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Feminism and the Roots of Apathy in the Czech Republic

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As a child I repeatedly participated in one nasty game. We put a stick into an anthill and watched how hundreds of thousands of ants tried to fix all those damaged paths and restore their order. They managed well; they had been building those structures for thousands of generations in the same way. We, the people from postcommunist countries, find ourselves in a worse position. In contrast to ants, we do not know what our structure should actually look like, what it should follow from, and how it should relate to the whole world, which has been changing constantly during the course of our effort.

Although we like to speak about the nonbloody Velvet Revolution, what happened in 1989 was rather a collapse of the system brought on by total corrosion. This was probably caused by a "system fault*" built directly into the foundation of the structure. The totalitarian regime headed by the only political party—which had abolished all forms of private ownership and ran the central planning of both the production and sale of goods, and which ultimately led to a fatal limitation of personal initiative as well as each individual—was unable to solve a single human problem, not even the relationship between a man and a woman.

Envy was elevated into a historically given social law, called the dictatorship of the proletariat, while the class struggle was

supposed to be the fundamental driving force of the development of all social formations, even the development of mankind as a whole.

It did not succeed.

Today, in the effort to quickly restore our entire system and organize it in such a way that it would resemble Western societies, we have been relying on concise information, with which we create building blocks for our society. Sometimes we do not notice that the individual building blocks belong to different construction kits. This is reflected in the overall appearance of our "Legoland."

As sociologists, we must learn to pay attention to those blocks that, up until now, we have ignored. The neglected part of those puzzles is feminism, broadly understood as a relationship of two fundamental elements of the human relationship, that is, the relationship between a man and woman. It has been neglected not only in the Czech Republic, but practically in all postcommunist countries.

Transitologists—that is, scientists who follow and analyze the process of our transformation—are, of course, interested in our situation. I am also interested, but I view the problems from inside the system as an engaged observer, both as an object and a subject, and often a creative agent. I am aware of the limitations of our efforts. Perhaps this is why I also can see the limitations inherent in the approach of Western transitologists. These transitologists, however, in order to make their assignment easier, intervene in the process before it really occurs. And so they find phenomena similar to or resembling those with which they are acquainted from their own countries. They keep forgetting that various things they are describing have been introduced to us rather recently by them. It is somehow reminiscent of a situation in which someone wants to study how the steppe is blossoming, but for the sake of his own comfort—as the first step—has a highway constructed leading to the location of his interesting research. Afterward, he or she announces to the world that there is a highway in the steppe.

These transitologists are equally surprised when the subject of their research does not behave as expected, although they have already constructed the highway. They forget that it was they who brought many of the phenomena and movements and ideologies (both good and bad) to our countries. This is the situation with feminism. We did not hear anything about feminism for decades, and today we are asked about our evaluation of feminist attitudes. We are still searching for our new civic identity, and yet we are supposed to communicate our opinion on some specific issue, the existence of which has not even been perceived by most women. Nor did Western feminists themselves try to establish contacts with us in the period of the communist regime!

The Iron Curtain was getting rusty in the 1980s, and through its openings we were receiving a lot of information and books from tourists and emigres. We circulated, translated, read, and copied Orwell, Popper, Arendt, Dahrendorf, von Hayek, Althusser, Eurocommunists, punk, pop music, porno, and so on. But feminists did not send anything! It may be that they were afraid that we would have dispelled their illusion with a truth they would not admit: the employment of women was not enough to bring about their liberation and that socialism was as unable to solve women's issues as capitalism, in spite of references to Babeuf and Engels. Or it may be that women in socialist countries were not a good investment or, in their eyes, we were threatening their simplified perception of Eastern Europe, just as they, in our eyes, with their criticism of Western parliamentary democracy, were jeopardizing our admiration of the West in our similarly simplified perception.

After breaking through the front line of the Cold War, that is, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the removal of barriers at the borders, the first to come to our country were businessmen, adventurers, and enthusiasts. The first echelon of feminists to visit us consisted predominantly of enthusiasts and activists who sometimes, led by their desire to convince us quickly, brought even more confusion into our newly formed

self-confidence. The gender identity resides in a deeper layer of the personality than an affiliation with some political party! At that time we were still learning to understand the differences between the programs of the fifty political parties that came into being here.

