic’ requirements for a successful upbringing: “of course you need to have a safe home or a place that can be your home. OK, maybe you don’t need it, but I think you need to have a safe environment.” There also seems to be a consensus among my interviewees that owning a home, if not indispensable, is a highly desirable prerequisite for having children. Dalma, very careful not to sound judgemental, nevertheless agrees:

it’s not inevitably important but it is good to have your own flat and we are both, well, our parents can help us, but of course it is important. So I think it is important to have something stable behind [you]. If it is not your flat but a flat you are sure you can rent for a long time it’s also good. But it’s good to have a place where you can bring your child home, better than not (Dalma, Budapest, 32, son 3.5y, researcher at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

As I already showed in the previous chapters, ‘staying at home’ as a linguistic substitute for being on parental leave is often understood quite literally in Hungary, to the point where some mothers, like Kinga (33, daughter 2y, researcher at a research centre, Hungarian, living with male partner), fear leaving the house alone with their baby. For others, like Dóra (37, son 6 months, account manager, Hungarian, living with male partner) and Nikolett (37, son 2.5y, librarian, Hungarian, living with male partner), the home is understood to be the safe environment a baby

needs almost at all times. This understanding of the home as a safe haven of family normality, as I have already discussed from a gender ideology perspective in Chapter 4, is also the locus of Hungarian middle-class subjectification, according to Fehervary (2013). Fehervary, whose work revolves around the affective relationship with our material environment, argues that “in the moral, spiritual, and economic struggles of the post-socialist period crystallised a material aesthetic for a liveable, normal, and respectable life for middle-class Hungarians” (2013: 2). As shown in the previous chapters of this thesis, however, this focus on the aesthetic of the everyday did not emerge overnight but was in fact rooted in decades of a socialist way of family life, truly centred on the home. The domesticity tests, imposed on mothers by Hungarian social workers, which unified the practice of “good motherhood” are quite obviously part of the Hungarian socialist state’s disciplining machine and have played their role in symbolically locking the respectable family between the four walls of the home.

However, the transition to capitalism and supposed democracy has added a new dimension to the home which has gradually started to transform into a site of anxiety about class status. Both Fehervary (2013) and Berdahl (1999) attest to a growing fascination with western consumer culture and goods in 1990s Hungary, where the experience of (the middle) class was marked by a heightened sensitivity to purchasing power and various new materialistic concerns. Further, the worries and inner tensions of the gradually forming middle classes point to another dimension of living with social inequalities: the affective experience of a class position (Crean 2018). As Fehervary (2013) shows, in the changing meanings of domestic respectability in 1990s Hungary, reproductive inadequacy did not only negatively affect the lower classes: it may have also been the result of the emotional experience of occupying a materially and symbolically inferior position in a globally unequal world. In that sense, a middle-class mother from an Eastern European country could simultaneously experience a profound sense of cultural competence locally yet suffer from a deep-seated insecurity that she fails to procure the best for her children compared to her western counterparts: something we’ll see very clearly in the case of Bulgaria in section 6.3.2 of this chapter.

For Fehervary (2013), by the early 2000s, at the (non-existent) core of Hungarian middle-class aspirations lay a preoccupation with ‘normalcy’. This normalcy, though, was scarcely common in post-socialist Hungary. In fact, people used the adjectives “normal”, “respectable” and “liveable” to refer to goods, services and living conditions which were far beyond the average living standard in Hungary at the time. Instead they marked the image Hungarians had of middle-class lifestyles in the global West. This is at the heart of Fehervary’s argument about the cultural

construction of Hungarian middle-class subjectivity. While during the state socialist era Hungarians enjoyed so-called ‘goulash communism’⁶⁸ and a privileged status in terms of consumption power compared to most other socialist countries, after the fall of communism they ended up on the losing end of a modernity defined by western singularity. With the disappearance of the ‘Second World’ the (dream of a) socially just middle ground between First World opulence and Third World misery vanished into the haze. In the words of Fehervary: “The penalty for slipping out of this middle class now is to suffer the consequences of falling into the denigrated state of a Third World underclass of people that do not count as full-fledged citizens” (2013: 22). In this sense, Fehervary claims, post-socialism and its relationship to global class politics is truly universal – not just a temporal condition affecting the former sphere of influence of Soviet Russia – but a crucial discourse alteration around the world. Instead of two ideological models of social organisation, capitalism and communism, there is only one now – global capitalism, dominated by a west that is ravished by inner problems and contradictions, yet is, at least symbolically speaking, unquestionably on top of the world.

In the light of these geo-politically informed changes in the discourse of global class, it is precisely this fixation on the creation of a cosy, domestic respectability, imagined as western⁶⁹, that lies at the core of middle-class self-definition in Hungary. From a deconstructionist perspective, its abject reality is precisely the world of parenting described by Luca and marked by the extreme experiences of homelessness, debilitating addiction and domestic violence. The terms normalcy and respectability, in Hungarian, just like in English, carry strong heteronormative connotations. The harmonious, egalitarian, heterosexual relationships between two parents my interviewees tirelessly insisted they had with their male partners, despite endless evidence of the unequal division of carework within their families I presented in Chapter 4, are a claim to a class status which essentially becomes synonymous with a claim for humanity. The moral imperative to do good or ultimately to be a good person, as Pellandini-Simányi (2014) argues, transcends class struggle because it has to: the alternative is to lose one’s humanity and thus the right to fully-fledged citizenship (also see Goven 2000, Skeggs 1997).

My hypothesis is that Hungarian mothers, unlike their Bulgarian counterparts as I will demonstrate in section 6.3.2, do not explicitly try to construct their parenting practices as

⁶⁸ ‘Goulash communism’ refers to the Kádár era of Hungarian state-socialism. From the 1960s until the end of the regime in 1989, Hungary significantly improved the living standards of its citizens, as well as its human rights record. It was known as the richest and most liberal country of the Eastern bloc.

⁶⁹ And indeed, in Skeggs’ (1997) account, as English.

western – with a few exceptions they rarely read western expert-guided literature on childcare – because westernness is already symbolically contained in their more or less successful aspirations towards ‘normalcy’. Further, unlike in Bulgaria, where (actual or symbolic) emigration to the global West is structural to the ideation of the post-socialist middle-class (again, to be elaborated shortly), historically in Hungary it carried quite the opposite cultural connotations. In the early 1990s, older Hungarian emigres who left the country after 1956 were already coming back to enjoy life on the cash saved during years of hard manual labour in the West. But their material wealth failed to grant them a status distinction, in the Weberian sense, because it was perceived as illegitimately earned (Fehervary 2013). Thus, the connection between westernness and middle-class status in Hungary is one ripe with inner tensions and structural contradictions. In fact, too much preoccupation with one’s children’s future upward class mobility and its relation to western superiority is judged negatively. As Hanna says:

Parents feel that life is one big competition. And you have to do everything for your child, prepare them the best way. Make them the best, so they have better chances in life. There is this feeling that somebody pushes us that we have to educate our children as early as possible, with English for example. My best friend, we had our babies 2 months apart, they go to English classes since he was 8 months old, usually with native speakers. It is extremely expensive...I don’t have this feeling because I am happy in my life, I have the success I want and I didn’t have this preparation. I know that the world has changed, but not that much. I think that other values matter more than learning English by the age of 4. I think he [her son] has time and there are some psychologists, Ranschburg, Vekerdi⁷⁰ and all these people, they say that children need to feel safe and play, and that’s all. I think they know what they are talking about (Hanna, Budapest, 31, daughter 1.y5, lawyer, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Too much hustling, viewing life as one big competition and ultimately putting pressure on one’s children all disrupt the homely cosiness of childhood (and motherhood). More interestingly in this quote we can see the symbolic juxtaposition of the perception of a modern busy childhood, full of educational activities, understood as belonging to the western model of parenting and symbolised by learning a western language, and the vision of Hungarian psychologists, who put the emphasis on unstructured play and feelings of safety. In that sense, if a mother, like Hanna, is certain in her (material and other) success in life – that is, her class anxieties have been to a large extent resolved – she can be the relaxed, yet all-giving mother Hungarian maternalism promotes.

⁷⁰ Two famous psychologists from the Hungarian school discussed in Chapter 4.

