

Title: Between Cultural Policies, Industry Structures and the Household: A Feminist Perspective on Digitalization and Musical Careers in Hungary

Abstract: This paper examines the ways in which the digitalization of the music industries has impacted the work of musicians locally, in the semi-peripheral country of Hungary. In particular, it focuses on the ways in which the work of musicians is shaped by gender relations. It aims to critique the democratization discourse of the digitalization of musical production by exploring, first, the local policy and industry context of digitalized musical labor, and secondly, the role of gender relations within the household in the labor and careers of musicians in Hungary.

Keywords: digitalization; creative labor; gender; household; semi periphery; music industries; policy

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This paper examines how the digital transformation of the music industries has impacted the work of musicians locally, in the Hungary of the so-called “System of National Cooperation.” This system can be understood as a new semi-peripheral regime of capital accumulation (Éber et al.) or “authoritarian capitalism” (Scheiring) introduced in 2010 by the second Viktor Orbán government and continued through, so far, two subsequent government cycles. I look at the work of musicians through a feminist theoretical lens, tracing the ways in which gender relations complicate the conditions of music-making aided by accessible digital technology in the specific local context. I argue that focusing on gender relations not only in the public spaces of the music industries, but also within the household — the sphere of female and “housewifized” labor (Mies) — may contribute to a better understanding of the inequalities related to changes brought about by digitalization. The combination of desktop recording technology and the availability of online platforms for music distribution has ensured that the domestic space has become a crucial site for the production of music. The household, however, simultaneously also functions as a site for housework and care work, where the division of labor is deeply gendered. In this paper, I ask in what ways specific local structural features complicate the democratizing effect of digitalization from the perspective of gender equality. This main question is investigated on two levels. First, I ask how local cultural and media policy, as well as gender relations within the music industries drive particularly female musicians towards home-based digital entrepreneurship. Second, I ask what role the home, and gender relations within the household, play in the labor and careers of musicians in Hungary.

My enquiry is based on data from interviews with 14 musicians and 3 music industries workers conducted as the pilot study for a larger research project focusing on creative labor in the Hungarian music industries. Semi-structured interviews with all 17 subjects were combined in 7 cases with time-use interviews.¹ The majority of the interview

subjects were associated with a loosely defined alternative pop-rock sphere. 9 subjects were women and 8 men, which means women were well over-represented with regard to their general ratio in the Hungarian music industries. 15 subjects were between 30–40 years, and two between 41–51. Most of the interviewees had university degrees or had spent some years in tertiary education. In the data analysis, I focused on the subjects' relations inside and outside the music industries (e.g. within the household), mapping resources and access to these, the structuring of work, divisions of labor, the relation between working conditions and digital technology, attitudes towards work, and gendered experiences.

In what follows, I will first outline the theoretical framework of my analysis, drawing on literature that theorizes the relationship between digitalization and creative labor. I emphasize the relevance of focusing on the household — a crucial economic unit in world-systems analysis — in the studying of gender inequalities in the digital era. I draw on analyses of the relationship between the domestic space, digital technology, and women's access to music-making, but complement these with works pointing to the ways in which unpaid or poorly paid creative work contributes to the capitalist cultural industries. Following the presentation of my theoretical framework, in the third section I discuss aspects of the local context and effects of the digital transformation of the music industries that push Hungarian musicians towards home-based digital entrepreneurship. The fourth section then analyses the ways in which labor and resources within the household support the work and careers of the Hungarian musicians in the study, and the ways in which gender relations structure the division and allocation of these.

Digitalization, Labor, and Gender

The democratizing effects of the digitalization of the music industries has predominantly been discussed in terms of the contribution of digital formats and channels to an increase in access to music production and consumption (Galuszka and Brzozowska; Hesmondhalgh 101). As Kaitajärvi-Tiekso observes, two notions have been central to this discourse: disintermediation — the possibility for the producers of music to bypass traditional music industry intermediaries such as record labels and reach an audience directly — and Anderson’s concept of the long tail — the development of a digitalized cultural economy for niche products and markets, eventually leading to cultural diversification. Both notions have received ample critique (e.g. Napoli), notably for their lack of attention to the role and power of digital platform companies entering the music industries as new intermediaries and gaining share and influence. Political economic analyses of the “post-Napster era” digital music industries have pointed to the recently solidifying oligopoly of large IT corporations such as Apple, Google, and Amazon (Hesmondhalgh and Meier). Rather than fulfilling the dreams of democratization, disintermediation, and cultural diversification, this has led to a renewed exposure of musicians and creative workers to the logic of capital concentration and a reinforcement of geographical inequalities (Tófalvy and Koltai). As Antal observes in relation to music streaming: “[f]or some [Central and Eastern European] market players, access to all global markets creates an opportunity. For most of them, they pose an existential threat” (Antal, *Central and Eastern European* 29).