The meeting of Eastern women and Western feminists was new for both sides. We keenly perceived each other, generalizing details and individual responses into a whole, regarding feminism as a movement, philosophy, life style, and so on. Western feminists, on the other hand, generalized attitudes of those several dozen women with whom they were able to speak in English.

Other information about feminism came from articles written mostly by our men returning from exile. They reflected above all the situation at universities in the early 1970s and published articles about this particular experience of theirs in which they characterized feminists and women's liberation in strongly ironic terms. A man in danger of systemic anomie tries, like the ants, to quickly restore his world and structure it in such a way as to be able to orient himself in it. Under socialism we all learned to see society divided into good and bad, "us" and "them," black and white. Simplification always makes life easier. These initial influences and our earlier learned responses have affected the reception of feminism. This seems to be the reason why we have not picked up this building block and tried to incorporate it into our construction. In contrast to the ants, we do not try to rebuild the same structure. The emancipation movement, the equality of woman and man, this has long been included in our internalized patterns, even though we lacked feminism as an ideology and philosophy in our history.

Most of the sociological research concerning attitudes to feminism carried out shortly after the coup was initiated from the West and financed by various foundations and funds. The stratification criteria, methods, techniques, as well as ways of data processing were also adopted from the West. This was a

natural and the only possible solution because the social sciences in the former socialist countries (except for Poland) were transformed into Marxist-Leninist sociology that "scientifically" proved the correctness of measures taken by the communists. Research after 1989 was also carried out according to adopted conceptions and hypotheses from the West. Our sociologists sometimes conformed to the stereotype or, as expressed by Hungarian authors, the "acquired syndrome" to prove empirically way what they were expected to prove. In Czech we have a saying, "Sing the song of those whose bread you eat!" Colleagues from Hungary, who also observed the phenomenon of our postcommunist reaction to the newly discovered Western reality, called it the "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome in Eastern Europe" (Csepeli, et al., 1996; Kusá, 1996; Šiklová, 1996).

I will consciously try to avoid this syndrome, but in my interpretation I will be inevitably influenced, in contrast to Western transitologists, by my experience with socialism, by the experience of a woman who lived under socialism and survived it. who mistrusts all ideologies and has insufficient knowledge of contemporary Western feminisms and feminist discourses. I will be burdened by my own personal past in the same way that Western transitologists and theorists of feminism are burdened by their encyclopedic knowledge. Only when we realize these differences, limitations, as well as the specificity of differing points of view, is it worth continuing the discussion not only about feminism, but also about the relationship between men and women, that is, the issue that transcends the borders of individual countries and even continents.

We in postcommunist countries do not know very much about the building blocks from the construction kit entitled feminism. Only now are translations being made and lectures being given at universities. Nevertheless, we comment on the unknown in a rather categorical way. The Canadian-Jewish coworker of the Gender Studies Center in Prague, Laura

Busheikin, has written an article with a typical title: "I Don't Know What Feminism Is, but I Say NO!" (1994; see also Renne, 1997; Siklová, 1994).

The majority of Czech women (and women from other postcommunist countries) think that "feminism is just a silly Western import which we don't need." When we started the Gender Studies Foundation, many friends asked me, "Why you, my dear? You are normal, you have children, grandchildren, and you look relatively good for your age! Why do you need to collect books about this strange ideology?"¹

This negative image of feminism is enhanced by plenty of stupid stuff (from our point of view) such as, for example, Mike Tyson's rape trial and discussions at American universities about politically correct statements and affirmative action. The latter is reminiscent of Orwell's "newspeak" and the communist regime's promotion of members of the working class and working women to high positions only to remedy the "historical injustice against the working people."

In addition to such attitudes formed in recent years, there are other much more profound factors inhibiting feminism. The four major roots of such inhibition are as follows: First, the history of our state in the nineteenth century and other specific aspects of our history lead to a substantially higher cohesion between men and women and the continuous subjection of specific women's interests to that which for decades had supremacy over women's interests. Second, the recent socialist past, that is, the collective experience of the totalitarian state that deformed human relations and at the same time facilitated a specific cohesion between men and women as allies against the state. Third, the contemporary political and economic situation of the Czech Republic. Fourth, our deformed reflection of Western ideology.

