**Gendered visions of family life and parenthood among Czech young people:
Restricted or transforming imaginations?**

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Introduction

In this article we present findings on young people's imaginations of their future family, based on qualitative research with young people aged 17-18, living in a small Bohemian town. We aim to contribute to an enhanced understanding of the social conditioning of young Czechs' wishes for future partnerships and family relations, by situating these wishes in a regional-specific context where gendered employment and care-work arrangements have followed different historical trajectories from those found in most Western societies.

As recently argued by Forsberg and Timonen (2018) visions for the future family are seldom put at the centre of studies of young people's imaginations of the future. In the Czech context a couple of studies have explored the phenomena with children and younger adolescents (Jarkovská 2013, Haukanes and Heggli 2016), but no research has been conducted with young people in the age group in our study - still in school but old enough to have concrete perceptions of adulthood. A few studies conducted in Western contexts have discussed the impact of a move from a male breadwinner model on young people's visions for their future family, showing that the women demonstrate a stronger sense of individuality and a clearer desire for independence than women of the previous generation (Bulbeck 2012, Patterson and Forbes 2012). Czech society, since state socialism, has gone through radical transformations so also here young people's transitions into family and parenthood differ substantially from those dominant in earlier generations. However, developments have followed

different paths than in many Western societies (Szelewa and Polakowski 2008). Increased individualisation, fuelled by the post-1989 stress on freedom of choice and self-expression, has led to growing heterogeneity and de-standardisation of the life course (Pyšňaková and Miles 2010; Chaloupková 2010). Simultaneously, and despite EU gender equality and work-life balance recommendations and directives, there has been a move away from policies which give women incentives to combine paid work with caregiving. Underpinned by assumptions that collective care is bad for small children, Czech society has moved from a state socialist dual-breadwinner model facilitated by extensive public child care services, towards a "re-familisation" of care (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006), implying that increasing number of women have stepped temporarily out of the workforce to provide full-time childcare (Hašková and Dudová 2017).

This article explores how these historically complex and region-specific processes are reflected in young people´s imaginations of their future family lives. We show that both young men and women have incorporated the ideal of home-based maternal care as the best way to ensure the wellbeing of small children, a social norm which existed before 1989 but which has been accentuated since then. Simultaneously, many challenge the idea of an unjust division of household labour and reject the image of "the female domestic slave" projected in popular culture under state socialism. We also demonstrate that young people are aware of the institutional conditioning of their lives, both in terms of structural barriers and options made available through recent state policies. We argue that in this awareness lies an opportunity for change, potentially expanding young people's imaginations of their future life options.

Our research also speaks to broader debates concerning young people's orientations towards the future, and the much debated questions of agency, choice and structural constraints (Bryant and Ellard 2015, Bulbeck 2012, Carabelli and Lyon 2016, Brannen and Nilsen 2002, Furlong and Cartmel 2006 [1997], Woodman 2011). Much research has demonstrated how an individualisation framework fails to explain the ways that young people construct their imaginations of the future, and that

structural factors such as class and gender still play an important role in shaping their orientations (Bulbeck 2012, Furlong and Cartmel 2006 [1997], Heggli et.al 2013, Brannen and Nilsen 2002, Bryant and Ellard 2015). Woodman (2011) on the basis of his research with young Australians, argues convincingly that young people develop their future thinking collectively, in interaction with significant others. This is true also for imaginations of the future family. However, we contend that imaginations of the family differ from imaginations of for example career or education. These imaginations are not only developed with *existing* significant others, they also involve an *imagined* significant other – a partner with whom to establish and develop the family. Understanding young people's constructions of *gendered relationalities* is thus crucial, and at the centre of our endeavour in this article. As will be demonstrated, the importance of the imagined 'other' and his/her ability to perform according to ones' desires, brings a particular kind uncertainty into the picture which makes imaginations of the future family fall into the category of wishes or hopes (Bryant and Ellard 2015) rather than plans (Nilsen and Brannen 2005).