Of course, it is questionable to what extent my respondents managed to re-shape their habitus to fit the image of the 'relaxed mother' in their daily lives, yet she discursively overwhelmed most of their accounts. As Dalma (32, son 3.5y, researcher at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner) says: "And what I like about other mothers and I didn't have is this kind of relaxedness or cosiness, so I was a bit too strict with this schedules stuff...I do envy others that they can do...that". That relaxedness, which Dalma interestingly finds tantamount to cosiness, a noun which belongs with 'normalcy' and 'respectability' in Fehervary's (2013) interpretation of Hungarian middle-class identity, is indeed far less innocent than it appears at first glance. To start with, as described in Chapters 3 and 4, the relaxed mother is a powerful discursive construct, which serves to discipline women into performing their incessant maternal duties without voicing any complaint. The relaxed mother, in that sense, isn't only 'good' for her children, she is also very convenient for her male partner. Another class-related issue transpires in her image too. Several of my respondents claimed that financial problems may stand in the way of a mother being as calm and caring as she must be. This, of course, is not surprising at all, but what is sociologically significant is the merging of heteronormativity, a relatively high class status and acceptable, docile femininity in her image. The words of Klára illustrate this best:

I have noticed that often when the relationship between a mother and a father is not working so well then the mother is feeling a lot of frustration and becomes stressed and puts it on the kid, and also I think financial problems can also be, can also cause, well, not being a good mother I think. It's a difficult question. When you have to do things that you don't want to but you are forced to do it is really not good because then you yourself don't feel safe. I think the mother should feel safe to give that safeness to the kid as well (Klára, Budapest, 30, son 1.5y, administrator at a university, Hungarian, living with male partner).

Not only do financial problems seem to go hand in hand with dysfunctional relationships, but they force women to do things they wouldn't want to do. It is obvious here how having an interesting job, which not only pays well but is intellectually and otherwise fulfilling and/or another source of family income, a privilege not many people from the lower classes possess, is naturalised as the basis for 'good motherhood'. Of course, not all women from my sample understand 'the relaxed mother' the same way – Hanna (31, daughter 1.y5, lawyer, Hungarian, living with male partner) and Bea (33, daughter 2y, project coordinator at a cultural centre, Hungarian, single, living with daughter), who invoke her in their imaginary of 'good motherhood', explicitly state that a heterosexual, stable relationship isn't a must before one has a baby. Nevertheless, they do insist that in such a case a mother must be able to take the full responsibility to provide stability, financial and otherwise, for her offspring.

It is clear that my sample of educated, and mostly liberal middle-class respondents is diverse in its understanding of 'good motherhood'. The extent to which they explicitly agree with, unconsciously replicate or begrudgingly comply with the heterosexist, classist and last but not least racist normativity of Hungarian good motherhood varies by respondent. Nevertheless, they all, in some ways, refer to the maternalist ideology Kispéter (2012) unveils in her work. What is clearly lacking is an open resistance to this model, imposed by the state for over five decades. Funnily enough, many of the women I talked to wanted to make sure I knew they are 'more than just mothers'. They endlessly insisted how they do not enjoy chatting with other mothers in the park, because all those women seem to talk about were baby-related topics, while they craved an intellectual conversation about politics, art or culture. In the words of Kinga for example:

I'm not that kind of mother, I hope you can imagine that I am not that kind of mother! [...] people think that if you have a baby then you aren't interested in anything else but the baby which can be true for some people but for me...I don't know. You know you can't just...they are so boring, these conversations, can't we just talk about World War 2? (Kinga, Budapest, 33, daughter 2y, researcher at a research centre, Hungarian, living with male partner)

While the 'more than a mum' trope appeared time and again in my respondents' accounts, they did little to transform it into praxis. What they perceived as their children's⁷¹ needs trumped their own, locking the desire for something more than docile motherhood into the realm of speech only. Perhaps, and not very surprisingly, in order to document proper resistance to dominant 'good' motherhood, a researcher must direct their lens to the practices of lower-class, Roma, immigrant and non-heterosexual women – an important trajectory for my future research.

In the next section of this chapter, I will proceed to show how the locally specific intersections of class, race and gender have produced quite a different model of middle-class maternal performances in Bulgaria. The lack of uniformity of practices I described in previous chapters, a result of state socialism's emphasis on women's roles as workers and activists, coupled with a naturalisation of their maternal function, allows for more space for women with children to negotiate their middle-class status through their motherhood. In Sofia, in other words, we will see locally particular interpretations of the ways appropriate childcare relates to class, but ones which are overall closer to the model described in sociological and feminist literature on parenting (Byrne 2006, Faircloth 2014, Furedi 2002, Hays 1999, Lareau 2003). Before getting into

⁷¹ And their husbands' needs as well, as we saw in Chapter 4.

the specific ways Bulgarian mothers make sure they transmit their class status to their offspring, however, I will take a step back and provide a historical overview of the fabric of the present-day middle class in Bulgaria. Importantly, in this section, while generally following the same method as in the rest of my thesis, I unpack the individual stories of several respondents in more detail, while illustrating some of the main points they are making with quotes from other mothers as well. In my understanding, in order for the diverse class-constructing rituals and rationalisations in Bulgaria to make sense for a non-local reader, they must be put into the larger context of an interviewee's life narrative and their origin story in particular. Not all middle-class women are created equal and whether their class status is hard-earned or inherited correlates with different anxieties, aspirations and subjectivising practices.

6.3.2 Middle-Class Bulgaria: American Dreams and Balkan Realities – Mothering the Endangered Moral Compass of Society

Stoilkova (2003) provides a comprehensive narrative about the emergence of the middle class in Bulgaria after the fall of the state socialist regime. She focuses on the migration patterns of Bulgarians throughout the 1990s, describing a process of mass emigration of educated, young Bulgarians to the global west and the US in particular. Contrary to popular wisdom, it is not the most disadvantaged strata of society who emigrated following the fall of state socialism, but the new generation of the intelligentsia, educated in the last years of the regime. Stoilkova attests to the fact that in the late socialist period class divisions in Bulgarian society were not organised around wealth, but “along the lines of education, profession, administrative status, and the character of work (e.g., intellectual vs. manual)” (2001: 156). Unlike Hungary, where the liberalisation of market relations and the appearance of the second economy in the 1970s ensured that skilled labourers could gradually translate their knowledge into a class standing (Éber and Gagyi 2015, Róbert and Bukodi 2010), in Bulgaria:

the status of the so-called “mass intelligentsia” of socialism (teachers, doctors, journalists, academics, engineers etc.) – the social group which was expected to constitute the “middle class” after the fall of socialism - has radically dropped in prestige, concurrent with a drop in their standard of living [...] Significant structural redistribution of the administrative apparatus has left a large number of state-employed professionals and intellectuals literally on the street. It is precisely the educated group of the generation of the 1980s that have embodied in their personal lives the weight of the so-called “transitional period” in Bulgaria. (Stoilkova 2001: 156)

During state socialism, the intelligentsia saw itself as responsible for setting the moral and cultural compass of society, and its strong appreciation for arts and high education served as a measure of human worth). On this basis the Bulgarian intelligentsia differentiated itself from both the nomenklatura on the one side, as well as the lower classes and in particular the Roma, on the other. According to Stoilkova, spatial and occupational segregation in the capital city of Sofia especially made sure members of the intelligentsia were rarely in contact with members of the peasantry or the working class and were thus, amid state propaganda about social equality, unaware of the vast class differences existing in the country. The lack of education of the lower classes in that sense was not seen as a structural issue, but as a moral, personal failure. Further, during late state socialism the intelligentsia, while not necessarily taking up an openly dissident stance towards the regime, aligned itself, culturally and ideologically, with the west (Stoilkova 2003, Taylor 2003). Thus, the orientalising of the lower classes did not originate in the transition to capitalism but was deeply rooted in state socialism's cultural life. The sharp focus on immaterial values was also in contrast to the cosy domestic respectability described by Berdahl (1999) and Fehervary (2013) as pertinent to Hungarian middle class (re)formation. It had to do not only with the cultural legacies of state socialism, but also with the actual loss of material privileges the ex-intelligentsia went through in the first years of the so-called transition. Left without many options to retain, let alone better, its status, the (younger members of the) Bulgarian intelligentsia lived their aspirations of upward class mobility through desired or actual emigration to the West (Stoilkova 2003). The image of the emigrant exemplified a meritocratic, self-reliant subject, who had transcended state socialism's 'personal connections' economy, which was, conveniently if perhaps unjustly, blamed for the lack of opportunities for the young and educated.

Meanwhile, the new ruling class was formed from the old socialist nomenklatura: the big socialist company administrators and the privatised sector – or, as Éber and Gagyí put it:

Among the significant factors contributing to entry into the new elite, they pointed to company ownership in one's family before 1948,⁷² high family education levels before 1948, one's own professional education, a managerial position in a socialist company, and Party membership before 1989. (Éber and Gagyí 2015: 602)

Informality, once again, was what structured the new economy – the old state socialist connections shaped the economic structure before market forces could start operating. In Hungary and the rest of the Central European post-socialist countries, mid-level entrepreneurs

⁷² The official establishment of the socialist regime in Hungary.

and technocrats from the previous regime made their way into the privileged layers of society, starting to form the middle classes. I want to emphasise, however, that while in the 1990s western-based transitologists generally considered this to be a specificity of the “eastern” model of (pseudo) democracy, in my view it only proved that the east was always closer to the west, where social and economic capital have gone hand in hand since the dawn of capitalism (Bourdieu 1984, Lasch 1995).