Labor and working conditions have received relatively little attention in this discourse. Although more recently an increasing number of valuable studies have been published on labor in the cultural industries in general (e.g. McRobbie; Banks; Hesmondhalgh and Baker) and the music industries specifically (e.g. Coulson; Stahl; Umney and Kretsos; Williamson and Cloonan), with some addressing gender inequalities (Gavanas and Reitsamer; Scharff; Bennett), these primarily focus on the global core, typically the UK.

While digitalization has transformed creative labor, it was built on already existing tendencies. The global transformation of labor has been described as post-Fordization and “flexible specialization,” and cultural workers have been understood as an ideal-typical representation of labor patterns becoming dominant in this process (e.g. Haynes and Marshall 3). On the one hand, flexible employment may symbolize freedom and could, in theory, create a harmonious fit with creative work, associated with artistic self-expression in a model where boundaries between “work” and “life” are blurred. On the other hand, a lack of permanent job security or full-time working hours is also associated with precarity, while self-employment is associated with individualization and competition (e.g. McRobbie). Digitalization, moreover, has contributed to the creation of additional self-management tasks for creative workers, and the deep-felt engagement with creative work has contributed not only to self-realization, but also self-exploitation (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 221; Gavanas and Reitsamer 2–3).

Terranova has drawn attention to the significance of free labor, such as the work of maintaining websites or mailing lists, in supporting the economy of digital culture (48). At the same time, unpaid labor has in general been a constitutive aspect of the capitalist extraction of value. In the 1970s, socialist feminist authors (e.g. Cox and Federici; Dalla Costa and James) theorized the *household* as the fundamental site for the reproduction of the labor force in order to explain how capitalism integrates practices of love and care within a logic of capital accumulation. *Reproductive labor* — literally giving birth, but including all kinds of care work — is labor necessary for the reproduction of life, which in the capitalist system equals the reproduction of labor power. Globally, it is mostly informal, unpaid or poorly paid, and performed within the household, predominantly by women (Dalla Costa and James; Dunaway). On a cultural level, the productive–reproductive labor divide has

contributed to the cementing of gender relations in capitalism — that is, the patriarchal order — by assigning the former to men and the latter to women.

Furthermore, as world-systems analysis scholars have pointed out, this informal labor and thus the invisible burden on women is not equally divided among countries — rather, the informal labor contribution of the global periphery and semi-periphery (Wallerstein) has been a condition of the development of economies of the core. “The typical capitalist worker,” rather than being a wage laborer, “has been ‘the marginalized, housewifized, unfree labourer, most of them women’” (Mies 116, quoted in Dunaway 102), and most of them living outside of the more economically developed world.

The informal sphere of the household, moreover, is also the sphere absorbing the damage caused by economic crises. Due to global relations of dependency, this effect can be felt stronger in (semi-)peripheral economies. In the case of Hungary, the informal labor of women in the household played a significant role in mitigating the costs of the country’s reintegration into the global capitalist system following the 1989–1990 regime change, which saw a massive cutback on welfare institutions (Csányi 123–124). A similar process can be observed after the 2008 economic crisis. The year 2010 brought a political turn in the country, with the second, third and fourth Orbán governments establishing what Scheiring interprets as “authoritarian capitalism” and an accumulative state, and Éber et al. as a new, semi-peripheral regime of capital accumulation. The defining policies of these post-2010 governments have been aimed at, on the one hand, the securing of the smooth capital accumulation of “external” factions of capital to secure macro-stability, with a simultaneous carving out an ever-increasing space for the rapid capital accumulation of “internal” factions of capital, involving the establishing of a new national bourgeoisie (Éber et al. 45). This has been accompanied by “a complete political and ideological submission of social groups not favored by the regime” through a so-called “workfare regime” built on public work programs

embedded in patron-client relations, as well as the monopolization of mass media, which contributed to the establishing of an ideological hegemony (48). The new regime, Éber et al. argue, has continued but also accelerated the trend, starting in the 1970s, of the relegation of the costs of social reproduction to the informal sphere of the household, and mostly to women. The regime exploits various forms of informal female reproductive labor from childcare to eldercare, and supports the necessary exploitative structures through symbolic gender politics, where women are first and foremost defined in their demographic function serving, through childbirth, the “national” aim of long-term reproduction (Csányi). The rhetorical focus of the regime has correspondingly been the restoration of gender roles (Csányi).

