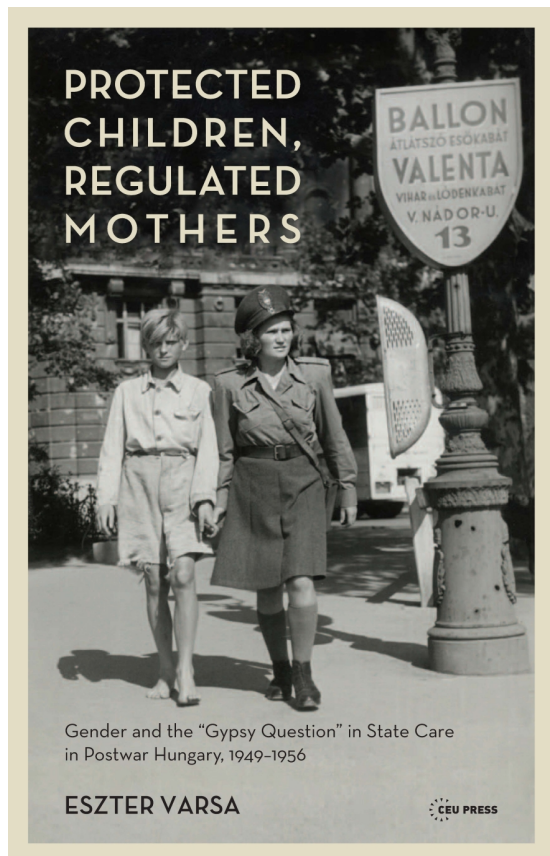


PROTECTED CHILDREN, REGULATED MOTHERS

Gender and the “Gypsy Question” in State Care in Postwar Hungary, 1949–1956



“This deeply researched and well-documented book addresses issues of the state, child welfare, and Romani/non-Romani children in early socialist Hungary. Employing a variety of archival materials and interviews, Eszter Varsa makes important contributions to the fields of Romani history, modern Hungarian history, and the history of childhood.”
Nancy M. Wingfield, author of *The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria*

“*Protected Children, Regulated Mothers* reveals the contradictory implications of social policy toward children in early state-socialist Hungary. By zeroing in on a seven-year period, historian Eszter Varsa shows how, in the name of *protecting* children, the state also *regulated* their mothers’ work performance and sexuality. With special attention to the “work-shy” Roma population, racialized Hungarian policy anticipated what came to be called “workfare” in the United States. This is an important contribution to both the revisionist historiography of Stalinist societies as well as comparative welfare state studies.”

Sonya Michel, Professor Emerita of History, American Studies, and Gender and Women’s Studies, University of Maryland.

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Protected Children, Regulated Mothers examines child protection in Stalinist Hungary as a part of twentieth-century East Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European history. Across the communist bloc, the prewar foster care system was increasingly replaced after 1945 by institutionalization in residential homes. This shift was often interpreted as a further attempt to establish totalitarian control. However, this study—based on hundreds of children’s case files and interviews with institution leaders, teachers, and people formerly in state care—provides a new perspective. Rather than being merely a tool of political repression, state care in postwar Hungary was often shaped by educators’ efforts to address the myriad of problems engendered by the social and economic transformations that emerged after World War II. This response built on, rather than broke with, earlier models of reform and reformatory education. Yet child protection went beyond safeguarding and educating children; it also focused on parents, particularly lone mothers, regulating not only their entrance to paid work but also their sexuality. In so doing, children’s homes both reinforced and changed existing cultural and social patterns, whether about gendered division of work or the assimilation of minorities. Indeed, a major finding of the book is that state socialist child protection continued a centuries-long national project of seeking a “solution to the Gypsy question,” rooted in efforts to eliminate the perceived “work-shyness” of Roma.

About the Author

Eszter Varsa is post-doctoral researcher in the ERC project ZARAH: Women’s Labour Activism in Eastern Europe and Transnationally, From the Age of Empires to the Late 20th Century at Central European University, Vienna.

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CONTENTS

List of Figures, List of tables, Abbreviations
Acknowledgments
Introduction

Chapter 1. Child protection in early state socialist Hungary

A brief introduction to the historical context: Hungary, 1949–1956
Historical and legal background of child protection in Hungary in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century
Child protection as a “solution to the Gypsy question” in nineteenth and twentieth century Hungary

Chapter 2. “The minor would hinder the mother in finding employment”: Child protection regulating women’s labor force participation

A lack of child care services and “delinquent” children
“The minor would hinder the mother in finding employment”: Child protection as a tool to force unemployed mothers to enter paid work
“As they are Gypsies, they are not employed”: The negative evaluation of Romani motherhood
Parents requesting their children’s institutionalization for the purposes of child care

Chapter 3. “She occupied herself with men”: Child protection regulating the sexual morality of lone mothers and single young women

Concern about women’s sexual morality in early state socialist Hungary
The regulation of lone mothers’ sexuality
The representation of lone mothers in the case files of children in state care
The regulation of Romani women’s sexuality
Regulating the sexuality of single young women