What is more important for the sake of this argument, however, is that, as Verdery et al. (2005) testify, unfortunately without elaborating further, Romania and Bulgaria did not follow the same middle class formation pattern. As shown in Chapter 4, throughout the 1990s Bulgaria was significantly poorer than Hungary and the sharp neoliberal turn its welfare system took contributed to the creation of a severely polarised society with a few rich and an overall poor majority. In this environment, the emphasis on the moral superiority of the (ex) intelligentsia seemed like a sensible strategy for building class consciousness. The focus on morality has remained a primary tool for distinction, in the Bourdieusian sense, and justifies the claims for both political and personal legitimacy of the urban professionals from the capitals of Bulgaria and Romania (Deoancă 2018, Tsoneva 2017). According to Tsoneva (2017) the summer 2013 wave of anti-government protests in Bulgaria articulated a rhetoric which juxtaposed the “smart and the beautiful” (ibid: 124) middle-class urbanites’ demands for ethical and pro-European politics to the ‘coalition’ formed by the oligarchic-style government and the deliberately impoverished welfare precariat that supposedly sustained it in power. Thus, similarly to Stoilkova’s (2001, 2003) narrative about the early 1990s, Tsoneva argues that the contemporary subjectivising strategies of the middle class in Bulgaria include a vilification of both rich and poor, who are declared to belong to another epoch (or even a different civilisation) – that of state socialism, of course:

according to these voices, the (post)communist crisis we have to tackle is not material (utility bills, poverty, inequality, etc.) but cultural/civilizational/moral and aesthetic... Bulgaria is only formally a democracy, as its liberal institutions are lacking in substance. This substance is taste, “citizen” culture, love for reading books, beauty, rigor, and as such it is immaterial, spiritual, and sadly lacking in the majority of the population seduced by the “welfare populism” of the oligarchs (Tsoneva 2017: 117).

In line with Owczarzak’s (2009) orientalising of the internal other – the loser in the transition to liberal capitalism – Tsoneva coins the term ‘anti-citizen’: the ‘ugly’, ‘uncivilised’, ‘uncultured’,

'communist', 'Asian'⁷³ welfare recipient or, alternatively, powerful oligarch, who tries to keep Bulgaria away from its rightful place in the European family of brotherly nations. The discourse of the protests in 2013, continues Tsoneva, articulates the existence of two antagonistic "Bulgarias", where the one belonging to the urban professionals operates according to the neoliberal values of individual (economic) responsibility: "On this understanding, the real citizen is a hard-working, ascetic, self-help anticommunist who roots for 'values' instead of 'material trivialities'" (2017: 119, also see Rose, 1990).

Further, the anti-citizens were systematically racialised, assumed to be primarily from the Roma and the Turkish minority, and their supposed ethnic characteristics served as an explanation for their lack of culture. In that sense, we could speculate that, even when distinctions are being made on the grounds of knowledge, culture and morals, as they happen to be in the narratives of motherhood my interviewees produced, the middle class implicitly imagines itself in opposition to not only those in power and the poor, but ethnic minorities as well.

Again, similarly to Hungary and possibly because of my limited snowball sample, the women I interviewed did not express openly racist opinions about the practices of Roma or Turkish women. The implicit construction of one's own childcare decisions as valuable through an emphasis on immaterial values and respect for culture, however, dominated their accounts. The pattern is best illustrated by Svetlana's words:

And I would like to show him [her son] which things are...well, because at present it turns out that it is more important what kind of car you have, which *chalga* club you frequent, literally, because I have the feeling that his whole environment will be like that, his classmates at school will listen to *chalga*, I don't know what kind of stuff they'll like. And you still have to show what really matters in life, that this outer glam, this simpleton lifestyle we have embraced... I would like to be able to make that distinction for him, to discern the truly valuable from the surrounding superficial bling. It sounds simple enough, but in our Bulgarian reality it isn't at all (Svetlana, Sofia, 32, son 2y, medical doctor, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

According to Livni (2014) *chalga*, the Bulgarian variation of a popular Balkan and middle-eastern music style, has a special place in national self-orientalising discourses and its popularity is a source of both global and local class anxieties. Building on Todorova (1997) and her concept of Balkanism, Livni argues that *chalga* is a symptom of the lived experiences of Balkan marginalisation. Bulgaria, according to Livni, experienced its entire modern history as a form of never-ending, yet incomplete 'transition': from the Ottoman empire to 'Europe' after the

⁷³ As in non-European.

gradual liberation from Ottoman rule, from underdeveloped capitalism to 'full communism' under state socialism, and eventually from socialism to democracy after the fall of the regime in 1989. Thus, the discourse on *chalga* is not simply a discourse on a popular music style but it exemplifies the painful repercussions of an 'incomplete modernity' – a forever unfulfilled promise to catch up with a glorious yet elusive west. Conventionally, Bulgarian intellectuals understand *chalga* to be a post-socialist phenomenon, exemplifying the moral decay of Bulgarian culture (see, for instance, Daskalov n.d., a well-known Bulgarian historian and anthropologist). As the explanation goes, once the state withdrew its support for high art and left the cultural life of the nation to be decided by market forces, it was the 'masses' that made a civilisational choice to align with the 'Orient' rather than the supposedly culturally superior west. That is, while politically Bulgaria declared its will to 'catch up' with 'democratic' Europe, the 'uncultured masses' – that is the poor and the Roma, but also the nouveau riche as in Tsoneva's (2018) account - turned to a 'primitive', 'eastern' music style. As a result, they sabotaged the true 'inner' transformation of Bulgarian society. Jansen's (2005) ethnography about urban middle-class cultural construction in Serbia and Croatia describes the same tropes structuring the fragile middle-class identity. These include an explicit distancing from Turbo-folk, the Serbo-Croatian version of the same music style - and the related fetishisation of new money and the conspicuous consumption of designer goods and expensive cars, yet, lacking 'true style' (see also Adriaans 2017 for a similar narrative concerning Armenia). Thus, for the middle classes *chalga* becomes the imagined 'inner world' of the anti-citizen, whether s/he is ethnically and economically marginalised or perceived as having made their wealth via illegitimate means such as connections to the old socialist regime and/or criminality. Further, liking *chalga* is also attributed to the so-called 'peasants', which in the Balkans tends to refer to anyone not from a capital city, or at least the biggest cities (Jansen 2005).

In that sense Svetlana's determination to protect her child from the 'dangerous grip' of *chalga* is a reproductive strategy for retaining a middle class, urban status. Indeed, according to Nadia, one cannot start too early to set the scene for 'correct' socialisation and even physically separate one's children from the cultural patterns of the undesirable:

I meet other mothers during the day, but only friends of mine from before. In our neighbourhood there is a park where many mothers gather, but they are of the type who just sit around all day, munching on sunflower seeds...I wouldn't want him to grow up in such an environment. With my friends I feel calmer, we have similar values and interests (Nadia, Sofia, 31, son 1y, senior expert at a state agency, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Sunflower seeds here are a symbol for the 'lazy ways' and the questionable tastes of the lower classes, in particular the population from the countryside in Bulgaria. Through their open denunciation of superficial glamour, low culture and lack of morality, Svetlana and Nadia construct themselves as an endangered minority, the social reproduction of which is truly valuable. Implicit in their accounts is the self-definition of the middle class as the moral compass of society, inherited from the socialist intelligentsia (Owczarzak 2009, Stoilkova 2003). Svetlana claims that the best thing about motherhood is being able to "transmit something valuable to someone else" and continues, speaking about her mother:

She has showed me what is worthy in life, the difference between good and bad, how to value the right things in life. My view on life is surely largely influenced by my parents and I am very happy about the way they have raised me, let alone all the financial help which they have given and still give me (Svetlana, Sofia, 32, son 2y, medical doctor, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

It is obvious in these data how class status is conceived as a set of personal, moral qualities, transmitted from generation to generation. In this quote, however, a rare reference to the inherited wealth underlying the moral and cultural sense of superiority is also visible. In Svetlana's story of motherhood one sees the exact opposite of Crean's (2018) argument about the class injuries poor mothers in Ireland endure and transfer within and through the care work they perform: a sense of comfort and self-worth, inherited from one's parents and projected onto one's offspring. Svetlana, like many others of my respondents from Sofia, as shown in Chapter 4, relied on her mother for childcare and considered her mother's influence on her child either as inevitable or desirable. With the overall insufficient places in state-owned childcare institutions, the carework of the grandmother is indispensable - that is, if she lives in Sofia and can provide it.