The exploration of the domestic space as a site of creativity began with the feminist critique of the primarily male-centered subcultural research. In the 1970s, McRobbie and Garber posed the question of why girls were missing from contemporary accounts of post-war youth subcultures, locating the missing young women in the space of their bedrooms, similarly engaged in activities around music and fashion to their male counterparts. They suggested that in addition to the marginal positions of girls in relation to boys within subcultures, girls’ positions could be understood in terms of a “structured secondarity”:
“[t]hey are ‘marginal’ to work *because* they are central to the subordinate, complementary sphere of the *family*” (211). This returns us to the structural hierarchy of the public space of productive labor versus the private, domestic, space of invisible and unpaid reproductive labor.

Some authors have helpfully begun to draw parallels between unpaid reproductive labor and creative labor on the basis that they are both typically described as a calling, as “labour of love” that does not require material remuneration (Praznik; see also Shukaitis and Figiel). The close relation of creative labor to the self, implied by myths of the self-realizing

and self-sacrificing artist, as well as the obligation of “do what you love,” echoes constructions of motherhood (Csányi and Kerényi) or the caring wife that help naturalize the patriarchal order of capitalism. In a UK context, Taylor identifies a discursive configuration of a new creative entrepreneur figure “who leaves paid employment for the supposed satisfactions of working from home” (S. Taylor 174). She argues that “in contrast to the heroic masculine figures of the entrepreneur and artist” (S. Taylor 174), this new figure is a feminized — and, it could be added, housewifed — low-status worker. Thus, in the same way that women’s unpaid housework complements productive labor by caring for, and reproducing the wage labor force, much unpaid or badly paid cultural labor contributes to the cultural industries. As I intend to show, however, beyond a mere parallel, the work of musicians, increasingly concentrated within the home with the support of digital and online technology, also becomes intertwined with domestic labor and the gendered divisions of labor within the household.

Industry Structures, Local Policies, and Strategies of Digital Self-Management

The digitalization of the music industries is not a globally uniform process and the changes in labor conditions this entails for musicians is contingent on a variety of locally specific cultural and media policies as well as industry structures. In the following, I discuss three aspects of the Hungarian context that push musicians, especially women, towards home-based digital entrepreneurship. These are aspects of local cultural and media policy, the increasing dominance of live music together with online promotion and streaming, and gender relations in the local music industries. I then reflect on the ways in which home-working aided with digital technology is reinforced through an entrepreneurial mindset that needs to be interpreted in this specific local, semi-peripheral, context.

As Taylor notes, different positions within the capitalist world-system correspond with different possibilities for cultural producers to earn income (T. D. Taylor 80–117). After the 1989–90 regime change, when the former state socialist Eastern Bloc began reintegrating into the capitalist world system along with a political turn, these former socialist countries, including Hungary, entered the global music industries primarily as new markets for major record labels. The local subsidiaries of the majors focused less on the international promotion of local artists and more on the local promotion of their international stars. At the turn of the 21st century, the new digital channels of distribution and sharing led to a temporary, but drastic, decline in recording sales, which weakened the economic power of the majors. On the semi-periphery, this effect was even stronger, and the local subsidiaries of the majors gradually withdrew from these local markets, while those remaining had less power and fewer resources to support local artists (Elavsky). The global digital restructuring reinforced existing geographical inequalities and the new platforms channeling music distribution and consumption further contributed to this, for instance through streaming algorithms (Tófalvy and Koltai) or the operational logic of YouTube (Van Es).

An indirect but equally significant aspect of the digital transformation is the growth of the live industry at the expense of the recording industry (Frith; Brennan and Webster). In the Hungarian market, while the recording sector suffered an especially large blow, the growth of digital recorded music income occurred later and at a slower rate. For Hungary, the value of the live music sector was estimated at 118.5 million dollars in 2018, and the recorded music sector at 62.3 million dollars (Virágh and Főző) — barely exceeding half of the size of the live sector. This shift has directly affected the working lives of musicians and music industry workers, since live music has become their primary source of income (Virágh and Főző 13).

The previously-mentioned 2010 political turn in Hungary towards an “authoritarian capitalism” (Scheiring) has also brought significant changes in cultural and media policy.