In order to investigate the gendered nature of these imaginations, we turn to feminist perspectives on gender and social change, more specifically Yanagisako and Delaney's conceptual couple *naturalisation* and *denaturalisation*. Yanagisako and Delaney (1995) define naturalisation as a process through which unequal relations come to be seen as "natural, inevitable, even God-given" (ibid., p. 1), i.e. beyond the control of humans, and therefore considered wrong to try to change. De-naturalisation refers to processes where what was previously taken for granted is questioned and its "naturalness" destabilised. Underlying these concepts is an understanding of gendered social orders as being both resistant to change and simultaneously genuinely unstable. Naturalisation and de-naturalisation are happening as historical processes (Frøystad 2015), influenced by macro-societal factors, such as politics and expert discourse, but also unfolding in people's daily lives, for example in a couple's disagreements over domestic labour. A third process is also involved, namely *re-naturalisation* (Frøystad 2015), which implies that de-naturalising discourses and policies are counteracted in an attempt to re-establish the "natural order of things".

Life course patterns and the care-work balance: Policies, norms and practices in the Czech Republic

In socialist Czechoslovakia, most life transitions connected to the process of becoming an adult occurred within a relatively short time frame, commonly in people´s early twenties. In contrast to post-war Western Europe, where the male breadwinner was promoted as an ideal, participation in the labour force was made compulsory for all grown-ups (except mothers of small children), and the dual breadwinner family became the norm as early as the late 1950s. However, care and household services provided by the state did not cover the need, and the gap was filled by women's unpaid labour. From the 1960s, women´s double burden came to be publicly criticized in the region. In line with other state socialist countries Czechoslovakia gradually introduced gender specific policy measures that supported women in their roles as mothers, but also cemented these roles (Hašková and Dudová 2017).

After 1989, life transitions became less 'universal' and took more time (Chaloupková 2010). This development went hand in hand with post-89 anti-communist and anti-collectivist discourse stressing freedom of choice and freedom from institutions of social control (Chaloupková 2010). Emerging as part of this discourse was the idea that women should be freed from the obligation of employment and be able to devote herself entirely to home-based childcare. In addition, gender conservative family policies began to dominate in the region (Hašková and Dudová 2017). In the Czech Republic, mothers of small children were encouraged to leave the labour market through tax deductions for married non-working partners and increases in the duration of social benefits for full-time carers up to four years (Hašková and Dudová 2017). Public care services were severely reduced, with the largest cuts in services for children under three (OECD 2019).[1]

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[1] This trend could be compared to what has been described as "post-feminist" individualization in Western Europe and the USA. This trend, commonly connected to neoliberalist capitalism and life style consumerism, is understood as eroded support for feminist movements (Hall and Rodriguez 2004) combined with a promotion of the idea that women should be free to choose the life they desire even if this goes against feminist gains. (Genz 2006: 337-338). However, we do not find that this label captures developments in Czech society well. Firstly, we cannot talk about a "reaction to second wave feminism", as this wave never reached socialist

Intensive mothering (Hays 1996) is a care model which has become normative throughout Europe and beyond, albeit with context-specific traits (Faircloth et.al. 2014). In the Czech Republic, the model seems closely connected to the idea that collective care, associated with communism and women's obligation to participate in the labour force, is bad for small children and contradicts what nature has prescribed. These views have been widely propagated by experts and have become more or less taken for granted in the population at large (Hašková and Dudová 2017).

The interplay between these policies and norms have led many women to leave their jobs until their children are three or four. The negative impact of motherhood on women's employment is therefore stronger in the Czech Republic than anywhere else in the EU (OECD 2019). This does not mean that Czech women have left the labour market. Support for the dual earner family is strong in Czech society, the idea of the lifelong housewife is rejected (Rabušic and Chromková Manea 2018) and female labour market participation is among the highest in Europe among families with school-age children (OECD 2019). However, in families with small children the male breadwinner model is the dominant practice (ibid). This has implications for the organisation of domestic labour: Czech women in general perform the bulk of household work, but research shows that the gender gap increases in families with preschool children, and remains high even after women's return to the labour market (Jak Češi… 2016).