Indeed private childcare options are preferred only by the wealthiest of mothers and concerns over the practices of childminders in public crèches are often expressed. In Kalina's words "I suspect lack of professionalism, uncleanliness, neglect" (Kalina, Sofia, 29, son 6m, lecturer in foreign languages at a university, Bulgarian, living with male partner). Mothers seem to also be concerned with the lack of outside play at state-owned institutions, which tends to be blamed on insufficient personnel or the lazy habits of women working in such institutions - often understood as a legacy of state socialism (Owczarzak 2009). Interestingly, such concerns are rarely voiced about one's own parents, except in the case of Gergana (29, son 5m, company owner, Bulgarian, living with male partner) whose story I would like to re-visit, but this time from a class perspective. Gergana is one of the most economically privileged women in my sample

but her wealth is the result of successful class mobility and not something she was born into. Neither she nor her partner come from Sofia, which, as argued by Jansen (2005), adds a layer of fragility to any claim to a middle-class, urban identity. Well-educated and hard-working, self-proclaimed 'workaholic' Gergana is the epitome of the self-reliant post-socialist entrepreneur. In her motherhood narrative, however, multiple tensions about class and the subjectivising processes around it are noticeable. First of all, she is the only one in my sample to openly denounce the care of grandmothers as detrimental for a child. As also suggested in Chapter 5, the reasoning behind this is as follows:

The grandmother is a grandmother, not a babysitter. She's been through motherhood, more or less successfully, and her experience dates back 28-29 years. They refuse to accept that things have changed, that children are seen differently, the whole attitude towards children have changed drastically. It probably depends on the particular grandparents, I don't know. I wouldn't let my husband's parents or mine take care of my child as babysitters.

Two leitmotifs running through Bulgarian middle class construction are present in the quote above. Behind the apparently straightforward assumption that a grandmother would have old-fashioned beliefs about childcare lurks the distancing post-socialist young urbanites want to perform between themselves and their parents' shameful, "pre-modern" socialist past (Tsoneva 2018). Further, however, we learn that not all grandparents are created equal, but Gergana's parents and her in-laws are deemed unsuitable to look after her son. My reading is that this rejection is related to the fact her and her husband's parents do not come from the capital city. I had no chance to explore Gergana's origins any deeper, because the symbolic power relation between those born and raised in Sofia and the rest of Bulgarians is so overwhelming that my further pushing of the question would have been read at best as tactless, and at worst as hateful and discriminatory. To elaborate, I come from Sofia, which is audible to Bulgarians in my accent. Simultaneously, just like Svetlana, Daniela and multiple others, Gergana describes state-owned crèches and kindergartens as "tragic" because of being understaffed and as such unable to provide the necessary attention to individual children. Yet, she speaks of fostering independent problem-solving skills and self-sufficiency in her son via leaving him alone as much as possible. The apparent contradiction in the two statements, stuck one after the other, reveals in an extreme way that childcare practices are empty signifiers – the same practice may be labelled beneficial or detrimental depending on the (class) status of the performer.

Thus, the solution Gergana has for the care of her son is to hire a private babysitter. Despite otherwise emphasising qualifications and professionalism as crucial for any job performance,

Gergana is willing to overlook previous experience as long as she likes “the person, their attitude and worldview”. Like-mindedness, which in essence has to do either with the sharing or the uncritical acceptance of middle-class values, and the willingness to follow the mother’s strict instructions over the execution of childcare chores become the conditions for a childminder’s acceptability. Instinctively, Gergana recognises that her beliefs in independence and an entrepreneurial approach to life are to be systematically fostered in her child in order to ensure the reproduction of her fragile class status. As a first-generation resident of the capital and a self-made woman Gergana does not experience the sense of comfort and relaxed attitude to life we can see in Svetlana’s life narrative. Her care is very much directed around instilling “ambition” in her child and teaching him to be “the change he wants to see in the world”: the same attributes the ‘smart and beautiful’ middle-class protesters in summer 2013 were described to possess in Tsoneva’s (2018) article. Finally, we see how a dislike for the old-fashioned (read state socialist) ways of her parents’ generation, institutional deficit and poverty all collapse in the way she imagines appropriate parenting:

There is a problem in the country, there aren’t enough kindergartens, crèches, spaces in those. People can’t afford private babysitters, it is clear why they fall onto the care of grandmothers in the end, this is the financial reality of many families... But I believe that, given the situation in the country, everyone has to find their own way. From the point of view of the child’s interest, I don’t think the grandmother is the best option (Gergana, Sofia, 29, son 5m, company owner, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

At first glance sympathetic to the struggles of poorer families, at the end of the day Gergana not only advocates an individualist solution to the problem – “everyone has to find their own way” – but narratively constructs her own class status as superior to that of the majority of the country’s population. Finally, despite claiming to recognise the materialities at the root of the widespread participation of grandmothers in the organisation of childcare, Gergana ultimately frames the issue in moral terms: making a choice in the best interest of the child. As Liechty (2002) testifies, the moralisation of economically determined practices is a typical discursive tool the middle classes use to construct their own superiority. Putting children’s needs first, on the other hand, has long been discussed in literature as the core of recent conceptualisations of classed ‘good motherhood’ (Furedi 2013, Hays 1996).

Finally, Gergana, like almost all my Bulgarian respondents, claims to extensively read English language expert guided literature on childcare, because in her opinion “the best practices described there are light years ahead of what we do here”. Those mothers who speak other western languages complement their knowledge with literature from those countries as well. A

clear pattern of auto-orientalisation of Bulgaria and a simultaneous construction of one's own childcare decisions as western, that is, modern, are observable in other maternal stories from my interviewees. For Ani the understanding that one needs to do extensive research in order to make informed choices as a parent connects to an overall sense of culturedness as an indispensable part of valuable personhood:

[In order to be a good mother] one needs to be an overall cultured person. Someone without broad general knowledge and culture, even if they are kind and well-meaning...one has to be well-informed as a parent, not to rely simply on her own opinions (Ani, Sofia, 32, son 1y, construction engineer at an architecture firm, Polish/Bulgarian, living with male partner).

The apparently intuitive mothering style of lower-class women, described as marginalised in western feminist literature on parenting, is denounced by my Bulgarian respondents as well. Further, unlike in Hungary, where having too much concern with early foreign (read western) language education for children is often denounced, in Bulgaria, where anxieties about being excluded from western modernity are stronger, it is a must for many of the women in my research sample. For Maria, in fact:

This [being bilingual] is the best thing you can give to a child. My mother⁷⁴ encourages me to speak to him exclusively in English, regardless of the way people stare at us, because it will be so beneficial for him (Maria, Sofia, 29, son 9 months, PhD candidate, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Stoilkova (2003) argues that the newly formed Bulgarian middle class symbolically aligned itself with the west, living its desire for upward social mobility via performing or fantasising about emigration. The alternative meant succumbing to a quality of life similar to that of the Third World underclasses (also see Fehervary 2013). Raising a child to be bilingual in a western language as well as Bulgarian then is "the best thing you can give to a child" because it is literally a ticket to a First World status. Interestingly, all of my Bulgarian respondents had travelled to the west, some extensively, and quite a few had either studied or worked there for a while. They were obviously aware of class divisions and poverty in the west: however, it was upper/middle-class opulence for which they imagined to be preparing their children. As described in Chapter 5, they were also particularly concerned with organic feeding options, clearly preferring western

⁷⁴ Maria's mother happens to be a professor at the University of Sofia, and coincidentally or not, her advice is experienced as a positive influence by her academic daughter.

brands of baby food over local ones, and wanted to ensure their children had the right kind of attitude to their bodies: eating healthily, doing sports and so on. Nadia shares as follows:

I like taking him [her son] to the open-air gym in the park. There aren't any cotton candy stalls, merry-go-rounds and other traps for children over there. He seems to really like it and I hope this will foster an appreciation for sports later on (Nadia, Sofia, 31, son 1y, senior expert at a state agency, Bulgarian, living with male partner).

Once again, the superficial pleasures of empty consumerism like merry-go-rounds and unhealthy snack options are perceived as a gateway drug that may eventually lead to a slip into lower class status. The right kind of entertainment – visits to museums and time spent hiking in nature for example - plus the personal example of mothers with a managerial attitude and successful careers described in Chapters 4 and 5 are supposed to ensure that my respondents' children will grow up to be self-reliant, educated, responsible, healthy and good-looking multilingual citizens of the world.