Public service radio has gradually been losing its role as a supporter of emerging Hungarian artists. MR2 Petőfi, the popular music public service station went through a sharp transformation after 2010 into an international-focused mainstream pop radio station, with much less exposure for Hungarian acts in general. The ProArt Hungarian Music Industry Report observed a continuing narrowing of the station's repertoire in 2019, with Hungarian music making up 33% of total airtime (ProArt). Only a select few artists are given visibility, some of whom are more politically and ideologically aligned with the authoritarian regime. Thus while pop-rock artists could previously rely on visibility as well as royalty income through public service radio, they now face extra pressure to promote themselves on other platforms: by giving live performances and through streaming and the use of social media.

At the same time, in 2014 the government also introduced an extensive program for funding popular music, including grants for concert tours, recording and the production of music videos, through the National Cultural Fund (NKA). This has arguably contributed to the establishment of a system of dependency on the state in the pop-rock segment to which the interviewed musicians and industry workers belong. Out of the 17 interview subjects, 15 mentioned NKA grants as a significant source for Hungarian musicians in general, and 9 as significant in their own careers in light of the lack of radio exposure and the inequality of access to income from live music (which I detail below). As a singer and songwriter put it when explaining why grants are important to her: "Well if you don't have enough concerts, then you have low income, and if radio doesn't play [your music], this also shows in your income" (R-F4).²

As a combined result of the absolute and relative growth of the live sector due to the decline of income in music sales in the era of digitalization and the aforementioned radio policy, festival promoters, especially those associated with major festivals (such as Sziget, Volt, Balaton Sound, Strand or B.My.Lake) and venues have emerged as key music industry

gatekeepers in the past decade. Almost all of our interview subjects named the same middle-aged, male promoters as actors with the power to decide who gets access to festival audiences and larger venues and who does not. Being friendly, or at least acquainted with these gatekeepers was applied as a conscious strategy and deemed crucial by interview subjects in getting access to live performances: “If there is no personal connection, it is not possible [to get gigs]” (R-F7). Or, as another interviewee expressed it: “There is a group of people, from the radio director to the promoter of Sziget Festival, who decide what reaches people. If you treat these people as kings [...], then they will be quick to accept you and will help you with anything” (R-M5). Moreover, informal connections were, according to many interview subjects, also the key to getting grants.

Gender relations further complicate the possibility of access to work and informal occasions, since reinforcing ties of friendship forming the basis of professional cooperation were typically described as conforming to masculine patterns, such as practices of drinking or taking drugs. A female musician reflected on the power of informal networks by describing herself as an artist facing an invisible barrier as somebody who does not “smoke weed or party with these people, and anyway,” she says, “I am just a mother with a young baby” (R-F4). The masculine setup of the backstage area, where females would typically be categorized as “groupies,” prevented another female musician from socializing with other musicians at the beginning of her career: “When, for instance, I asked to be let into backstage areas to meet musicians, I was regularly treated as if I was there to give a blow-job to whoever ... I was treated that way many times” (R-F2). In contrast, a male musician spoke about the backstage area as an important and supportive site for his early socialization into the rock music scene: “I was always trying [to hang out] in the backstage although [...] I was just a little kid looking at the bass guitar, but I was well-prepared, I had a good sense of

rhythm and can keep time, and people just liked being around me and I liked being around them” (R-M6).

Consequently, several female musicians in the study felt that as women — in some cases, represented by women managers — they were at a disadvantage in establishing and maintaining connections with these gatekeepers: “To make matters worse, my manager is also a woman and [...] this industry is really awfully sexist” (R-F3). One artist narrated her “metoo-story,” as she referred to it, of experiencing sexual harassment by a male promoter in an important gatekeeping position, which resulted in her being subsequently prevented by the same person from performing at prominent musical events (R-F1). From 2010, the Hungarian government has sought to replace various ideological and academic approaches to gender roles, relations and inequalities with substantial, conclusive and sacral definitions of family (Csányi 128). This has also involved waging a symbolic war against liberal (“western”) NGOs focusing on women’s rights or the propagation of gender equality (Csányi 128). As a result of the ensuing lack of institutional support for female workers addressing sexual discrimination or harassment, women workers are left particularly vulnerable. This is especially true in the work environment of the music industries, where freelancing or working without contracts on an informal basis are the norm.

As a direct result of the masculine and patriarchal character of the spaces and practices of professional networking that renders them unsafe and unwelcoming for female participation, some of the female artists narrated home-based digital entrepreneurship and connecting with fans directly on Facebook or YouTube as a safe haven. One female musician explained how her faith in digital and online social media platforms strengthened after becoming disillusioned with three aspects of the Hungarian music industries: the radio’s lack of support for emerging Hungarian artists, the perceived corruption of the state popular music funding program, and the lack of transparency and the gender bias of the live music scene.