Although postcommunist countries do not form a homogeneous whole in economic terms, we are similar in our reactions. Evaluation of the postcommunist era is premature. The future will tell us what mistakes were committed, which ones were

inevitable, what was good to take from the West, and what was wrong and unnecessary. In all former socialist countries, human rights were systematically suppressed and the struggle to observe was the basis for resistance and, consequently, the fall of the whole political system. In spite of this situation, the forbidden feminism, linking up with the struggle for human rights, has not provoked much response in these countries and it is not arousing it even at present. Why?

The relative cohesion and agreement between men and women in the Czech lands—that is, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, formerly known as Czechoslovakia and since 1993 as the Czech Republic—originated in the nineteenth century when the Czech nation was formed as a counterpart of the German-speaking population of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The national revival of the Czech nation took place under external pressure and men and women of this country had a common enemy, a fact that increased the cohesion of all individuals who considered themselves to be Czech. For this reason men encouraged the education of women, their struggle for the right to vote. Czech women were men's allies in their joint struggle against the Habsburg monarchy and the discrepancy between men and women, and patriarchy was greatly reduced by this external influence (Fox, 1991).

After the end of the First World War, when women in all European countries fought for their civil rights, there was no need for Czech women to win their status through a confrontation with men. They had already reached an understanding with men. The way to this understanding was prepared by a man of great authority, the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and by his concept of equality of women. Masaryk was influenced by his wife, Charlotte Garrigue, who came from the United States. Under the influence of his American wife, Masaryk as early as the 1890s wrote and lectured at the university about women's issues and was considered a defender of women's rights (Skilling, 1994, Ch. 8).

Masaryk put human and civic issues above national and particular interests, including women's ones, and this attitude of his has complicated women's identification from the point of view of contemporary radical feminism. Women felt a part of the whole, the nation, their fatherland, and they did not seek their own separate identity as women. Under the fascist and communist rule, the study of Masaryk's work was more or less forbidden and, therefore, more unofficially respected and accepted. At present, Masaryk's work is being rediscovered and his nonconfrontational ideas about the relationship between men and women act as inhibitors of radical feminist attitudes and the new search for women's self.

During the Second World War, men and women in our country had a common enemy as well: fascism and hardships of war, forced labor in heavily bombarded Germany, and suffering in concentration camps were borne by Czech men and women alike. All women who did not have small children had to work involuntarily for the war industry. Emancipation of woman in the form of her incorporation into the working process, which has often been a goal of the effort of many Western feminists, was carried out by an act of the totalitarian, fascistic state hostile to the Czechs. This forced labor was later repeated after the war in the 1950s when women were forced to "build socialism." The status of Czech men during the Second World War did not differ much from that of Czech women. Both genders were civilians, both were in the background, both were under the "protectorate" of a higher authority in the form of fascist Germany. Once again, all this made allies of men and women.

The situation was somewhat similar to that prevailing at the time of Stalinism during the 1950s. Real patriarchy could not develop in our country, not even after the Second World War. In February 1948, a coup d'etat established a new political regime based on a highly simplified concept of Marxism that put class differentiation above particular interests in its ideology. The solution of women's issues was considered a

particular interest and given no priority. All social problems were expected to be solved automatically as a result of the victory of socialism. Politically disciplined female members of the Communist Party who identified with the officially adopted ideology and considered feminism a bourgeois ideology, the aim of which was the disintegration of the uniform struggle of the working class against its class enemy, and as a retardation of the establishment of the new social order, socialism.

The possible influence of feminism was suppressed not only ideologically, but also economically—patriarchy lost its economic and social bases. For over forty years, all means of production were expropriated so that a man was not the owner of the property, was not a woman's employer. Both genders were oppressed by the political system of the state administration. The communist regime was personified by the omnipotent Communist Party, which had no gender.

At the beginning of socialism in the 1950s, production was extensive, so it was necessary to increase the labor force. Employment of women grew dramatically. What Western feminists had long been struggling for became a fact almost overnight. What women in the West had to fight for and what they therefore valued was given to women under socialism "free of charge" and often against their will. As a result, Czech women had a different attitude toward work than Western women, at least initially.'