6.4 Summary

In this chapter of my thesis, I addressed the ways the locally specific constructions of motherhood in present-day Hungary and Bulgaria were also inherently classed. Making reference to a large body of primarily western literature on the relationship between parenting and social class, I showed that at the 'core' of middle-class motherhoods lies not particular practices, generally naturalised as creating class distinctions in western-based scholarship, but rather locally specific cultural (and occasionally material) exclusions. The reproductive strategies of Bulgarian mothers were based on imagining themselves as modern (as opposed to a socialist past), western (as opposed to Balkan or Oriental backwardness) and culturally and morally superior to both the 'poor masses' and the nouveau riche. Hungary, on the other hand, followed a very different model of classing parenting. Due to the heavy state control over mothers' practices during state socialism and beyond, 'good motherhood' is a fairly uniform category which cuts across class status. As it is labour intensive and presupposes the constant care of a domestic goddess-like mother, it does not allow for much space for negotiating one's class identity. Nevertheless, an implicit distinction from the racialised poor is inbuilt in the image of homely respectability which middle-class families attempt to construct. Finally, the inferiority complex of Hungarians towards the west did not translate into a preoccupation with western parenting styles and knowledges as directly as it did in Bulgaria. Instead it revolved around the

desire for 'normalcy' as synonymous with (hetero)normative middle-class nuclear family lives as imagined existing in western Europe and the United States.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: This Is the Best Part of the Trip⁷⁵

I started this thesis, not very originally, by comparing it to a journey with a beginning, chosen for narrative effect, and an end, forced by the depletion of my funding. From Andrásy Boulevard in Budapest, affectionately called ‘The Champs-Élysées of the East’ by locals and tourists alike, to College Avenue in Leicester city, my personal journey of unravelling, contextualising and historicising post-socialist motherhood certainly had a highly politicised geographical dimension.

I emphasise this as I write from my rented attic space on a gloomy March afternoon, literally ‘the mad woman in the attic’ (Gilbert and Gubar 2000). In their analysis of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1999), Gilbert and Gubar equate Mr Rochester’s mentally ill wife Bertha, locked up in the attic of his mansion, with the repressed feminist rage of submissive bride-to-be Jane. Nineteenth century female writers, claim Gilbert and Gubar, were similarly locked in the prison of the patriarchal literary canon, which did not allow for multidimensional female characters. The ‘mad woman in the attic’ then was the only way for their deep dissatisfaction with women’s oppression to reach the surface of their writing.

As such it seems only fitting to be finishing this thesis on Hungarian and Bulgarian motherhoods as ‘the mad woman in the attic’. Both countries have taken a particularly misogynist right-wing political turn since 2012/2013 when I did my interviews. Indeed, Bulgaria and Hungary are two of the eleven EU countries which have not ratified the Istanbul convention against gender-based violence. In Bulgaria ratification was even declared unconstitutional amid a toxically misplaced debate about the meaning of ‘gender’. In the meantime, 41 women have lost their lives at the hand of current or ex partners, or other male relatives since the beginning of 2018. And while the government trumpeted its commitment to end gender-based violence once and for all, the half-baked legislative measures taken and the discourses surrounding them tell a different story: one of a semi-official institutionalisation of violence as a way to keep women ‘in their place’. On the positive side this triggered an unseen feminist mobilisation on a national level. On the negative, however, it opened a space for further questioning women’s rights over their bodies. Abortion rights are now, for the first time ever since the dawn of state socialism, a topic of public

⁷⁵ A reference to the lyrics of “The Soft Parade” by The Doors.

debate, where the voices of church officials and other conservatives are sadly not only the loudest, but also vastly overrepresented.

In Hungary on the other hand, the 'gender ideology' hysteria took a different turn and led to the almost complete annihilation of academic freedom. Viktor Orbán's extreme right government, committed to, in his own words, 'illiberal democracy', considers femininity and masculinity to be a biological destiny. As such, the study of gender as a social construction contradicts the very basis on which the Orbán regime is built. In a strange turn of events it's as if the subversive power of sexual difference feminism was officially hijacked by the very institutions it sought to dismantle through critique. As a result, however, among other suppressions of the freedom of independent research, Hungary revoked the accreditation of gender studies courses available in its higher education institutions. The alma mater where I received my MA degree and started this PhD journey, in the department of Critical Gender Studies, the Central European University, is on its way to being forcefully relocated to Vienna.

This is the political climate in which I am trying to write the concluding remarks of a thesis about Bulgarian and Hungarian women, an Eastern European madwoman in an attic of my own in Brexit Britain, where a couple of years ago I thought I had found my academic home. The referendum, however, changed everything and my family and I decided to relocate back to Hungary. Little did we know that the kind of research both my partner and I engage in would be effectively banned by the time we fully complete our move. But our daughter has already started to get accustomed to her new school and Budapest in general. A life with a child is a series of ethical encounter-events and until we know for sure that a choice to leave Hungary once more would benefit her too, we will stay put and proceed according to plan. For now, I am a (temporarily) childless woman, theorising motherhood and a future academic within an academia with no future. 'And isn't it ironic?'⁷⁶

In this situation, assigning any futurity to this research feels not only understandably doubtful, but heartbreaking as well. Its limitations, at the moment, appear absolute to me. Of course, since completing this degree is not irrelevant to me, I will return to those later in this chapter and pretend to spell out directions for development. For the moment, however, I will proceed with the only semi-sane thing to do in a world devoured by corporate greed and the oh-so-tired loathing of the gendered, raced, classed and so on 'other': focus on what is already there and make the small steps to ensure it has, if not a future, than at least a present. And hope that this

⁷⁶ A famous line from Alanis Morissette's song "Ironic".

present, just as subjectivity, can be a present 'otherwise', transcending the abuses of the masculine subject of nature and humanity alike.

A chapter by chapter summary of the thesis' structure can be found in my introduction chapter. What the concluding chapter will do, instead, is address the various themes tackled by this research and shape them into a systematic narrative about maternal subjectivity. A rough chronological order is kept in the summary of findings I present in the following section. However, the focus is rather more on answering the research questions, as posed in the Introduction. Instead of listing them once more, here I prefer to rearticulate them into a larger, overarching question that simultaneously contains and expands on those initial ones: What are the implications of my Eastern European-focused analysis of stories about the maternal everyday for the feminist study of both (maternal) subjectivity and classed parenting alike?

According to Grossberg, the hardest part of studying culture is the obligation to constantly re-examine one's own questions in relation to the research context: "The trajectory from the beginning to the end provides the measure of our success at mapping, at arriving at a better description/understanding of the context" (2006: 3). Since putting the post-socialist context at the centre of studying motherhood has been a crucial driving force behind this research, I am delighted to wrap up my thesis with the realisation that the questions are still very similar, but the links between them are tighter and more fused than in the beginning. The fragments of my own 'maternal thinking' have become the building blocks of a (hopefully) coherent story.

7.1 Summary of Findings

I started this project in an attempt to re-articulate maternal subjectivity 'otherwise' (Baraitser 2009), beyond treating motherhood as an aberration of the 'normal' human condition, marked by individualism, self-interest and (bodily) autonomy (Cixous 1986, Hays 1996). Instead, maternal subjectivity was conceptualised as emerging from an ethical encounter with the radical and transformative alterity of the child. The focus was not on the way motherhood supposedly changed an individual woman forever, as it has often been presented in feminist literature (Lawler 2000), but rather on how it disrupted the phantasy of an individual self in which modern, middle-class women are allowed to indulge. And indeed, my respondents spoke not about 'loss of self' (Lawler 2000), but rather about a hazy reconstitution of priorities, which shed light on how fluidity, multiplicity and change have always defined their lives. In that sense, the way the subject is understood, in mainstream and a lot of feminist theory alike, is unable to

accommodate the experiences of what, in Chapter 3, I called the ‘cooperative maternal subject “otherwise”’.