Her experience, repeated by a majority of the interview subjects (and complemented, in one case, by the corruption of competitions and talent contests), was that the festival circuit and the radio heavily relied on informal networks that were inaccessible to her: “It is difficult to get through this festival mafia” (R-F3). Others observed: “This is always like this, [festival promoters] treat young women [artists or managers] as though we are invisible” (R-M4). To circumvent these obstacles, she made use of social media and audience support by crowdfunding her videos and an album premiere concert through Indiegogo, which enabled her to feel in control:

To be honest I trust what worked from the very start, that my music reaches people and that way it can survive. And there will be people I can play to, since they are what matters, and I am the media [...] There is the festival *mutyi*,³ and the state *mutyi*, and there is you, and you keep doing what you do anyway, and you can get through to people because you have the internet. (R-F3)

Notably, she recycles the slogan “we are the media” used by the artist Amanda Palmer in her financially successful Kickstarter campaign, often cited in music industries’ literature as a model of autonomous success in the digital world of music. This narrative, however, is problematic in more than one sense. First, the company Kickstarter takes its share of the contributions — it is thus much more than a neutral platform that the digital disintermediation perspective would suggest. Secondly, Palmer was criticized for not paying her musicians on the tour that her successful campaign funded (T. D. Taylor 124–126). In other words, the costs were outsourced not only to fans but also to musician colleagues, who contributed their free labor.

Informal connections and personal networks were viewed and described as the most important resources overall for pursuing musical careers by the interview subjects: “personal

connections as resource” was the code occurring with the highest frequency in the analysis of the 24 interviews. However, as the mentioned sexual harassment case suggests, when “friendships” fail, opportunities are lost and the combined effects of the patriarchal mechanisms inherent in the informal networks of the Hungarian live music industries and the government’s gender policy leave women especially vulnerable, leading to their systematic exclusion. That the dominance of informal recruitment methods in the cultural industries tends to reinforce existing gender inequalities has already been documented (e.g. Conor et al. 11). At the same time, the heightened reliance on live music in lack of the ability to sell records has increased the power of local live music gatekeepers and female musicians’ vulnerability.

It is in this context that we have to interpret the enthusiasm of the female artist in the above example for social media use and crowdfunding. Haynes and Marshall speak of musicians as “reluctant” entrepreneurs — and Coulson, similarly, as “accidental” ones (251) — to indicate the complicated relation between musicians and entrepreneurship stemming from the tensions between creative autonomy and the capitalist logic of the cultural industries. In contrast with such narratives of “reluctant” or “accidental” creative entrepreneurs of the global core, however, this Hungarian artist’s view of social media, and the — ostensibly — direct relationship between her and her audience, is a narrative of empowerment in which digital means appear as “pure” and opposed to the “corrupt” informal networks of the live music sector and the state funding program: “I’m for playing it pure. I mean, I realized that nobody around me is playing it [corrupt], and my manager isn’t either, and that’s why we are a separate island” (R-F3).

At the same time, this has led her and other artists to uncritically embrace a neoliberal, individualized strategy that heavily relies on online platforms operated by powerful capitalist corporations, and a discourse that celebrates these without taking account

of their exploitative logic. The idea of “direct” access obfuscates the complex role of YouTube and its parent company Google in the power structure of the global music industries, including the geographical inequalities of monetization through YouTube’s advertising policy, which favors content creators from the core (CPM [cost per mille] is an indicator of the amount of money a YouTuber earns per one thousand views: while Hungarian YouTubers make 71 cents, this rate is 6.07 dollars for a content creator based in the US; *Penzcentrum.hu*). Streaming services have similarly contributed to the reinforcing of geographical inequalities (Tófalvy and Koltai). The “extraordinary growth in competition” (Antal, *Central and Eastern European* 29) leaves small markets at a huge disadvantage (e.g. a typical [median] song in the UK earns about ten times more than in the Central and Eastern European markets, as Antal finds based on combined data from Apple Music, Spotify and Deezer; Antal, *Central and Eastern European* 28). In addition, artists complained about their vulnerability to regular Facebook policy changes and their decreasing power in communicating to their followers on the platform due to these, especially if they do not have the means to pay regularly: “Reaching a large audience? For free! Hell no!” — said a well-known artist, citing the relatively large figure her team had spent on ads (R-F6).