Women worked more than men because they had to run the household, bring up children, and cultivate the permitted bit of a field or garden, but men as patriarchs did not exploit them, at least not in the sense of economic laws. Men at the time of socialism held significantly more management positions, but they considered themselves as the mere executors of resolutions adopted by the Communist Party organ, or trade unions, or some other depersonalized power. In this situation men and women again felt as allies against a power that manipulated them, and they often helped each other directly

in the workplace. For instance, men treated women as colleagues suffering the same oppression and often "covered" for women who left earlier or came late to work because they had to take their children to or from kindergarten. Relationships at workplaces between men and women were good, without rivalry and competition. Sexual vexations did exist at the time, but no one knew the term *sexual harassment* and women did not know their rights, so they did not think of complaining. However, it did not occur to them at that time to blame their difficulties on the patriarchal system; men and women together blamed communists in power. For this reason the term *patriarch* is unknown to women, and if they encounter it in arguments of Western feminists, they regard it an artificial construction (Zora et al., 1996; Gender Studies Center, 1994).

In the period of socialism, at least two generations of women saw for themselves that it was impossible to cope with parallel roles—that is, to run the household and to be employed—which inspired a feeling of guilt and permanent frustration because they were unable to perform either job to their satisfaction (Vodáková, 1992; Scott, 1974; Marody, 1993). Nursery schools and kindergartens were available, but other household services, including transportation to work, functioned unsatisfactorily, and women trying to cope with both roles did not achieve equal results in their jobs as men. The forced mass entrance of women to the labor market did not meet their expectations in the sphere of professional self-assertion and social as well as personal fulfillment. On the contrary, many were "persuaded" they could not keep up with men; as a result, employment did not raise women's self-confidence and did not provide the officially proclaimed justice and equality of men and women. Therefore women who lived under "real socialism" believe that Western feminists overestimate the significance of women's employment and their own careers for the emancipation of women. Women from postcommunist countries project their experience onto a different Western society—that is, onto other women who have

developed in a different reality; the behavior of Western feminists is similar and either party is surprised by the rigidity of thought of the other party. This experience is the same in other postcommunist countries (Castle-Kanerova, 1992; Elzbieta, 1994; Paukert, 1993). Although women were formally equal and from the legal point of view no discrimination of women at work was allowed under in the civil code, it did exist in fact. Women worked in low jobs very often and on the average, in the postcommunist period, their wages represented 69 percent of men's wages (at present, women make 2 percent more, that is, 71 percent). Reasons are still the same: women are not in the high-paid category because they have not held managerial jobs. This used to apply even to the most highly feminized professions (medical doctors—pediatricians). Women represented 74 percent of the total number of medical doctors in 1980 and 78 percent in 1989. However, in these feminized professions, women occupied only 22 percent of managerial jobs.³ Women had an unequal position in the job market under socialism as well. The frequently assumed and repeated opinion in the West that after the coup in 1989 women's position significantly deteriorated has not been justified yet, at least for the Czech Republic (Čermáková, 1993, 1996; Wolchik, 1994; Einhorn, 1994; Paukert, 1994).

In the recent past the usual complicity of men and women toward those "at the top" was repeated. Those women and men who did not approve of the socialist regime formed from the perspective of gender an entirely homogenous opposition. Our country has the prime example in the fact that a representative of the women's movement, Milada Horáková, was executed as early as 1950 (Iggers, 1995; Miller et al., 1993). The model of the relationship between men and women as allies against a political regime was repeated again after the occupation by Warsaw Pact armies in 1968. In the period of "normalization"—that is, in the years 1969 to 1989—there was a rather strong opposition in the Czech Republic in which once again men and women closely cooperated. In the last two

decades of the existence of socialism women played a particularly significant role in the opposition in (the dissident movement). The high cohesion of men and women in dissent was determined not only by the necessity of conspiracy, but also by the subordination of these activities to the common goal. Men and women were united once again, by the common struggle for human and civil rights, considered superior to particular interests.

Women were signatories to and spokesmen of Charter 77; they formed an absolute majority in the VONS (Committee for the Defense of Unjustly Prosecuted), and were judged in political trials. They wrote, translated, and typed political articles that were subsequently published by samizdat and exile publishers. Via foreign broadcasting their texts influenced the political situation in Czechoslovakia. Female dissidents primarily typed, retyped, translated, and generally did the dirty work, while male dissidents drafted political programs and proclamations. This was similar to the position of men and women in America in the late 1960s. However, there was a democratic system in the United States, so male and female students were able to afford to differentiate between each other. In socialist Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, police oppression was so heavy that the Czechoslovak dissent never underwent such differentiation as that of the New Left in the United States. If in last century the rivalry of men and women was diminished by the common interest of the Czech nation, one century later men and women were united once again by their joint struggle for human and civil rights. The model relationship was actually repeated in principle.