In many European countries, with Nordic countries at the forefront, the historical shift away from the male breadwinner model has led many to embrace an ideal of shared parenting, implying equal involvement of mothers and fathers in intimate care for children (Eydal and Rostgaard 2015). The discourse on shared parenting and "intimate fatherhood" is found in the Czech Republic too, but remains controversial (Saxonberg et.al. 2012, Nešporová 2019). Although men's right to parental leave

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Czechoslovakia because of restrictions on civic organizing. Secondly, self-chosen "housewification", which for the majority of Czech women is a temporary stage until their youngest child reaches the age of 3 or 4, appears less as a life-style choice than as having to do with discourses around children's wellbeing. These discourses have been accentuated after 1989 but they were already prominent before 1989 (see Hašková and Dudová 2017), i.e. before neoliberal capitalism made its entrance into the country.

was introduced in 2001, fewer than 2% of all those receiving parental benefit in 2015 were men (Höhne 2017, in Nešporová 2019). A recent qualitative study among first time Czech fathers confirms this picture: the fathers tended to stress their provider role rather than the emotional and caring aspects of fathering (Nešporová 2019). The author relates this to the fact that Czech men live in a society "where the key fatherhood construct is that of the breadwinner and the central masculine identity is that of the worker" (ibid.159). This resonates with what Zawiska and colleagues (2015) call the "re-masculinisation" of post-socialist societies. They connect "re-masculinisation" to post-1989 anti-collectivist attitudes that lessened values of public services and strengthened values of private business and men´s role as providers. Men's increased role as providers have gone hand in hand with policies undermining mothers' employment. Despite policies which allow fathers to take parental leave, decades of women being the only recipients have contributed to the perception of such leave as a right of mothers, strengthening the tendency to naturalize mothers as the ideal carer. Research analysing preferences shows that a majority of Czech respondents would prefer that mothers take all parental leave, and only 8% believe that the leave should be shared by mothers and fathers (Scharle 2015).

In the last decade, shared parenting has gained visibility in EU policy discourse and has been included in the EU's work-life balance directive from 2019. These developments have to some extent influenced the situation in the Czech Republic. For example, during the negotiations of the work-life balance directive a one week paid paternity leave was introduced in the country, a leave which will have to be extended to be in line with the directive.

The situation presented above illustrates the region-specific dialectics between labour markets, family policies and gender norms. We are interested in the ways these institutional contexts and sociocultural life scripts are reflected in the narratives of our study participants. What do they take for granted, what is questioned and challenged and why?

Methodology and study setting

The study on which this article is based was developed as a continuation of a comparative project called *Growing up Global? A comparative study of belonging, gendered identities and imagined futures in the Czech Republic, Norway and Tunisia* (Heggli et al. 2013), carried out among teenagers aged 14-15. In 2014 a follow-up study was prepared for the Czech Republic only. The follow-up study took place in a school setting among students aged 17-18 living in and around a small town in North Bohemia and attending grade 3 or 4 of upper secondary education. Two schools were visited; one vocational and one gymnasium.[2]

Fieldwork was carried out by the first author during three visits to the schools. During the first visit (autumn 2014) the main ideas behind the project were presented to the students, who were invited to write an essay on the topic of 'My future'. Altogether 78 essays were collected, 46 from the vocational school and 32 from the gymnasium. Six months later a new visit was paid to the schools during which interviews were held with 32 young women and men (16 from each school), all of whom had participated in the essay writing. Finally, a third visit was made in March 2016 to discuss research findings with the research participants.

This article is mainly based on the interviews. This is due to the richness of the interviews compared to the essays, in particular as concerns the topic of family life.[3] In the essays, almost all students touched upon the topic, but few presented elaborate reflections. The interviews provided an opportunity to explore more in-depth students' imaginations of their future family.

All of those who participated in the research were recruited with the help of a teacher at their school. The teachers were requested to encourage students of diverse social backgrounds and with differing academic records to participate. This appears to have happened: Students from well-off,

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[2] Gymnasium is the 'general studies' track of upper secondary education in the CR, normally attended by students who plan to pursue tertiary education.

[3] Topics discussed during the interviews were (in the following order): daily life and hobbies; plans for further education and employment; preferences regarding the place to live; future family life and children; visions for the future more generally.

average income and poorer families were represented, as well as students growing up in various family structures (two-parent nuclear families, extended families, single parent households). Consent to conduct the research was first sought and obtained from the leadership of the schools. Consent from the students was obtained in a stepwise process. First, the teachers facilitating the research were provided with a letter addressed to the students (written in Czech), which explained the research in detail and invited them to participate on a voluntary basis. When students recruited by the teachers gathered in a room designated for essay writing, the first author again made the letter available to the students, stressing that participation is voluntary[4] and explaining how participants' anonymity would be safeguarded. As concerns the latter, the students were asked to keep the essays anonymous, implying that no personal information should be stated in the document. Paper copies of the essays were shredded after transcription. Prior to each interview the consent process was again repeated, stressing voluntariness, the right to withdraw from the interview at any time, and anonymity. The interviews were all tape recorded. During transcription all names of people and places were removed so the material exists in an anonymous form only. The audiotapes were all deleted after transcription and the transcribed material has been kept at a password protected University owned computer. In terms of anonymity and protection of the integrity of the study participants, we should also mention that teachers were not involved in the research process other than during recruitment. They were not present during interviews nor during the essay writing sessions.