The Household, Creative Labor and Digital Technology

Following the contextualization of the Hungarian music industries and political climate that drives particularly the interviewed female musicians to invest in working from home, in this section I will explore the ways in which this domestic space, complete with the availability of digital technology, functions not only as a spatial setting for creative work, but also as a pool of various resources that contribute to musicians’ careers. At the same time, the household is

also a gendered social space where these resources and labor are allocated and structured in a hierarchical manner.

Virginia Woolf's famous concept of "a room of one's own" has served as a popular metaphor for female musicians' use of the bedroom as a recording studio, or a space for practice and composition, especially in relation to the emergence of digital technology (e.g. Wolfe). The metaphor suggests that for women, a space that guarantees insulation from the competitive masculine domain of the music industries and their patriarchal relations may be crucial in the pursuit of musical paths and establishing satisfactory careers within the music industries. According to Wolfe, some scholars see access to digital technology as something that helped create such "rooms of one's own" for women "and so arguably an increase in women's self-production practices, facilitated by digital technology" (Wolfe 2–3). What such interpretations of technology as a potential democratizing and emancipatory force fail to emphasize, however, is that the ideal "room of one's own" should be an autonomous working and creative space free from obligations of housework and care work — yet the domestic space does not automatically provide this for women.

An interviewed female musician lived with her musician husband and young child, expecting their second at the time of the interview, in the suburbs of a Hungarian university town, in a house built by her father. While a stay-at-home mother, she was also making use of digital and online tools accessible from home to start and manage a small-scale online enterprise: "Now I have this project where I created a page which is, let's say, a life consultancy for musicians" (R-F9). The webpage featured videos of her offering music-industries specific advice for musicians, make-up tutorials aimed at female performers, as well as promotional material for acts she managed through the page, including her husband's band and her own music. In one of her coach-style videos, she argues that artists need to choose between two strategies regarding the management of their online presence: drawing a

clear boundary between their professional and private life and not posting, for instance, about their families; or integrating their private life into their social media presence. While she speaks, classic rock music plays in the background — mixed quite loud — which represents her own musical image, but we also hear occasional baby sounds from her room where she recorded the video, which she highlights with “cute” animation edited into the video. This clearly suggests that she herself subscribes to the second strategy. Her online self-presentation and communication in general is characterized by a seamless blending of her musical activities with the depiction of her wedding, pregnancies, expressions of love for her husband and child, and a celebration — and simultaneous promotion — of her husband’s achievements as a musician. In the interview, she emphasized family as an important value to her, and expressed a desire to balance her musical career with her marriage and her children. She defines her future goals as

[m]aking the best of [my] talent [...] in a way that it is not disadvantageous to the baby, that I do not take time away from her, but still dedicate time to myself.

Keeping this in balance is more than an art. To be good in every area [...] — as a woman, as a mother, as a partner, as a musician, as everything. I think it is good to try to keep this in balance. (R-F9)

She thus simultaneously emphasized that this “keeping in balance” was no easy task, and her willingness to nevertheless try. In the same vein, another female musician, single at the time of the interview, expressed her desire to have a family later on, *and* her parallel “terror” “of not being a good mother” while also pursuing a career in music (R-F2).

The desire “not to take time away” from the child, as well as the latter musician’s expressed fear draw on the ideal of the “good woman,” which Mies describes as the “woman as *mother* and *housewife*, and the family as her arena, the privatized arena of consumption

and ‘love’, excluded and sheltered from the arena of production and accumulation, where men reign” (Mies 103), and which has served to cement the gendered division of labor of the capitalist world system on a symbolic level. Csányi and Kerényi describe “the contemporary myth of the ‘good mother’ in Hungary” as “somebody who is striving to give the best to her children and entire family in every situation and on every level all by herself, by making conscious choices: she cares and entertains at the same time, binds the family together, and places her needs, if she has them, behind those of the family” (328). The authors also point out that the post-2010 governments have made use of such cultural constructions as part of their pro-natalist policy. While the interviewed female musicians emphasized their own career goals as artists — as opposed to merely rendering them subservient to the needs of their families and leaving “the arena of production and accumulation” to men — they also openly communicated their struggles to be good mothers and wives and made use of social media to present an image of a good *creative* mother able to efficiently integrate these various aspects into their lives.

Another interviewed female artist with a young child followed a similar online strategy while expecting her second baby and after giving birth: along with promoting new music and live gigs, she also wrote posts in a purportedly sincere tone about motherhood and childbirth, as well as sharing details of her — successfully — managing motherhood and the lifestyle of a performing artist: “Many people have asked where [the 3-month-old child] was during [the time of the concert]. I nursed her right before the gig at our accommodation, which was five minutes from [the venue], she fell asleep at 8 and I was back with her by 2 am when she woke up” (R-F4 in Facebook post).⁴ Notably, the questions from her audience to which she refers imply an expectation that she is a “good mother” as well as a successful performer — a clearly gender-based expectation that male artists do not have to conform to.