Women who were not interested in politics then are not interested in feminism. Under socialism these women, like as all nonpolitical citizens, defended themselves against the totalitarian system primarily by their retreat into the family as the only sphere not directly controlled by the state. Under socialism the family was not a place of oppression; on the contrary, it was a place of relative freedom, a place of privacy

and of manifestation of gender identity. Because people did not, and could not, fulfill themselves in the often meaningless work for the state or society, their personal relationships were more significant for them than they were for people in Western countries. The care of the family and the dual role enforced by the state enormously burdened and stressed women. However, the fact that a woman was able to cope simultaneously on both fronts and have it all enhanced her self-confidence. Many Western feminist cannot understand where the self-reliance of women in postcommunist countries comes from when these women do not reflect their specific needs or their female differences and identity. But this is a mistaken interpretation, derived from what Czech women say about feminism and themselves, from their verbal rejection of emancipation, even though they have internalized it strongly. They do not have to speak about it; they, together with their husbands, can easily dismiss Western feminism and ignore it. These women who lived through the "real socialism" feel subconsciously that feminism, by its devaluation of the significance of household chores and with its ideology of equality, devalues their "privilege" to be martyrs of the household, to be the "better ones" in the relationship of both genders.

The aversion to feminism results also from the relationship between generations, the relationship of daughters and mothers. The current generation of middle-aged women was the first one to live their childhood in very imperfect nursery schools and kindergartens, and the generational conflict between these daughters and their mothers acquires also the character of a political aversion against what their mothers used to foster. Now this middle-aged generation feels the need to be better mothers than their mothers used to be, the need to take care of their children personally, and they naturally reject any ideology reminiscent of the old situation. They verbally reject women's liberation, but they keep their jobs despite the fact that many of their partners now would be able to support

them. However, the new generation of women now approaching thirty does not show such attitudes toward feminism very often, and the youngest, feeling a little bit threatened by the competition in the job market, perceive emancipation and feminism in a lot more welcoming way than their mothers or grandparents.

Paradoxically, one of the obstacles for feminism in the Czech Republic is a rather good economic situation. Women do not perceive their group interests from the point of view of a position in the job market, or the possible necessity to organize themselves in some way. This constitutes the basis of their current lack of interest in forming their own organizations and participation in politics. In this respect, women from postcommunist countries actually have disappointed Western feminists, who expected them to be allies.

In the Czech Republic the unemployment rate is still very low, on the average about 3 percent. In many large regions of the country, unprofitable and environmentally damaging production is being closed. These heavy industries employ primarily men, who have felt the brunt of this restructuring. Women have felt less of an impact because there are still job opportunities in the service sector and light industry, although wages are substantially lower. Women are affected by unemployment more often as members of a household where the main breadwinner is the man who relies on welfare benefits. Although this decreases women's standard of living, their position and importance in families is nevertheless preserved.

Available evidence indicates that the share of women in the labor force has declined only slightly in the countries of Central Europe (that is, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech and Slovak Republics). Research shows that between 1989 and 1994 the share of women in the labor force remained practically constant and these levels are considerable higher than those found in the countries of the European Union. Although Czech women often proclaimed at the beginning of

the transformation that they worked only for economic reasons and that if they were not obliged to work they would stay at home, in reality very few women quit their jobs, and they usually plan their future in connection with their professional career (Čermáková, 1996). The economic situation currently permits this. If women associate, they form relatively small organizations and set very concrete goals, such as, for example, defense of single mothers, acquiring space for leisure time activities of their children, advice centers for violence against homemakers, assistance to mothers with handicapped children, and so on.

The level of religious identification is relatively low in the Czech Republic, as is the influence of the Catholic Church; therefore there was no radicalization of women in the case of abortion and contraception laws.[^] Contraception and abortion have been legal, but they are no longer free of charge. Still, fees for these things are financially accessible both for a single and married women. The woman decides totally independently whether she wants to give birth, and in the event of an abortion, she has to pay about a half of average monthly salary in the Czech Republic. However, days spent in hospital must be taken from her vacation time, which is a new development.