The ‘cooperative maternal subject “otherwise”’ is what occurs when the imaginary of wholeness and boundedness of new mothers is shattered by pregnancy and the arrival of the baby. It’s what I termed an I-we entity, because phallogentric language does not provide a pronoun which would allow the articulation of a maternal chainlike self, strategically, yet gently, engulfing and expelling others, indispensable in a mother’s daily existence. Unlike the mother-child dyad psychoanalysts belonging to the object relations tradition such as Klein (1975) and Winnicott (1960) write about, or the ‘individual’ mother of a lot of feminist theory (Blum and Vandewater 1993, Bobel 2001, DiQuinzio 1999, Hays 1996, Hochschild and Machung 1989, Rothman 1989), my I-we/cooperative maternal subject speaks to Baraitser’s (2009) subjectivity ‘otherwise’ and Ettinger’s ‘I and non-I’ matrixial subject. This offers a way to address “the m/other’s compassionate hospitality” in an ethical “encounter-event” (Ettinger 2006: 27). I have engaged in depth with the work of Baraitser and Ettinger, but my ‘cooperative maternal subject’ emerged sociologically: via a feminist CDA analysis (Lazar 2007) of the 35 semi-structured interviews I conducted with first-time middle-class mothers on maternity leave in Budapest and Sofia. As explained in Chapter 2, feminist CDA allowed me to historicise, deconstruct and contextualise the maternal stories of my respondents at once. I traced the ways different kinds of power, classed, raced and gendered, shaped the meaning my interviewees attached to their experiences of motherhood.

Further, I put my respondents’ narratives in a direct dialogue with psychoanalysis and philosophy, in an attempt to make the latter two actually listen to the mother, which helped me re-articulate subject formation as a two, or more, way process, rather than as a monofocal site of genesis of the self of the child. It is this subject, then, which has informed my deconstructive engagement with motherhood as performative (Derrida 1982, Mahmood 2005). With new mothers’ time being ‘seized’ by the endless carework around the realisation of their children’s selves, it is precisely the performative engagement with those culturally specific childcare rituals (Faircloth et al. 2014) which structures the ‘cooperative maternal subject “otherwise”’. For instance, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, the nuances around the understanding of what constitutes an appropriate infant feeding choice require Hungarian and Bulgarian mothers to engage in almost opposite strategies of ‘good motherhood’. Women from Sofia emphasise primarily their organisational and financial contributions to family food provision, while their counterparts from Budapest practically fetishise the bodily labour invested in meal preparation.

As a result, their daily lives, and therefore the ways they 'do' themselves as mothers look very different.

In their narratives a story of sexual difference (Cixous 1979, 1981, 1986, 1991) comes to light as well: despite becoming fathers, that is, having an encounter-event with a radical alterity they are responsible for, my interviewees' male partners did not go through the same unravelling of self as the women did (of course, this is what my respondents claim, not the actual words of their partners). Due to the gendered character of care work (Cixous 1979, 1981, 1986, 1991, Critterden 2001, Federici 2004) men were a lot more able to keep the phantasy of the autonomous subject alive.

To go back to my female respondents though, Mahmood's (2005) conceptualisation of performativity outside liberal societies was also very fruitful for my analysis. Unlike Butler's performativity (1990, 1993, 1997), it questions the dichotomous vision of the subject's relation to norms as either being repressed/produced by them or in one way or another accomplishing their subversion. For Mahmood the subject emerges through any kind of performative relation with a contextualised norm. And indeed, resistance was not on the agenda of my research subjects. Perhaps this is because as middle-class Bulgarian and Hungarian mothers in their own countries they did not see the need to resist childcare narratives they were more or less able to comply with. Alternatively, it may be because Bulgaria and Hungary's socio-political systems and the understanding of personhood that underlies them are not exactly liberal – at least not in the way the concept is traditionally understood in the west. In line with Mahmood's performativity, disentangling the context – historical, cultural and geographical – of those realisations of (maternal) subjectivity/personhood was key to my research. Instead of assuming a top down approach and relying exclusively on western theory for the conceptualisation of my cooperative maternal subject, in Chapter 4 I turned to Gal and Kligman's (2000) 'fractal' understanding of the public/private divide. While under patriarchy reproductive work is materially and symbolically subordinated to productive work, and as such structural to gender relations, the institutions, activities, practices, spaces and individuals that the public/private divide hierarchically encapsulates are culturally contingent and in perpetual flux.

Indeed, articulating a place from which to speak about maternal subjectivity from the semi-periphery of Eastern Europe – a crucial goal of this study both in an academic and in a political sense – requires an engagement with the particularities of the gender ideologies in Hungary and Bulgaria. As I admitted in the Introduction, before even conceptualising this research, I attempted to accommodate those two in my own uncomfortable maternal body. The task, I was

surprised to realise, turned out to be practically impossible. Being a 'good mother', I had to recognise, couldn't be further from 'natural'. A question started shaping up: what does one need to do to deserve the honorary label 'good' mother, and what feeds into those culturally specific definitions?

To answer it, I traced historical changes from the era of so-called mature socialism onwards to provide a nuanced analysis of the reasons why the categories Bulgarian and Hungarian middle-class mothers of young children use to explicate their everyday life are practically the same, while the actual performances that constitute said daily life are often miles apart. I have looked at the particular childcare performances of my respondents and suggested that, whenever dilemmas of public and private surface around them, they provide a window on the gender norms shaping mothers' self-actualisations. The cooperative maternal subject realises itself differently, dependent on those relationships, key for its survival. The reasons for the conceptual similarities and practical divergences between the two countries, are regulated by a long chain of ideologically loaded events such as the introduction of a long maternity leave in 1967-1968 in both countries, the controlling practices of the *védőnő* and other social workers in Hungary, the (however incomplete) efforts of the Bulgarian state to socialise housework and childcare, the creation of the Institute for Childhood Psychology in 1968 in Hungary, the de facto institutionalisation of grandparental care in Bulgaria in the 1980s and so on.

As it turns out, both in Budapest and Sofia my respondents' 'motherwork' (Hill Collins 1990) is indeed subordinated to the paid work of their male partners despite frequently repeated claims that their relationships are egalitarian. This inequality transpires most strongly around issues of night time rest, leisure and entertainment. The male partner working outside the home has an unquestionable right to those in both locations. Mothers from Sofia, largely because of the common participation of grandmothers in childcare, are allowed some freedom in pursuing outside interests. However, this 'frivolity' is not without cost: childcare is naturalised as part of women's self-realisation and denied the honorific label 'work'. Mothers from Budapest, on the other hand, remain almost exclusively responsible for the well-being of their children and, while their reproductive contributions receive the marker 'labour' (although again this is deeply naturalised in its gendered character), they need to practically sacrifice their social lives for the duration of their 'stay at home with the baby'.

The fact that all this occurs in a global climate of intensification of a particular form of paranoid parenting (Furedi 2002) does not make the task on the hands of my respondents any easier. The practices of intensive, paranoid parenting have been well described in western-centric literature

(Faircloth et al. 2013, Furedi 2002, Hays 1996, Lee et al. 2014) A study systematically addressing these in an Eastern European context has not, to my knowledge, yet been published. This thesis discusses these practices - breast and bottle feeding, solid food introduction, sleeping habits, outings with the baby and so on - in the light of the personal autonomy ideal mothers from both locations try to foster in their children. While they engage in those practices, with the aim of building the personas of their children, they are performatively re-structuring their selves as mothers too. A (good) mother is therefore not revealed through her performance of inherently superior childcare decisions. As I have suggested elsewhere, instead she is created through the repetitive enactment of socially constituted and culturally specific, classed, gendered and also racialised childcare practices, conceived at the intersection of various discourses such as those of medicine, women's employment, welfare and healthcare and - last but not least – personhood (Cheresheva 2015).

The question of what a good person is, as it lies at the core of women's reproductive strategies, is again a contextual one, straddling Bulgaria and Hungary's neoliberal capitalist present with its underlying ideologies of self-reliance (to be elaborated on later) as well as their socialist past. Despite the fact that state socialism tried to erase 'autonomy' from the 'core of the socialist subject' (Fodor 2002, Millei and Imre 2010), it didn't in fact bother with its implicit maleness. Further, western influences through music and media alike, which opponents of the regime were sneaking behind the Iron Curtain, disrupted the neat re-education work of the socialist ideology (Verdery 1994, Gal and Kligman 2000, Taylor 2003). As such personhood in Eastern Europe is a particularly contested category, and the understanding of children's needs which it informs can be expected to vary as well. Nevertheless, women in Budapest and Sofia frame the qualities they expect to see in their children in a surprisingly similar vein: mothers hope to raise happy, healthy, self-reliant individuals. What differs immensely, however, are the technologies through which they expect to achieve those goals.

In Hungary, in line with a long local tradition of Freudian childhood psychology, it is the constant care of an infinitely devoted mother that allows the gradual emergence of an independent child. In Bulgaria in turn, it is letting the child solve what are understood as age-appropriate problems, as well as the ability of the mother to serve as a role model: successful, with a variety of interests and so on. That of course does not mean both sets of mothers adhere religiously to these behavioural models. Rather, these are important discursive categories, norms around which my respondents performatively realise their maternal subjectivities, and deviation from which requires different justification strategies.