The students were interviewed in pairs, which were formed on the basis of the students' own preferences. This in most cases implied that the pairs were made up of friends. The reason behind implementing pair interviewing was the first author's previous experience of conducting individual interviews with Czech youth, where she had learned that not all study participants felt comfortable being interviewed one-on-one by an adult. She thought that giving the students the opportunity to engage with her questions in the company of a friend would make the situation more relaxed. An

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[4] A couple of students chose not to participate; they left the room, or did not hand in any essay to the researcher.

objection to pair interviewing could be that it would lead the students to express more conventional attitudes than they would have done in an individual interview. However, we do not believe that this has been a major problem. As the interviewed couple knew each other well, most conversations were lively and the students often expressed disagreements and/or contrasted own experiences with that of their friend. The rich exchanges that unfolded between the students gave insights into both prevailing norms and ways of challenging such norms.

The interviewed students were homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, nationality and sexual orientation. This implies that our findings do not cover the situation of young people with non-heterosexual identities, or from migrant or Roma families. Another characteristic of the sample is that the students all live in small urban settlements or in villages. The North Bohemian region where the study was conducted is known for its industry and mountain areas with skiing and leisure resorts. In terms of employment opportunities, access to education or leisure activities, the locality does not differ substantially from other smaller towns in Bohemia[5] and there is no reason to believe that our study participants´ family imaginations differ a lot from those of young people living in other small or medium-sized towns.[6] However, role models for certain non-normative family forms and sexual identities may be lacking in their immediate surroundings; surveys have, for example, shown increased preferences for childfree life only among Czechs living in bigger towns (Hašková and Pospíšilová 2020).

Gendered labour, gendered relationalities

In our outline of the historically complex gender order of Czech society, we find contradictory tendencies. Individualisation stressing the need to make choices and create one´s own biography

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[5] At the time of research unemployment rates were on the national average (i.e. low). There are no tertiary learning institutions in the specific region and there is lack of employment opportunities for people with higher education. However, big towns with tertiary education are not far away and people can commute on a daily basis for education or work.
[6] As shown in the European value surveys from 1991-2017 attitudes to family life and partnerships do not differ substantially between people living in urban and rural areas in the Czech Republic (Rabušic and Chromková Manea 2018).

stands against a policy-supported pull towards standardization of separate gender roles, which again is in dissonance with the stress on gender equality and shared parenting found in EU-policies. Our explorations of young people´s narratives seek to capture manifestations of these tendencies through looking in detail at ways that the young people come to gender tasks and responsibilities, and the broader discourses on gender underpinning them.

Living as a family: division and gendering of domestic labour

A vast majority of the study participants expressed a desire to have a family of their own, imagined as heteronormative, and including at least one, but often two to three children. All of them saw themselves as future earners and none of girls imagined that they would be "homemakers" only. The question of gendered division of domestic work triggered vivid imaginations among the participants. A host of different arrangements were described, from gender role reversals to more 'conservative' arrangements:

P: Well, I would like to take care of a household myself, that´s for sure. I would be very glad if my boyfriend helped me, well, my husband since we are talking about it. I would be glad if he helped me but otherwise I would like to do the household chores myself and my husband could make money. (Int 3, vocational, woman).

Both young men and women expect to have paid work in the future and this young woman is no exception. Nevertheless, she sees the housework as her responsibility. Similar ideas about separate gender roles and tasks were expressed among some of the male students:

B: Well, cleaning, I don´t ever do it. Bring money home, cook, chop up firewood, repair things, ….. But cleaning and tidying up? Just after myself. A: Well, for the time being [I do it]. Because we are four boys [at home] we have always done these household chores, and I don´t like them either but I do them, it is needed. So, as I was saying, doing some repair jobs or so, I like it much better than mopping or doing the dishes. …. A: I also rather like cooking, so cooking is OK. B: I also like it (Int. 8, gymnasium, 2 men)

In B's account, his female future counterpart is only indirectly present, as the one who is going to do the cleaning and tidying up tasks, which he detests so much, while no reasoning is done around her desires to do these tasks. A is less categorical but also in his view household chores are female and he and his brothers have had to engage in them only because of the lack of women in the household.

