

IVAN CHORVÁT

Family and Women in Central and Eastern Europe: the Significance of Traditional Roles after Socialism

This paper will focus on possible transformations of 'family' in post-communist countries of Central Europe (using the examples of Slovakia and the Czech Republic) under the influence of ideas of Western feminism. It attempts to show how feminist ideas are reflected in the writings of Slovak and Czech social scientists and how they influence local cultural settings.

Although the ideas of feminism gained much influence, support, and popularity in the West, they were not influential in former communist countries. This was not surprising because the communist regimes did not allow Western ideas to spread in those societies. Western feminists hoped that after the collapse of communist ideology the situation would change. However, I would argue that their expectations have not been fulfilled and feminist ideas remain weak in post-communist societies.

There is a whole range of reasons that can explain why women in Central and Eastern Europe have not been very receptive to feminist ideas. This paper discusses some of these reasons, especially those that are related to family life and family setting. The focus of attention will be on the countries of Central Europe, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

However, to say that local social scientists are not receptive to western feminism is not to suggest that there is no thinking about gender issues. It is that their ideas differ from Western feminist perspectives, and their approach to women's issues is not in line with the developments of the Western women's movement in the 1960 and

70s. Central European writers build their discourse rather in terms of more recent Western neo-feminist trends of sexual difference, of the articulation of specific values of female subjectivity and identity..

The following section discusses some characteristics of the communist regime that had a strong impact on the position of women as full-time workers as well as on the value of the family.

Women under the Communist Regime

Jirina Siklova, a prominent Czech feminist, believes that the feminist movement is not developing in the former Czechoslovakia because it has been discredited by the previous communist regime. The regime considered the emancipation of women to be almost a state ideology, which meant, in the eyes of the citizens, a disgrace of the women's movement. The fact that the emancipation of women was reduced not to the right to work but to the 'duty to work',¹ alongside benefits for women just because they were women, weakened rather than strengthened women's self-confidence. Women became the basic labour force that was called upon to create the socialist society in the 1950's.² It is therefore necessary to see what are the political implications of women's employment and women's emancipation in Central Europe because, as Fuszara rightly observes, the situation of women is different in countries where work is an individual and economic right and the best way of gaining a personal living or increasing wealth, from those countries where it is largely a duty aimed at increasing the wealth of the community.³

1 The Constitution of socialist countries introduced 'the duty to work'. Those who did not work were considered social parasites.

2 Jirina Siklova, 'Rozumi zapad nasim zenam?' [Does the West understand our women?] in *Listy*, no. 5 (1991), p. 15.

3 Malgorzata Fuszara, 'Does the Law Protect Polish Women?' in Maclean, M., & Kurczewski, J. (ed.) *Families, Politics and the Law: Perspectives for East and West Europe* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 241.

Thus the role of women at the beginning of the communist period in Central Europe was defined as a unity of economic, maternal and political functions. However, as Heitlinger points out, in response to the declining birth rate⁴ there were important shifts in emphasis within that threefold role of women:

The formerly unitary model of the 'ideal' socialist woman gave way to a broader, more graduated model, one that recognised the contribution women make to society by having and raising children, and that took into account age and life-cycle differences among women. Women were no longer expected to fulfil all roles simultaneously.⁵

In 1970s the Czechoslovak government introduced new legal arrangements that were designed to help women in their multiple roles, to support families, especially young ones, and to encourage them to have more children. Some new measures were adopted, such as mothers' allowances, low interest rates on loans for young couples with children and extended maternity leave. These pro-family measures were designed not necessarily to advance women's equality, but to prevent possible manifestations of citizens' discontent and needed to stabilize the society, especially after the events of the so-called Prague Spring in 1968-9. In other words, the family was a good means of social control. The regime felt intuitively that the family is the basic precondition of a stable society. Certainly, the regime also

4 After February 1948 there was a tendency in Czechoslovakia for women to change their roles as a mother and a wife and to adopt a role as a worker.. Women appeared in jobs completely unusual for them at that time – in blue-collar jobs, in military and police uniforms, as tractor-drivers, in miner's schools, etc. As Fuszara points out when describing the Polish situation at that time, women's unlimited access to employment was not just an attempt to implement the ideal model of equality but predominantly an economic necessity after the war. It was therefore not surprising that the birth-rate after the war, stopped rising in Czechoslovakia in 1950 and decreased continuously until 1962.