Through the strategy of integrating their private life into their social media presence, these artists simultaneously make invisible reproductive labor visible and assert themselves as female artists in the patriarchal world of the music industries through digital technology. At the same time, such strategies also fall into the trend of a new, mediated domesticity (Faludi and Crosby), which does not challenge the restorative gender policy of the government. Reproductive tasks still predominantly remain with women, thus the domestic division of labor appears intact, while, through their social media activity, creative workers are seamlessly integrated into digital capitalism. Faludi and Crosby employ the concept of “Superwoman Syndrome” to describe (Hungarian) “women perform[ing] fantastic feats that are posted on social media” (Faludi and Crosby 119) during the COVID-19 lockdown era. My analysis indicates, however, that this process had already begun before the pandemic locked people in their domestic spaces.

The artist in the previous example also indicated, both in the quoted public Facebook post and in the interview, that the continuing of her career after childbirth relies on the reproductive support of especially the female members of her extended family:

The family network works really well. My mother-in-law has been retired since January this year. She looks after [the baby] a lot. My husband is freelance, he can also do a lot, and my husband’s sister, she also looks after her loads. So I involve the family. My godmother and her family as well. (R-F4)

This is evidence that household resources and support are crucial in the sustaining of musical careers, and that the division and allocation of such support is embedded in domestic gender relations.

Moreover, different forms of resources and support intersect in various ways in the sphere of the household, and the patterns in which they intersect are also shaped by domestic gender relations. The time-use interviews indicated the significance of emotional and care labor embedded within family relations and partnerships in supporting the work of musicians. Emotional support included a partner — typically female — discussing band conflicts or other difficulties with a — typically male — musician, such as not getting gigs and the subsequent feeling of not getting ahead. As an example, a musician mentioned his feelings of disappointment resulting from an unsuccessful online advertisement that he had placed. He told his wife about it, and even though she was unable to offer professional advice, she performed the emotional labor of reassuring him: “Because she is in PR and not marketing, she is unable to give advice — so she comforted me that it would be better next time” (T/U-M1). Creative support typically involved a female partner participating in the creative process or management by performing specific tasks as well as offering opinions and new ideas. “What I find really difficult [...] is [non-musical] creative work such as who to ask to direct your video, what artwork I should have for the release of the next song, what the next record should be titled ... these are the things that are the most tiring for me. [...] But] my wife helps a lot,” says a male musician (R-M5). Or: “[my girlfriend] is familiar with what I’m doing, and I regularly ask for her opinion and she has ideas” (T/U-M2). Female partners also regularly act as a test audience: “I remember, when we were working on [a project], it helped a lot that I was able to talk it over with [my girlfriend] as a viewer” (T/U-M2). The domestic sphere functions as a “natural” site of such informal, but also gendered, collaboration. Furthermore, due to its naturalized status, such emotional and creative support was typically not explicitly named by male musicians in the interviews as a

resource — as opposed to, for instance, informal industry connections, which were explicitly stated as such.

Female partners also provided such support in cases where they were looking after their own careers at the same time. Although the first musician quoted in this section distinguished between different roles according to her social relations with others — a woman, a mother to her children, a partner to her husband, and a musician — these roles intersected on the level of labor. Managing her husband’s musical career besides her own — work she did without any payment — could be categorized both as labor that feeds into the musical economy (Leyshon), and as emotional labor that she performs within the household in her role as partner. In fact, as we have seen, she imagined an ideal future where these areas would not only be in balance, but as intertwined as possible. Yet female artists do not appear to have a choice: if they want to pursue a career in music, they need to find a way of managing these various roles. In contrast, male artists are free to continue to focus on their careers while being, as shown above, supported through women’s multifaceted labor in the household.