Chapter 4. “Make Them Experience the Good Taste of Productive Work”: Residential Care as an Institution of Education

Reformatory and reform pedagogy: The origins of education for work in residential care education
The continuity of education for work in the curricula and educational practice of residential homes under state socialism
Education for work in the socialist context: reform pedagogical and reformatory traditions
“Make them experience the good taste of productive work”: What education for work meant to child protection professionals during and after socialism
Turning work into a habit
Education for work as education for life: Creating gendered habits
Education for work as a means towards the assimilation of Roma

Chapter 5. “He was three years old but could not speak and had no emotional attachment to anybody”: State care as discourse on Stalinist political terror in socialist Hungary

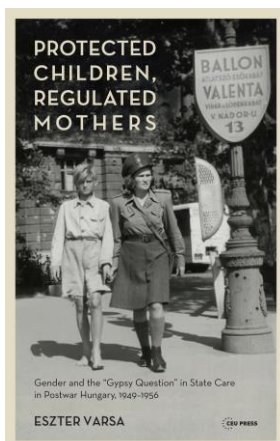
Emmi Pikler and the history of “Lóczy”
The cases of László Rajk Jr. and Mátyás Donáth
Júlia Rajk and Éva Bozóky’s (re)construction of their children’s institutionalization

Conclusion
Appendix
Biographical information
Bibliography

---PRESS RELEASE---

CEU PRESS Publishes *Protected Children, Regulated Mothers: Gender and the "Gypsy Question" in State Care in Postwar Hungary, 1949–1956* by Eszter Varsa

Protected Children, Regulated Mothers examines child protection in Stalinist Hungary as a part of twentieth-century East Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European history.



Across the communist bloc, the prewar foster care system was increasingly replaced after 1945 by institutionalization in residential homes. This shift was often interpreted as a further attempt to establish totalitarian control. However, this study—based on hundreds of children’s case files and interviews with institution leaders, teachers, and people formerly in state care—provides a new perspective. Rather than being merely a tool of political repression, state care in postwar Hungary was often shaped by educators’ efforts to address the myriad of problems engendered by the social and economic transformations that emerged after World War II. This response built on, rather than broke with, earlier models of reform and reformatory education. Yet child protection went beyond safeguarding and

educating children; it also focused on parents, particularly lone mothers, regulating not only their entrance to paid work but also their sexuality. In so doing, children’s homes both reinforced and changed existing cultural and social patterns, whether about gendered division of work or the assimilation of minorities.

Indeed, a major finding of the book is that state socialist child protection continued a centuries-long national project of seeking a “solution to the Gypsy question,” rooted in efforts to eliminate the perceived “work-shyness” of Roma.

Excerpts from the book:

In January 1956 the Guardianship Authorities of Túrkeve, a town in Szolnok County, central Hungary, ruled that the two-year-old daughter of Sándor Lugos and Beáta Varga be permanently placed in state care.¹ Their decision about the child, who by then had already been in temporary care for a year, was based on the following description of her family background:

The father, Sándor Lugos, has legally recognized the child, but has not provided for her maintenance and care at all. . . . The minor thus cannot be placed with the father. The mother, Beáta Varga, does not have a permanent and proper place of living, neither furniture nor bed clothes. She lives temporarily here or there. Her attitude to work is not good either. She does not work regularly or with persistence and often changes her place of work. . . . Her income is insecure; it is not even enough for her own subsistence. Her lifestyle is morally strongly questionable too; she has had another out-of-wedlock child, who also had to be placed in state care, otherwise the child would have died as a result of her mother's bad treatment and lack of care.

The story of this small child was not an isolated case in Hungary in the late 1940s and the first half of the 1950s. The situation of children and their parents in this time period was deeply affected both by the damages caused by World War II and the political, economic, and social changes set in motion by the new state socialist regime. Although with the onset of catch-up industrialization employment opportunities had improved by the early 1950s, poverty still affected a large percentage of the population. (From the Introduction)

Endorsements:

Protected Children, Regulated Mothers reveals the contradictory implications of social policy toward children in early state-socialist Hungary. By zeroing in on a seven-year period, historian Eszter Varsa shows how, in the name of *protecting* children, the state also *regulated* their mothers' work performance and sexuality. With special attention to the "work-shy" Roma population, racialized Hungarian policy anticipated what came to be called "workfare" in the United States. This is an important contribution to both the revisionist historiography of Stalinist societies as well as comparative welfare state studies.

Sonya Michel, Professor Emerita of History, American Studies, and Gender and Women's Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, USA, author of Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy

This deeply researched and well-documented book addresses issues of the state, child welfare, and Romani/non-Romani children in early socialist Hungary. Employing a variety of archival materials and interviews, Eszter Varsa makes important contributions to the fields of Romani history, modern Hungarian history, and the history of childhood.

Nancy M. Wingfield, author of The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria

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