The fact that women are not markedly threatened in their positions in the labor market is probably a cause of the relatively low interest of women in a direct political participation. Women in our country are quite interested in politics: they often discuss it, read newspapers, attend pre-election meetings, and they are more likely to vote than men. They also show a preference in favor of right-wing political parties, which is important regarding to attitudes feminism.

Nevertheless, since January 1997, there has been only one woman in the government, with another one holding a position as the vice chairman of a political party. At present, our political scene has a male face that is animated by beautiful women speakers who voice their support and then keep silent. All this has been happening in a country that has the highest

rates of female education and employment in the world. The absence of women on the political scene is, in a way, the "Czech paradox," since in general our society is prevalently matriarchal. Women's dominant role is in fact undisputable, although sometimes enforced (Havelkova, 1995).

However, the number of women in the Czech Parliament and Senate has been increasing. After the first elections following the split of Czechoslovakia in 1992, 10 percent of the Parliament were women, and in 1996 it was 15 percent. In the Senate, women have occupied 7 percent of the positions. According to a recent public opinion poll, the majority of the population thinks that women should be represented more markedly in the highest governmental positions. At the same time, female politicians as well as lay women reject the system of quotas⁵ as well as lobbying for women's issues, proclaiming that they want to be elected solely as representatives of the relevant political party and not on the grounds of being women. Again this is our old stereotype at work, putting political and civic objectives above those of women. Female politicians also reject any affirmative action because they are afraid that these programs might be attacked as a "communist invention." It is difficult to fight at both sides—against our own past and for our future—and to find words that are not "contaminated." Any cooperation of female members of Parliament across the borders of various political parties in the area of women's issues is unthinkable. Women do not regard it as important for their interests to represent women, and they identify their interests with interests of the whole society. Nowadays, only 3 percent of women of reproductive age are politically active. What a pity, wrote sociologist Marie Čermáková, that women in the Czech Republic lost the first six years after the revolution, and if they try in the near future to enter politics after all, they are going to be handicapped by the lack of this initial experience.

The Czech political momentum gravitates towards paternalistic, antiliberal solutions (or, more exactly, nonsolutions) of

such different issues for women as health care, education, protection of the handicapped, nongovernmental organizations, and the environment. This is closely associated with the political-psychological aspect: the immature political scene of the transition period (represented by men) has created the value orientation of an adolescent world, a world just after puberty.

Looking at the primitive, narcissistic, pseudo-manhood demonstrated by our present governmental politicians, we can see the clear answer to the question, What are the causes of the absence of women in the Czech politics? The present pressure against women as potential political activists will return us to a different context in the near future.

Western feminists are sometimes dissatisfied with us, and rightly so. They expected to find allies in us, while we, women from postcommunist countries, rather form a group that is willing to conform with the patriarchal system prevailing in the world. We object to the leftist language of feminism: statements such as "the struggle of genders is a never-ending revolution," or "women must convert gender differences into class differences," or "conquer power from men," arouse aversion, which we extend to the whole of feminism. Even if such statements were based on accurate formulations and signed by Wittgenstein, they cannot be accepted in this country at this time directly after the coup. Also, the excessive rhetoric of Western feminists, their craving for a global solution, their teleological character and feminist eschatology are not acceptable for women from Central and Eastern Europe.

This rejection only seems to be an aversion against feminism, but actually primarily it is a reaction to our own recent past. The freedom recently acquired by women in postcommunist Europe is the freedom not to organize oneself anywhere. If women participate in an organized activity at all, they are interested mostly in work in nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations that often focus on specific, local problems and tasks that do not get on television or the front pages of

newspapers (Gender Studies Center, 1994. Brunanski, 1995; Paukert, 1995). Women, however, do not mind.

The present is considered, once again, a transitory phase that we must somehow "survive" because it is a bridge to the future: the dreamed-of functioning market economy, democracy, and membership in the European Union. This is the reason why possible discrepancies in the relations between men and women are subordinated even today to a higher target—the transformation of society. Therefore we do not want to hear any feminist criticism of the capitalist system. Their criticism of what we consider to be a solution may shake our certainty. We want to believe that the economic change (this time, into the omnipotent market economy) will solve all other problems including the relationship between the man and woman.