In the local economic context, creative careers aided by digital technology thus rely on informal, housewifized labor, and would not be sustainable without this. While Praznik highlights the structural parallel between creative labor and women’s domestic labor through “the contradiction between the exaltation of artists and the undervaluation of artists’ labor [which] echoes that of an idealized femininity (angel in the house) whose normalized work similarly goes unrecognized” (Praznik 86), in the examples shown, the obligations of the caring wife and mother are also inextricably intertwined with (digitalized) musical labor — making music, online promotion, organizing and management. Labor and resources supporting musical careers, being thus embedded in household gender relations and performed free, are rendered doubly obscured. At the same time, we also see strategies of

female musicians directly aimed at making the intersections of creative and reproductive labor visible through digital technology in their social media self-presentation. On the one hand, they are thus challenging the forces that render such labor invisible in capitalism. On the other hand, their strategy is in line with a new, digital domesticity, a “deepening mediatised ‘housewifisation’ [in which] ‘old institutions’ still prevail” (Faludi and Crosby 117) — as we have seen, women still bear the burden of domestic tasks along with creative ones. Moreover, the representation of domesticity in the online self-presentation of creative “good mothers” also falls in line with the conservative symbolic politics of the government, where “family” above all is emphasized as a value.

Conclusions

Analyzing the circumstances under which musicians work in the semi-peripheral country of Hungary shows that the idea of the democratization of the music industries through the accessibility of new, small-scale digital and online technology and the possibility to work from home is complicated by gender relations both in the music industries and within the household. The analysis also highlights the necessity of taking account of both global industry structures, characterized by the ever-increasing weight of digital companies, which directly contributes to the precarity of artists outside the core economies and local politics. In Hungary, the post-2010 radio policy, combined with the perceived favoritism of the grant system and the patriarchal structure and masculine practices of the live music industry, have pushed artists towards digital self-management and thus an increasing reliance on household resources. Digital creative workers, however, are doubly exposed: to the capitalist logic of the

corporations owning digital platforms, and to the patriarchal power relations also structuring the sphere of the household.

Analyses of musicians based in the global core of the digitalized music industries indicate that they have been reluctant to label themselves as entrepreneurs in fear of an overemphasis of the economic dimensions of their work at the expense of creative autonomy. This semi-peripheral perspective, however, demonstrates that such attitudes are not universal. Rather, artists in this local context embraced, in a techno-optimistic fashion, the use of digital platforms for promotion, communication with the audience, and the pooling of resources through crowdfunding, as a “pure” alternative against to the corrupt and masculine informal networks of the live sector and the funding system. At the same time, the power of the capitalist corporations operating these online platforms and the economically marginalized position of Hungary on the digitalized global music industries remained obscured in their techno-optimistic discourse. As did the household resources that digital self-management labor heavily draws upon — including household infrastructure, but also emotional and creative support, the provision of which is deeply gendered. The household as a pool of labor and resources significantly contributes to musical careers, and ultimately to the digitalized musical economy, in the same way as unpaid reproductive labor in general helps sustain the capitalist world-system. Within the household, creative and reproductive labor become deeply intertwined, something which serves to reinforce — rather than reduce — existing gender inequalities. Those female musicians in the study with partners or families typically sought to find the most effective ways of combining creative and reproductive tasks — including emotional and creative labor that supported their partners. Through this balancing act, however, they subjugate themselves to two intersecting systems that render their work doubly invisible: the patriarchal order that obscures reproductive labor within the capitalist world-system, and the artistic ideology that understands creative labor as self-expression that

requires no remuneration. Some of these musicians actively attempted to defy this logic and make their labor, both creative and reproductive, visible through social media. At the same time, the interviews clearly indicated that the unequal division of labor within musical households remained intact.

These conclusions suggest that the study of digitalization and musical entrepreneurship has a lot to gain from, on the one hand, a focus on power relations within the music world on both a micro-level — local music industry power structures — and a macro-level — the global power relations of the music industries, and on the other hand, a focus on gender relations within the household, where most of this entrepreneurship is located.

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Endnotes

1. Ágnes Blaskó and Andrea Rajkó were both involved in conducting the semi-structured interviews, and Andrea Rajkó conducted some of the time-use interviews. For the time-use interviews, the subjects were asked to describe their previous working day with the help of questions. The design of this method was inspired by quantitative time-use research method, which has been used to study gendered patterns of time-use and the invisible work of women (e.g. Gershuny and Robinson).
2. I will refer to subjects through an anonymized code system indicate regular, semi-structured (R) or time-use (T/U) interviews; male (M) or female (F); and a number. Direct quotations are my own translations from Hungarian.
3. *Mutyi* in Hungarian refers to practices of corruption, favoritism, informality with a negative connotation. I left the original term for lack of an exact English-language equivalent.
4. Details of the post (including date) are omitted in order to preserve the subject's anonymity.

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R-F6. Personal interview by Emília Barna and Andrea Rajkó. 10 January 2019.

R-F7. Personal interview by Emília Barna and Andrea Rajkó. 22 January 2019.

R-F9. Personal interview by Emília Barna. 11 April 2019.

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