5 Alena Heitlinger, 'The Impact of the Transition from Communism on the Status of Women in the Czech and Slovak Republics' in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (ed.) *Gender, Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 96.

supported families because they were cost-effective in providing childcare.

The family has always been a very strong and important value in the lives of people in Central Europe. The family has a special significance, even now, under the new political regime. In many public opinion polls throughout the 1990s in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic, only a very small part of the respondents (up to ten percent) believed that after 1989 it was less important than before 'to live for one's own family'⁶. Western feminists, in attacking the family as a patriarchal institution, must take into consideration the significance of the family for Central Europeans. Indeed, Nanette Funk writes :

there are tremendous differences in culture, socialization and personality between Eastern and Western women, and in what Habermas has referred to as the 'lifeworld', that stock taken for granted of unreflected beliefs and world views... Women in state socialist countries appear to be more oriented than Western feminists toward children and the family, have different attitudes toward the individual and the collective and to authority, are more sceptical of the benefits of paid work, and have different attitudes toward men or toward collective action.⁷

In other words, as the Czech feminist Hana Havelkova suggests, a potential feminist view must be preceded by the pre-feminist reflection on the post-socialist experience.⁸

The importance of the family in the communist states was paradoxically strengthened by women's positions as full-time workers in the labour market. Proposed 'liberation through participation in production' did not lead to women's equality but a 'double burden' of domestic chores and paid employment. Hauserova stresses that even

⁶ See, for example Helena Wolekova, 'Socialna politika' [Social welfare policy] in *Slovensko 1996 [Slovakia 1996]* (Bratislava: Institut pre verejne otazky, 1997, p. 185-196; *Rodina 1994 [Family 1994]* (Praha:STEM, 1994).

⁷ Nanette Funk, 'Feminism East and West' in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (eds.) *Gender, Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 320

⁸ Hana Havelkova, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts' in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (ed.) *Gender, Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 71.

state measures of social welfare introduced in the 1970s were aimed just to enable women to bear the 'double burden' but not to alleviate it, e.g. by establishing part-time jobs and flexible working hours.⁹ Moreover, for women in Central and Eastern Europe the double burden was much heavier than for their Western counterparts because of the arduous nature of daily domestic tasks

without the aid of many consumer durable and labour saving devices, in addition to queuing and having to struggle for the means of subsistence... They had to produce many basic commodities by growing food and preserving and pickling it; almost no services are commodified.¹⁰

Although state measures were intended to solve women's problems connected with family and childcare, Siklova claims that 'the very nature of a centrally directed system of planning and control worked to silence women. The socialists' "pseudo-emancipation" lost any originally positive attributes and led to a new "women's fate".¹¹ The constant conflict between the demands of work and home led to women resenting equality with men as a standard of behaviour a source of their discontent. And although married women in Czechoslovakia did not have the duty to work and be employed, most worked, regarding it as their duty to contribute to the family budget.¹²

Partially as a result of dissatisfaction with paid employment (women did not achieve autonomy, freedom, self-respect, self-realization and were paid only 70 % of men's salaries for the same job), women turned to their families as a major source of meaning. In fact, both women and men escaped into the family as a place of relative freedom and privacy. According to Siklova,

9 Eva Hauserova, *Na kosteti se da i litat* [It is also possible to fly on the broom] (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 1995), p. 75.

10 Claire Wallace, *A Western Feminist Goes East* (Central European University Paper, Praha, 1994), p. 10

11 Jirina Siklova, 'Are Women in Central and Eastern Europe Conservative?' in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (eds.) *Gender Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 75.

12 Havelkova, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts', p. 70.

since people did not realize themselves in their work for society and state, their private relationships were perhaps of greater importance for them than for people in the West... Moreover, work in the family had its undisputed value, whereas work for society was often senseless.¹³

This aspect of the socialist society was noticed also by Nanette Funk who sees the distinction between the family and the state as the fundamental dichotomy of state socialism:

The family thus had a very special and powerful status as the primary institution that stood in opposition to the state. Women who wanted to be in the 'private' sphere wanted something different than what would be meant by a Western woman's orientation toward the family.¹⁴

Who Is the Enemy?