Finally, my thesis has engaged with the ways these narratives of good motherhood are not only culturally specific, but profoundly classed as well (see Chapter 6). As Hays (1996) has shown for the US context, the labour-intensive, financially-demanding and time-consuming practices of middle-class mothers in fact historically inform the very idea of ‘good’ motherhood. While those have been studied extensively in western contexts (Faircloth 2014, Laureu 2003, Laureu and Weininger 2008, Vincent and Ball 2007), my research shows they are certainly not universal. In other words, it isn’t the obsessive-compulsive provision of organic and fair-trade food options, the skilful manoeuvring around (pre-)school selection or the endless supply of extracurricular activities that make middle-class parenting. Non-western contexts produce their own specific technologies of cultural and material exclusion, and these lie at the core of class distinction.

In CEE in particular, where the middle class gradually emerged after 1989 from a supposedly classless society, these exclusionary technologies carry a heavy weight as they are often, together with other socially valued cultural practices, the only way to secure a relative and fragile economic privilege. On top of a very short history of the contemporary middle classes in CEE, its members, in striving for social status, are acutely aware of their economic inferiority, as well as their supposed backwardness, compared to their western counterparts. In fact, that inferiority complex is deeply built into the class distinction processes in my two research locations. Claims to a middle-class status are in that sense also civilisational claims – for the internalised judgement of ‘western eyes’ (Mohanty 1984) – to ‘Europeanness’, to ‘whiteness’, to being a winner in a voracious system of global inequalities (Fehervary 2013, Owczarzak 2009, Tsoneva 2017). Class, in the understanding that I deploy here, is a ‘glocal’ design (Bauman 2014): its particular performance is culturally and historically specific but embedded in narratives about whose lives actually matter in an unequal world.

The way these ‘glocal’ class anxieties play out in the performative actualisations of my respondents’ maternal subjectivities vary by location: however, in both Budapest and Sofia, mothers frame their childcare choices as a matter of subtle moral superiority. While not a single one of my interviewees made any explicitly racist remarks – and I will return to this in the limitations section – their narrative motherwork contained an implicit reference to (what they imagined to be) the ‘inferior’ motherwork of poor and Roma women. Other than this crucial similarity, the actual class ideals underlying the maternal practice of women from Budapest and Sofia differed substantially. While my Bulgarian respondents constructed their childcare choices as modern (as opposed to a socialist past), western (as opposed to Balkan or Oriental ‘backwardness’) and culturally and morally superior to both the ‘poor masses’ and the nouveau

riche, Hungarian women did not seem to be very preoccupied with proving the global value of their personas. Partly, this is an effect of the heavily state-regulated character of Hungarian 'good' motherhood. As such, it cuts across class and doesn't provide much space for articulating one's class identity. Mothers' preoccupation with a particular version of cosy and relaxed domestic respectability in the realisation of their family lives, however, speaks volumes about the implicit distinction from the racialised poor in the dominant narrative of Hungarian good parenting. The general lack of referencing the superiority of western childcare designs by Hungarian women points to the ways in which the western heteronormative 'good life' has already been embedded in their ethical quests for 'good' motherhood.

7.2 Contributions: This Is the Most Awkward Part of the Trip

This thesis engages with the specific childcare practices of women from two different post-socialist societies in light with their classed maternal subjectivities. Developed from this original setting, my research makes five particular contributions to broader feminist theory on motherhood.

First, although research on motherhood has obviously been done in Eastern Europe before (Kispéter 2012, Muresan 2018, Sorainen et al. 2017, Takács 2011), to my knowledge this is the first comprehensive study of mothering as a cultural practice, particularly one creating class distinctions. Thus, it contributes to a large body of literature on middle-class parenting styles in particular and the intersections between class and parenting in general around the world (Byrne 2006, Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001, Faircloth et al. 2013, Gatrell 2013, Hays 1996, Lareau 2003, Lareau and Weininger 2008, Skeggs 1997, Walbank 2001).

Second, my research was politically motivated by the aim of putting the particularities of the mothering practices of CEE women on the feminist theoretical map. Finding a way to speak about mothering normativity from a specifically Eastern European perspective, rather than simply positioning my respondents' practices in relation to western research, is another important contribution my thesis makes. While it does try to voice maternal experience from the semi-periphery of CEE, it also does so while emphasising key differences in the dominant ideologies around reproductive work in Hungary and Bulgaria. Politicising the post-socialist condition in that sense cannot happen without contradicting a western canon, which, blinded by self-importance, systematically erases contextual dissimilarities in close and far-away lands alike (Burawoy and Verdery 1999, Dunn 2004, Gal and Kligman 2000).

Third, I articulated the concept of the 'cooperative maternal subjectivity "otherwise"' to describe the complicated chain-like selves that new mothers inhabit. Unable to articulate their experiences from the confines of phallogocentric languages, my respondents kept referring to themselves and those others, indispensable in their daily lives as carers as undifferentiated I-we-s. Forced to simultaneously become life-support systems for their infants and depend on others in order to manage the impossible demands of contemporary 'good' motherhood, new mothers un/consciously abandon the phantasy of an individual bound self. I argued for a redefinition of subjectivity which will put the 'cooperative maternal subject "otherwise"' at the centre of the study of subjectivity. In dialogue with feminist psychoanalytic thinkers such as Lisa Baraitser (2009), Bracha Ettinger (2006) and Helene Cixous (1976, 1981, 1986, 1991), I conceptualised subjectivity as stemming from an ethical encounter with alterity, driven by the desire to 'link' with the other(s). On the one hand, this understanding of the subject adds to a long line of feminist psychoanalysis, which opposes Freudian/Lacanian 'masculine' subjectivity, steered by an insatiable desire to incorporate the other in an attempt to fill an original void (Baraitser 2009, Cixous 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, DiQuinzio 1999, Ettinger 2006, Irigaray 1985, Kristeva 1984, Kristeva and Goldhammer 1985, Sprengnether 1990). On the other, it solves a conceptual problem within feminist scholarship, which opposes individualism in principle, but ends up trapped within it. In their desire to emancipate the mother from the obligation to always put others' needs before her own, feminists have often stubbornly insisted on treating her as an autonomous subject (Blum 1993, Bobel 2001, Hays 1996, Lawler 2000, Stearns 1999, Walbank 2001). This is probably the right place to come clean about the choice of the term 'cooperative' in my re-conceptualisation of maternal subjectivity. A number of other words could probably express the same idea - collective or joint for example. Cooperative has been chosen as a 'wink' to the organisation of the means of production under state-socialism, in particular in agriculture. In theory, a farmer could choose whether to join a cooperative or not. In practice if they didn't, in one way or another, their (economic) survival was made impossible. I see a clear parallel with new mothers' in/voluntary, enmeshed, chaotic dependencies on others.

Next, in order to connect the particular post-socialist context, the culturally specific childcare rituals my respondents engage in, and the deconstruction of subjectivity, I introduced the concept of performativity in the feminist theory of motherhood. Of course, treating motherhood as performative, or at least as a performance, isn't new (Byrne 2006, Gabb 1999, Glenn et al. 1994, Laureu and Weininger 2008). Those works, however, I dare say simply snatch the concept of performativity out of queer theory and apply it to the analysis of motherhood. My thesis, in contrast, does the excavatory work needed to explore the tensions between the two before

using it. I trace the Freudian spectres haunting the early work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1997), in order to show that they are the primary culprits for the tensions in question. I also disentangled the nuances between Butler's and Mahmood's (2005) performativity, before making a conscious choice to deploy the latter in my analysis.

Finally, bridging 'theoretical' and 'empirical' feminist approaches to studying motherhood, I have put the words of Bulgarian and Hungarian mothers in a democratic and compassionate dialogue with feminist philosophy, psychoanalysis and sociology alike. Keeping 'high' theory in an ivory tower far away from the lives of actual people has long sustained the privilege of white western men in academia. I can only hope this is just one of many studies to deconstruct this dichotomy in the future.

7.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The other side of several important contributions are, of course, enormous limitations. This thesis makes some pretty big claims on the basis of fewer than 40 interviews. Quite obviously, I do not mean to present a conclusive account of Hungarian and Bulgarian motherhood. My study is small, it is qualitative, and it has been driven by my own struggles as a nomadic mother. Not only is my sample sociologically non-representative, but I let some of my respondents speak far more than others. I can only hope that the reader will not consider this as social scientific malpractice. Rather than silencing viewpoints that contradict the general direction of my argument, this has been a practical choice driven by the multilingual nature of this project. To put it simply: some respondents express things more clearly than others, or their words translate better into English. As a writer I have had to make decisions around the form of this research as well. At the end of the day legibility won over the number of the voices explicitly represented: nevertheless, the accounts of those interviewees not specifically quoted still inform the overall findings presented in the thesis.