Regardless of the desired division of domestic work, many study participants, both male and female, discussed the necessity of at least some degree of sharing household responsibilities. A male student explained his motivation for sharing in the following way:

G *I don't want to make her a slave, right? It should for sure somehow be divided equally, so that one [of the partners] would not complain that the one always is working while the other is sitting in front of the television*. (Int. 6, gymnasium, two men).

Two female vocational students shared their experiences from their own relationships and by this demonstrated their inclination towards gender equality, through talking about their ability to perform tasks normally placed within the domain of the other gender.

J: Our other halves [her boyfriend and that of her friend, with whom she is interviewed] *are so handy that they can help with women´s household chores so it is an advantage for me, and me on my part, I don't object to fitting a bulb or tightening something somewhere. I: A tap or something like that.* (Int. 6, vocational, 2 women)

Among many of the students, male involvement in domestic labour other than that done outside the house was conceptualized as 'helping the woman', though:

I: Well, I hope he will help me. In our household, my dad does the cooking and stuff like that. Not that he would do the cleaning, he wouldn´t do that but all the work outside, we have a garden, you know.…. So I hope it will be like that in the future, too [laughing]*. That my husband won´t be lying on the couch and demanding [things], haha.* (Int. gymnasium, woman).

In I's account, the image of a helping husband was contrasted with a much worse alternative – the one who exercises his patriarchal power from the couch. A similar notion emerged in the account of a gymnasium girl, when she was describing her ideal partner:

C: Hhm, he should respect me so that there is no quarrelling, so that he doesn´t think that I will obey him as if I were his slave, doing the cooking and so on... So that he is a bit independent, so that he can cook by himself, take care of a child. (Int. 4, gymnasium, woman)

C expresses desires for a gender equal relationship, through contrasting it with its opposite; a partner who demands her obedience and who is incapable of performing domestic work and care. Another woman, who presented herself as career-oriented, did not even mention the future husband when issues of domestic work were discussed, but envisioned that she would hire a nanny to help her manage domestic responsibilities.

As shown, there are great variations in which tasks are seen as exchangeable between partners. There is also some variation in how the tasks themselves are gendered: cooking is presented as more gender neutral, whereas cleaning and tidying are mostly defined as women's work. Work outside the house, such as chopping wood, or repairs, belong to the male domain. While some are comfortable crossing the gendered boundaries, and even boast of their ability to do so (mainly women), others are more restrictive in their attitudes. Comparing the young people from the gymnasium and those attending the vocational school, we find support for separate gender roles and gender transformative attitudes in both groups. However, most women opt to let the man choose which housework to engage in. This corresponds with male students´ expectations that they will participate in household tasks but less intensively, choose those that they like or that are 'manly' and decline those they dislike. Most women are adamant in their desire to find a spouse who will help them with the housework and some even present male involvement as a precondition for their professional life and satisfaction in partnership. Negative stereotypes of the 'lazy male' who makes unreasonable demands are abundant, indicating an awareness – and a critique - of gender inequalities.

Still, as shown below, almost all the young women are prepared to increase their share of family labour once they have a child.

The limit of flexibility: Parenting and parental leave

Cultural norms together with policies and employment circumstances have turned motherhood into a long-lasting activity for many Czech women while weakening their links to the labour market. In consequence, pressure has been put on men to fulfil the breadwinner role. We look at how these tendencies are reflected in the students' imaginations of their future parenting roles.