Now we are arriving at what is probably the central issue: the 'mysterious' attitude of Central and Eastern European women toward Western feminism and gender issues. Havelkova shows that while in Western debates the division of power corresponds with the division between the private and the public spheres, in socialism the division was drawn between the Communist Party, and its others. Women, as well as men, 'were given positions in the Party according to their loyalty, not their abilities.'¹⁵ Therefore the private sphere came to have very different connotations in socialist countries than it had for Western feminists. It was a state-free zone. *Both* women and men sought refuge from the repressive public life in the family.

Mozny also points out that the 'new' socialist regime did not fulfil a lot of promises and proclamations in helping women and lightening their responsibilities, especially in young families. The common

13 Jirina Siklova, 'Inhibited Factors of Feminism in the Czech Republic' (The paper prepared for the conference *Crossing Borders*, Stockholm 27–29 May 1994), p. 5–6.

14 Funk, 'Feminism East and West', p. 323.

15 Havelkova, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts', p. 68.

worries of how to get an apartment, how to get places for children in kindergartens and in secondary and high schools, the poor performance of the service sector and other common problems meant that there was solidarity between a husband and his wife and strengthened the notion of their mutual reciprocity and dependence.¹⁶

It is also possible to say that a woman was oppressed much more by the society than by her husband, leading most women in Central Europe reject feminism. While the psychological perceptions of women in Central and Eastern Europe are quite similar to those of Western women, their social experiences are radically different.¹⁷ In a sociological research study, FOCUS in Bratislava in 1994, it demonstrates that women understand their position as disadvantaged; however, the key problems for them is not the gender dimension but unambiguously social, or, to be more precise, socio-economic dimension.¹⁸

Furthermore, Siklova explains that in the communist states the regime's formal support of women was often misused against democracy and freedom of thought. On many occasions women had to place the fight for a democratic society, for freedom of expression, religion, and human rights above their own interests and the interests of other groups.¹⁹

Havelkova claims that it is necessary to differentiate between two forms of equality, positive and negative. There was a positive form of equalization enforced through law, and the negative equalization in the form of oppression of all individuals through totalitarian means. The latter meant the degradation of all persons as objects because the totalitarian regime suspended individual subjectivity, people as citizens, as thinking and acting subjects, as men and women shaping their own lives. Therefore

16 Ivo Mozy, *Moderní rodina: Myty a skutečnost* [The Modern Family: Myths and Reality] (Brno: Blok, 1990).

17 Jana Bodnarova, 'Makky feminizmus' [Soft Feminism] in *Aspekt*, no. 2 (1994), p. 29.

18 Tatiana Rosová, 'Ženy na Slovensku. Vyhodnotenie výsledkov kvalitatívnej sociologickej sondy' [Women in Slovakia. An Interpretation of Qualitative Sociological Survey] in *Aspekt*, no. 3 (1994), p. 113.

19 Siklova, 'Are Women in Central and Eastern Europe Conservative?', p. 80.

the problems of subjectivity and identity are not perceived in this society as specifically female ones. In theoretical terms, identity based on sex is still approached only as a sub-problem. There are thus two reasons for making the 'generally human' superior to the 'specifically female.' First, the problem is not one concerning women more than men; and second, in its emphatic form it is an essential problem of all.²⁰

Hence the situation in which both women's and men's identities were suppressed and both women and men were reduced to objects that were manipulated by the Communist system did special harm on the self-esteem of men and their masculinity. In fact 'the very ideal of a modern, self-conscious, self-evident, independently acting, powerful, in other words, 'male subject', so scorned in Western feminism, did not have a chance to develop here, or existed only as a pathetic caricature'.²¹ As a result, it was difficult even to establish 'typical' male manifestations of behaviour. It will be very strange and unusual for Western women to learn that many women in socialism 'deliberately encouraged the patriarchal manners of their husbands so as to boost their husbands' self-confidence, which the latter had difficulty maintaining in the public and work spheres'.²² Women under communism did not experience real patriarchal relations in the workplace even if their boss was a man, because the boss predominantly conformed to the political regime and obeyed the higher 'nomenclature'.²³ 'The division between the exploited and those who comfortably "settled" in the system did not precisely coincide with the relationship between men and women'.²⁴