Further, despite my genuine attempt to engage with contemporary Hungarian feminist research, I am not a proficient Hungarian speaker. I have, of course, discussed the ideas presented here with a number of contemporary Hungarian scholars, who have helped enormously in keeping me abreast with the local body of literature. However, the pieces I engage with in depth have all been published in English, and as such are only the tip of the iceberg of an ever-growing field.

Finally, and possibly most importantly, while this research aimed at shedding light on the classed character of mothering ideologies and practices in Budapest and Sofia, it only voices one side of

the story, and the more privileged one for that matter. On the one hand, I have made the choice to focus on the stories of middle-class CEE women in order to illuminate the ways in which they are profoundly different from what a western-biased literature considers universal middle-class parenting. On the other, however, it was again a practical choice, driven by my poor Hungarian (middle class CEE women generally speak fluent English) and my own relative class privilege which allowed me immediate access to such respondents via my personal networks. To quote Jarvis Cocker from Pulp: “I had to start somewhere, so I started...there”.

Two findings have probably been particularly heavily affected because of this. First, I claimed resisting dominant mothering ideologies was generally (with a few exceptions of course) not on the agenda of my respondents. Resistance can be, of course, driven by personal politics like in the exceptions mentioned above. Typically, however, resistance is driven by the structural inability to comply. In that sense in order to find proper resistance strategies against the controlling effects of mothering ideologies in CEE one would have to look at the motherwork of the excluded: queer women, Roma women, poor women, migrant and refugee women. This is an important direction, both academically and politically, for the future development of research on CEE motherhood as a cultural practice.

Second, the way my respondents constructed their classed maternal superiority was, as I already explained, markedly subtle. No explicitly racist or even outright classist remarks were made by any of them. I am adamant to say that this does not in any way mean Bulgarian and Hungarian middle-class women are not racist or classist. I am a leftist feminist and as such so are most of my friends, and their friends and so on. Outside of my cute liberal bubble of kind, privileged motherhoods the situation is far less accepting, as a look at any mothering internet forum can immediately attest. To gain a better picture of those sadly widespread attitudes, more research is clearly needed.

I started this thesis with comparing it to a journey. I'd rather end it with the metaphor of a trip – transcending beginnings and ends, and illuminating what was always already there, but due to repression (emotional or economic) and denial (psychological or resource-based), could not emerge on to the surface of knowledge. A trip is not necessarily pleasurable, but this is the best part of a trip: when experiential, embodied and intellectual knowledge all 'click' to produce a

deep sense of understanding, connectedness and hope for a different future. Just yesterday news was released that after the intervention of the European People's Party, the Central European University may in fact be able to stay in Budapest. It's time for this madwoman to leave her attic.

Appendix 1 – Research Participants

Table 1. Participants in Bulgaria

No	Pseudonym	Age	Child	Occupation	Ethnicity	Partnership status
1	Daniela	37	F, 1y	dentist	Bulgarian	living with male partner
2	Marina	32	M, 3y	translator at a sales firm	Bulgarian	living with male partner
3	Boryana	25	M, 1y	English teacher at an elite secondary school	Bulgarian	living with male partner
4	Radina	30	M, 1y	fashion designer, company owner	Bulgarian	living with male partner
5	Kalina	29	M, 6m	lecturer in foreign languages at a university	Bulgarian	living with male partner
6	Ani	32	M, 1y	construction engineer at an architecture firm	Polish/Bulgarian	living with male partner
7	Nadia	31	M, 1y	senior expert at a state agency	Bulgarian	living with male partner
8	Katerina	30	F, 1y	project coordinator at a software company	Bulgarian	living with male partner
9	Stela	29	F, 1y	customer service at a global corporation	Bulgarian	living with male partner
10	Svetlana	32	M, 2y	medical doctor	Bulgarian	living with male partner
11	Mira	31	M, 1.5y	credit risk management expert at a bank	Bulgarian	living with male partner
12	Adriana	35	M, 1y	radio presenter	Bulgarian	living with male partner
13	Maria	29	M, 9m	PhD candidate	Bulgarian	living with male partner
14	Lidia	29	M, 8m	software consultant	Bulgarian	living with male partner

15	Simona	29	M, 10m	project coordinator at a cable operator	Bulgarian	living with male partner
16	Gergana	29	M, 5m	company owner	Bulgarian	living with male partner
17	Diana	35	F, 1y	civil servant	Bulgarian	living with male partner
18	Desislava	29	F, 1y	product manager at a software company	Bulgarian	living with male partner
19	Ralitsa	32	F, 1y	telecommunications engineer	Bulgarian	living with male partner

Table 2. Participants in Hungary

No	Pseudonym	Age	Child	Occupation	Ethnicity	Partnership status
1	Alicia	33	M, 1.5y	consultant	Hungarian	living with male partner
2	Nikolett	37	M, 2.5y	librarian	Hungarian	living with male partner
3	Viktoría	32	M, 2y	PhD candidate	Hungarian	living with male partner
4	Judit	29	F, 1y	research assistant at a university	Hungarian	living with male partner
5	Klára	30	M, 1.5y	administrator at a university	Hungarian	living with male partner
6	Dóra	37	M, 6m	account manager	Hungarian	living with male partner
7	Bea	33	F, 2y	project coordinator at a cultural centre	Hungarian	single, living with daughter
8	Julia	35	F, 3.5y	finance expert at a telecommunications company	Hungarian	living with male partner
9	Kata	35	M, 3y	lawyer	Hungarian	living with male partner

10	Zsuzsa	35	F, 3y	architect	Hungarian	living with male partner
11	Hanna	31	F, 1.5y	lawyer	Hungarian	living with male partner
12	Reka	35	F, 1.5y	actuary at a pension fund	Hungarian	living with male partner
13	Erzsi	35	F, 1.5y	business consultant	Hungarian	living with male partner
14	Luca	27	F, 3m	social worker	Hungarian	living with male partner
15	Kinga	33	F, 2y	researcher at a research centre	Hungarian	living with male partner
16	Dalma	32	M, 3.5y	researcher at a university	Hungarian	living with male partner

Appendix 2 – Interview Guide

1. Let's start with a few general questions about yourself:
 - How old are you?
 - How old were you when you became a mother?
 - What's your education?
 - What was/is your job before you went on leave? Do you plan to go back? When?
2. Actually, what is, according to you, the ideal time to go back to work? How old should the child be? Why?
3. How old is your child now?
4. Can you describe a typical day with her/him?
 - When does s/he get up?
 - What happens next? What is for breakfast and who prepares it? At that time are you alone with your child?
 - What and when does your child eat?
 - What are your sleeping arrangements? (When does s/he go to bed, do you share a room/bed? Why?)
 - Outings? Where do you usually go? Alone or with friends, family?
 - Describe a typical visit to the playground – what does s/he like to do the most? What do you do while s/he's playing? Do you often talk to other parents on the playground? About what?
5. Do you have any other activities that you do on regular basis? (Baby swimming, singing, regular visits to family members/friends)?
6. How much other family members participate in your daily routine now that you are on leave?
 - How involved is your partner in the daily chores?
 - What about other family members? Grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc? Friends?
 - Do you think they will be more/less involved when you go back to work? How do you imagine the situation to change? What is your opinion on nurseries?
7. Now try to remember how it was when you baby was small (the first few months after the birth). Can you describe a typical day back then?
 - Did you breastfeed? If yes, on schedule or on demand? If you are still breastfeeding do you have it planned when you want to stop? Why/not? How did/do you feel about breastfeeding? (physically, emotionally). Do/did you breastfeed in public? Why/not?

Did/do you feel comfortable about it? (elaborate). Do you have some story to tell me about when things went wrong?

- How were the nights? How did you feel about it? (possibly talk about partner's involvement)

- When did you start taking your baby out? Why? Did you hear any reactions by other people about that? How did you decide when to start? (books, midwife, friends, family advice)

8. Who did you take advice from? Did you find the midwife's visits helpful? Why/not?

9. Do you remember how you felt in the beginning when you had your baby? List some positive and some negative feelings, if possible and elaborate.

10. Now let's talk a bit about solid food introduction. When did you start? What with? Why? Any opinions on the jarred vs homemade baby food debate? Elaborate.

I will now ask you some questions about motherhood in general.

11. What is the best thing about being a mother? Like, how did your life change for the better after giving birth? And the worst? What do you miss from your pre-baby lifestyle?

12. Think about the best mother you know. Can you please describe her to me? And the worst?

13. Do you think your mother was a good mother? What did she do right? And wrong? In what ways do you want to be different/similar to her as a mother?

14. What is the ideal time to become a mother? Why? What should a woman be like/have/have achieved, etc. when she decides to start a family?

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