Many interviewed women expressed a desire to stay at home once they have a child and saw it as their right. Mostly, they envisioned to stay at home three years per child and the idea of not returning to employment between children was also present:

I: Well, up to three, I would say. J: And after that into the kindergarten, yeah. I: Yes, sure … I would like to have my kids one after another [laughing] *so that I can be on maternity leave and then go to work. So that it is not fragmented, you see?* (Int. 2, gymnasium, 2 women)

The students were asked to imagine the possibility of the father staying at home with the child or taking up some of the parental leave. This was rejected by most male and female students:

F (woman): I think it is, well, I think it is weird . …… INT: So if you have children it will be you who stays at home with them? F: Yeah, I would think so. ……. E (man): I also believe that it is more of a woman´s job. Although, I don´t know, I guess it varies from case to case depending on what situation they are in... F: Women are usually looked upon as weird when they work and the man is [at home]… (Int 8, vocational, 1 woman, 1 man)

Care for small children is described by these two students as "a woman's job" with reference to ideas about what is "normal" and socially acceptable. Some study participants shared experiences from their own family while arguing for a gendered division of labour:

A: Well, I think, or in my family, it was always that my dad was making money and my mom was taking care of the children, which I think is the best for the kids, that they don´t have to have a nanny or go to kindergarten. … I would like to have it like that in my family too. … INT: Could you imagine that you would be on parental leave? A: Haha, me personally probably not, but I would definitely spend time with them later, after all, it is also important that their dad is at home and with the kids. (Int 8, gymnasium, man)

In contrast to domestic labour, where no explicit references were made to male and female nature-given capacities, such ideas were strongly vocalised in the imaginations of future childcare.

Z: Hmm, I think that those first years with the baby, they are very important for the mother. And I believe, that during the pregnancy, I will have time for things, for example to make an album or to keep a diary for the baby. I´m looking forward to that very much, haha,. INT: And the father could also stay at home with the kids? Or would you rather stay at home with them? Y: Well, I would… I would rather stay at home with them, rather than having their dad staying at home. I believe that the relationship between the mother and the baby at birth is deeper…. (Int 5, gymnasium, 2 women)

The idea that men do not have the skills to raise children properly was also present especially in the narratives of female students:

K: Well, we know how men sometimes are, what they would do with the kids, haha. I see sometimes how my sister´s boyfriend behaves towards his child: it is all fun and if the child were brought up like that, it would probably be awful. (Int 5, vocational, 2 women)

The reasons given for women to stay at home were not only related to what is claimed to be 'natural' for men and women, but could also be more pragmatic, i.e. who makes the most money:

J: In my opinion, it is more for the woman [i.e. the parental leave] *because ……as I mentioned before, it is the level of the salary, that women receive a lower pay for the same work. So therefore it is men who go to work as they know that they will bring in more than if they stayed at home and it was up to the women to earn the money* (Int 6, vocational, woman)

Economic reasons also emerged as the only acceptable argument for role reversal:

*INT: And your husband would also be on parental leave? **X:** I think I would send him to work to earn money, haha. On the other hand, I have a cousin who has a husband on maternity leave and she goes to work. And in their case, the reason is that she earns more money, so he is on maternity leave, you see. But I don´t know, I think it is… that the mother plays more with the children and spends time with them… I think it is better if the mother goes on maternity leave.* (Int 6, gymnasium, 2 women)

As in the example above, the 'gender reversal' scenario is presented as unwanted, and even more so with the male students. This is partly because it means engaging too much in the 'female sphere', but also because it shows a lack of ability to become the main provider for the family, which means a failure to live up to masculine expectations. The following humorous exchange between two male students illustrates this point:

*L: She [*his future wife*] should have enough time… for the children, haha. **K:** For me, so that she has time, has time for children and doesn´t earn more than me. **L:** So that it is not me who has to take maternity leave... **K:** Well, exactly. So that it is her who takes maternity leave and not me. **L:** Because if she earned more than me it would be me who would have to stay on maternity leave… **K:** No way, no way, I would find a different job **L:** I would work 24 hours a day and she would still earn more, hahaha.*
(Int 7, vocational, 2 men)

The idea of the man as the main breadwinner remains intact with these young men. Other possibilities are out of their range of options because they see securing financial support for the family as their main task and only when this role is fulfilled there is space for paternal involvement in childcare.