Western feminists sometimes barge in without first trying to understand the culture they are entering. Eastern women are sometimes close-minded about what Western feminism might have to offer. But after these first mistakes, it is necessary to realize that this is an opportunity to come to an understanding and to see our own issues globally. "It is a fruitful context for changes in all facets of society, including the problems of gender," writes Brunanski. who observed our first discussions (Burton, 1996).

West-European feminism grew in a context unlike our own. It developed during a time of a relative economic stability in the 1960s and was reemboldened by the civil rights movement. But who knows from which basis feminism in postcommunist countries is starting, or with what kind of heritage. Feminism cannot create a whole new world. Its ideas will merely enter into already existing social, political, psychopolitical, and economic structures in postcommunist countries. This is why the feminism that is arising in postcommunist states will differ from its Western counterpart, why we cannot merely erect the toppled structure of our anthill or simply adopt the well-constructed building blocks from a someone else's

Legoland and incorporate it into our structure. Taking into account the above-mentioned differences and past experiences, I believe that a slightly different, new type of feminism will develop in Central European countries, one that will be strongly influenced by Western feminism, but will not be identical to it.

Self identification and self-definition always take place at either side of a meeting or—in the worse case—at borders of a conflicts. Only by confrontation and empathy with other human beings do we realize our own identity. These frontiers (willy-nilly) necessarily define both parties.

Notes

¹ The Center for Gender Studies, operating since 1991 in Prague, is simultaneously a library and a study and coordination center with a vast network of contacts in other countries. This Center started with ideas and financial help coming from East West Women Network (EYVYVN) from New York (protagonists were from the New School for Social Research) and in recent years were supported financially by the foundation Frauen Anstifung from Hamburg, and now by Heinrich Boll Foundation from Germany .

The employment of women grew dramatically at the beginning of socialism. While shortly after the Second World War, women represented 22 percent of all working people, fifteen years later their quota jumped to 28.6 percent. In the Czech Republic, 97 percent of all women who were able to work were employed, which was a world record. The work schedule was modeled exclusively from the point of view of the well-being of the state and the economy, although this dissatisfied the majority of working people. Flexible working hours or part-time jobs were exceptional. Although the beginnings were tough and women at first rejected and hated this double burden (being mothers and having a career), they remain employed today, even though after the 1989 coup it is no longer obligatory to have a job and women can become homemakers. Over the decades the status of the working woman has increased so much that at present women constitute 43.8 percent of all working people (before 1989 it was 46 percent), and they continue to work even though their husbands make enough for their families.

"The situation among general practitioners was analogous: women represented 64 percent of the total number of doctors, but occupied only 11 percent of managerial jobs. At the faculty of philosophy of Charles University, in 1984, women represented 42.8 percent of all teachers, but only 15 percent of females were department heads, 18.6 percent held posts on scientific councils, and only 3.0 percent of the professors were female. After the takeover in 1989, the situation at the faculty of philosophy has changed a little in favor of women as department heads. The main reason of this increase is probably the fact that in accordance with the Lustration Act, such public positions required a certificate that the person in question did not cooperate with the state secret police during the communist regime. Women were significantly less frequently listed as collaborators with the secret police.

⁴ The year that had the highest number of medical abortions was the year in which abortion laws were liberalized: 1987 saw 113,730 abortions. In 1993, there were only 70,634, and since then the number of abortions has been decreasing significantly. During the communist regime, free-of-charge abortions were often used as a form of contraception; in addition to being free, the woman did not have to go to work during her convalescence. Only after 1989 did a variety of affordable contraceptives become available.

Discussions about quotas for women in politics are not possible in our country. The Czech Social Democratic Party raised this claim, but in March 1996, three months before elections, its vice chairman, the only woman in such a high position, said: "Quotas are for the support which is offered by the state to minorities to improve their chances vis-a-vis other average citizens. Our women do not need this!" Václav Klaus, head of our biggest, strongest, oriented party, stated that "quotas would offend Czech women." and other coalition parties proclaimed that "this is one of the reasons for which Social Democrats will not hopefully win this election!"

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