Some even made considerations about planning the number of children in relation to their financial situation:

*G: I would like to have at least three children….. If it is financially feasible. It depends a lot on that… **H:** I will add to what I said before that there is a limit of about two children in the Czech Republic because of the financial situation; as I see it, if someone has four children, they cannot pay for a trip for them*

*here or there. But then again, if I worked abroad, I would manage three haha. … It is a joke but it applies that more money, more children. **G:** Yes, haha, no money, no children.* (Int 3, gymnasium, 2 men)

While these male students made a connection between their future earnings and their intended number of children, typical for female gymnasium students only was that they made direct connections between their choice of future occupation and visions of their future family life. Anticipated engagement in an exciting job that involved lots of traveling was given as a reason for planning only one child, while preferences for working in the healthcare sector or as a teacher were related to advantages when it comes to combining childcare and work. Only one woman aired a childfree scenario:

F: As I said, I don´t know, maybe I will have a child, maybe not. … I believe that it is better to focus solely on your career rather than coming home angry from work and being cross with your kids. That´s why I say that if I had a demanding job I would rather stay childfree because if I had children I should stay with them. Because a mother should stay with her kids instead of seeing them for two hours and having a nanny to bring them up. (Int. 1, gymnasium, woman)

Although expressing doubt about having children, the ideal of intensive motherhood was still present in her reasoning: if a woman can't live up to its standards of continuous and devoted presence, she should give up having babies.

Discussion

In many Western societies, developments over the last four decades have gone from a male breadwinner model towards various dual earner models (Crompton 2006), increasingly incorporating the ideal of shared parenting (Stewart and Janta 2008). The countries which experienced state socialism have followed different paths; developments have been (and still are) rather messy in their directions (Szelewa and Polakowski 2008). In the Czech Republic, both policies and discourses seem to

be torn between support for gender equality, and gender separate models where care work is deemed female and breadwinning is seen as a main male responsibility. This is reflected in European comparative opinion surveys showing that the strongest support for separate gender roles and rejection of working mothers with preschool children are found in the countries of Central and East Europe while Czechs – similarly to Scandinavian populations – also strongly agree that both men and women should be employed (Fahlén 2015; Rabušic and Chromková Manea 2018).

Our research has focused on the interplay between the institutional conditioning of young people's imaginations of their future and the ways that these imaginations are gendered. How do the young people gender tasks and responsibilities? Which gendered relationalities are in play – in which ways do young women and men take into consideration their imagined partner when they present visions for their future family?

Our participants are aware of institutional constrains affecting their (future) lives. Most of them are acquainted with current policies for parental leave, and they reflect on existing labour market conditions including the gender pay gap. None of these societal conditions are criticized but taken into account as social facts determining what is possible and what is not.

We see that the *gendering of household tasks* follows a rather conventional pattern. Most housework is deemed female, while male tasks relate mainly to labour performed outside the house. Women in particular show flexible attitudes towards how to divide domestic work between themselves and their partners, indicating that a certain level of de-naturalisation (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995) of housework as female has happened (although a few want to employ a nanny rather than transgressing gender norm). All of the participants imagine that the male will help out with some tasks (of his choice). The image of a burdened woman who is a «slave» in the household – a scenario well known from popular culture from socialist times - is strongly denied. This image is not only considered unjust but also old-fashioned.

The relative flexibility found with regards to gendered distribution of household labour can also be connected to processes of individualisation in Czech society after state socialism; the diversification in life course described above, and attendant changes in demographic patterns (Chaloupková 2010). While the overwhelming majority of people born between the 1950s and 1970s established their first household with their partner, an increasing tendency for cohorts born after 1980 is to establish their own first household without a partner (Hašková 2014), so they have to perform household tasks regardless of their gendered connotations. Young women´s willingness to take on a larger share of housework once they have a family (and young men´s expectation that they will be allowed to choose what household work they will perform) do not necessarily contradict the individualisation trend. Rather, it reflects their inclination to incorporate social conventions into their future thinking.

Imagining the future family always involves an "imagined other", making gendered relationality an important part of these imaginations. Among young women images of the partner are strongly connected to how they foresee that they will organise their own lives: they may reduce their household burdens through selecting the right partner and the attitudes of the partner in this regard are therefore important. Not so among men. Although some reflect on desired qualities of their future partner, they don't connect this to their own working life or to the possibility of living a stress-free life.

While discussions about household labour revealed multiple gendered arrangements, the pattern is much more unified when it comes to childcare. Women want fathers who are present for the children, to play with them and support them, and men express a desire to spend time with their children in their leisure time. However, both men and women perceive intimate care on a full-time basis as a mother's natural responsibility. Historically, caregiving was never de-coupled from gender despite state socialist expansion of childcare institutions. The post-1989 re-familization (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006) of care, underpinned by ideas on intensive mothering combined with ideas about post-socialist freedoms, contributed to re-enforcing the naturalisation of caregiving as women's domain. This tendency is reflected in the imagination of our study participants. The young women in

our study all expect to have jobs to support their future family. Still, most seem to have internalised the norm of intensive mothering and are ready to take on the role as primary caregiver, which implies juggling care and career with long interruptions of the latter by the former. A few of the female gymnasium students aspire to a less "absorbent" motherhood. Typical for those is their career orientation and understanding that balancing paid work and care needs some coherent management from their side; planning for one child only, hiring a nanny or abandoning motherhood altogether.

However, none of them integrate an 'involved father' into their strategies to balance paid work and care. Although the discourse of 'intimate fatherhood' is not unknown in Czech society, the young women's constructions of gendered relationalities in their future family do not seem to embrace such an image.

It is evident that male students lack aspirations for participating in care of small children and using their right to parental leave. In this, they are in line with the dominant trends in society. Few Czech fathers actually use their legal right to parental leave and popular attitudes to a division of parental leave between the parents are also rather negative. This tendency is also shaped by region-specific post-socialist developments, i.e. re-masculinisation of post-socialist societies connected to rapidly increasing income differences and privatisation of services (Zawisza, Luyt & Zawadzka 2015). Like the first-time fathers studied by Nešporová (2019) our study participants recognize the male "duty" of breadwinning as crucial, which limits their imagination of men as primary or equal caregivers. Male students also recognize the ways their 'duty' of breadwinning may impact negatively on their desired number of children (no money - no children). Their mutually constituting roles as "main provider" and "second-rate caregiver" are not problematized or seen as unfair; they are naturalised as part of being an adult male in Czech society.

Young men are anxious about having female partners who earn more than themselves because it would turn them into primary caregivers and compromise their ability to live up to masculine expectations. For the young men their imagined inability to provide for a family is connected to

lowering their family size. For women the opposite applies: having a good career means having fewer children. Rather than envisioning alternative gendered patterns of care and money earning, students of both genders thus repeat the conventions of the current order.

Still, the role of the female main caregiver is not completely naturalized. Both men and women are aware of the options available to fathers to take parental leave, and a few know of couples who practice such a model. In fact, young men's strong protests against the idea of the male primary caregiver may be a sign that change is on its way. The male primary (or equal) caregiver, although seen as undesirable, is no longer unthinkable, and the protests vocalized against him could be regarded as an attempt to *re-naturalize* (Frøystad 2015) gendered parenting, in the sense that they represent an outcry for restoring the perceived natural order of things.

Conclusion

This article has contributed to an enhanced understanding of the ways young people living in the Czech Republic imagine their future family, by linking their imaginations to research on post-socialist transformation processes, and current discourses and policies on gender, family and childcare. We have pinned down regional tendencies (individualisation, combined with re-familisation of care and re-masculinisation of society) and shown how these tendencies condition young people's imaginations. We have argued that imaginations of the future family is likely to differ from other kinds of imaginations, as it involves an imagined significant other – the partner. Through the analytical lenses of gendered relationality, combined with Yanagisako and Delaney's conceptual couple naturalisation/de-naturalisation, we have uncovered multiplex structures of imaginations, and their specific regional–historical conditioning. We have shown that, while preferences for gender separate roles are quite strong among the young, there is a willingness to cross gendered boundaries and share tasks, and a rejection of the "communist" image of the "female domestic slave". We have argued that young women are more attentive to the qualities of their imagined partner than young men are; the

latter taking the future roles of their partner more for granted. Finally, we have demonstrated the limits of imagined sharing of responsibilities in the family, which for both young men and young women are related to caring for small children. Both genders refuse the idea of reversing the roles of care and breadwinning, something which resonates very well with the overall tendencies in Czech society where care for infants and toddlers has been re-familialised, and breadwinning masculinised. A few cracks in these seemingly firm boundaries can be detected, though. Young people's awareness of the conditions that direct them towards separate roles, and their knowledge about current policy changes in particular, may lead to a gradual change in their perceptions of the "conditions of possibility" governing their lives. The (mainly) EU driven policies on gender equality and work-life balance also have an impact on Czech policies, slowly increasing provision of childcare services and expanding work-life options for men and women.

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