It is no surprise, therefore, to read the following definition of feminism by the Czech feminist Jana Hradilkova, which appeared in the feminist journal *Aspekt* published in Bratislava:

20 Havelkova, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts', p. 66.

21 Jirina Smejkalova-Strickland, 'Do Czech Women Need Feminism?' in Sylvia Trnka & Busheikin, L. (eds.) *Bodies of Bread and Butter* (Praha, 1993), p. 17.

22 Havelkova, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts', p. 69.

23 Siklova, 'Inhibited Factors of Feminism in the Czech Republic', p. 7–8.

24 Havelkova, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts', p. 71.

For me feminism means simply an effort to understand men and their relations to women; an effort to conceive what is male in women's mentality and what is female in men's mentality; how it is developing and how it is manifested under the ideas which are forced to us by the system.²⁵

It has been already mentioned that the western dichotomy between private and public spheres did not exist in socialist countries. Another reason apart from those mentioned previously was that the family acted as a substitution for the public sphere. It was in the family and with close friends that one could safely discuss social, cultural and political issues, outside the public discourse in the media, the schools and the workplace.²⁶ This was reflected also in various public opinion polls. Kurczewski cites one study conducted in Poland:

health, a happy family life and a small circle of reliable, close friends constitutes the list of goods treasured as being those that give meaning to human life... They are regarded highly for themselves, whereas the value of other objects depends on how instrumental they are in the achievement of these basic goods.²⁷

With an increasing importance of the private sphere, the role of women becomes more important too. Private sphere has remained the domain of women, despite their activity also in the public sphere. Within the private sphere, the mother's role was irreplaceable. Women made use of this, for them the family represented an escape from political blackmails, for example professional advancement by joining and being loyal; to the Communist Party.²⁸ It was hoped that the mother's role would protect women from conforming to the communist ideals, from joining the Party, and from cooperating with the totalitarian regime, so enabling them to keep their human dignity relatively intact. On the whole, for a Central and Eastern European woman the ability to have a child represented the core of her identity.

25 Jana Hradilkova, 'Rozhovor' [Interview] in *Aspekt*, no. 2 (1994), p. 64.

26 Havelkova, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts', p. 68.

27 Jacek Kurczewski, 'Privatizing the Polish Family after Communism' in Mavis Maclean & Jacek Kurczewski (eds.) *Families, Politics and the Law: Perspectives for East and West Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 27.

28 Havelkova, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts', p. 69.

Motherhood gave limited protection from the frustrating and anomic world of work. Although motherhood had negative social consequences for women (such as less leisure time and poor career prospects), it signified a kind of privilege and respect for them.²⁹ Thus, women had an important status in the family under socialism.

29 Alena Wagnerova, 'Socialismus propousti ceske zeny' [Socialism fires Czech women] in *Aspekt* no. 1, (1994), p.22.

Going Back to the Family?

As the communist ideology broke down, many people welcomed the freedom to return to traditional practices, which were once forbidden. Often today there is a nostalgic feeling for the traditional woman's role. Hauserova claims that a Western woman is fascinated by the possibility of professional career just as much as an Eastern European woman is fascinated by her traditional role of a wife and a mother. While Western women have ambiguous attitudes toward the family, motherhood, and housework, Eastern European women have ambiguous attitudes towards their occupations and professional development. This is probably a manifestation of different cultural backgrounds: in Central and Eastern European culture motherhood represents a great natural power and not a dependency on the husband or a conformity conservative values, as most depicted by Western feminists. It is an interesting feature of post-communist societies that the humanity is connected with a turn to traditional values.³⁰

We can present two examples to show how important the cultural backgrounds are for the development of feminist attitudes. The first example is that of the wife of the former Slovak President Michal Kovac, Emilia, who said in her interview for daily *Smena*:

In our society a woman plays two roles; she is a mother and at the same time she is a working person-breadwinner. If a couple has a good income and sufficient family allowances, I believe that it would not be necessary for women to work and they could devote their time to their primary vocation - to childrearing. Only this can guarantee the happy future for our country and for the following generations.³¹

The second example is from an interview with the popular Slovak actress Zuzana Tlucikova, who at that time was not appearing on TV and on the stage because she was taking care of her second baby and 'realizing' herself as a housewife. The journalist conducting the

30 Hauserova, *Na kosteti se da i litat* [It is also possible to fly on the broom], p. 59.

31 Daily *Smena*, 21. 7. 1994, p. 3.

interview remarks that many famous actresses have babies and in a few days they work again for theatres and films. Tluczkova answers:

Don't forget that we live in Slovakia. Of course, Sophia Loren had her baby and immediately after that she worked for a film and relaxed in sauna. But I cannot do it. Cooking and child caring is my relaxation. In fact, I don't agree with emancipation of women in Eastern Europe. The woman should have a part-time job and care for the household, the family and herself.³²

After presenting all these ideas and describing the situation of Central and Eastern European women, there seems to be an unavoidable conclusion that after the political changes in 1989 and the breakdown of communism, nothing could prevent women from leaving paid employment and staying at home. Although some women used this opportunity and became full-time housewives, the expected large-scale flow from employment did not occur. Havelkova suggests that women did not resent work during socialism in Czechoslovakia as is sometimes claimed today.³³ For most women the workplace represents a useful form of socialising: one can meet people, make friends and create new relationships (including romantic ones). There are rituals of small celebrations, birthday parties, talks, mutual compliments and little jokes at the workplace.³⁴

However, the most important reason why women remain in the work force is due to economic necessity. As Heitlinger stresses, it is very unlikely that the male worker can earn enough to provide the 'family wage' to support the whole family.³⁵ Moreover, economic pressures on families have increased due to increases in the cost of many basic items previously subsidised by the state, such as housing,

32 Daily SME, 7. 6. 1994, p. 4.

33 Havelkova, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts', p. 71.

34 Mozný, *Moderní rodina: Myty a skutečnost* [The Modern Family: Myths and Reality], p. 121–122.

35 Family wage has been a suggested state measure for male workers whose wives would decide to stay at home as housewives and care for their children. It should have been high enough to support a worker's family. However, due to difficult economic circumstances of the post-communist societies the idea of family wage appears to be unrealistic.

food and child care.. Therefore keeping women at home is not very practical.³⁶ Furthermore, Nanette Funk clearly points out that

to have the choice not to work they [women] would have to be in stable marriages with husbands with stable jobs making a family wage. However, nothing is stable in post-communism, and none of these conditions generally hold... Many women are single mothers or are in unstable marriages, given 30 to 40 percent divorce rates. If they have husbands, the husbands are often unemployed or inadequately compensated, and more than two jobs in a family are often necessary for survival, as in Hungary or Poland.³⁷

One possible solution to integrate employment and family life, which is so important for women in Central and Eastern Europe, is to combine household chores with a part-time job. In the mid-1980s

only 7 % of women worked part-time [in Czechoslovakia], compared to 35 % in Canada, 44 % in the United Kingdom, 53 % in Netherlands, and 30 % in West Germany. However, 23-27 % of all women workers and 40 % of women returning to work after maternity leave stated they would prefer to work part-time.³⁸

It is quite obvious that for Central and Eastern European women liberation is seen not in escaping from the family but rather in a more satisfactory integration of motherhood and work.

Perspectives of Feminism in Central Europe

As noted early, traditional Western feminism does not appeal to women in Central Europe. However, it seems that the most recent developments in feminist theory correspond to some extent to the experiences and perceptions of post-socialist women. According to

36 Heitlinger, 'The Impact of the Transition from Communism on the Status of Women in the Czech and Slovak Republics'.

37 Funk, 'Feminism East and West', p. 326.

38 Heitlinger, 'The Impact of the Transition from Communism on the Status of Women in the Czech and Slovak Republics', p. 98.

Tatiana Sedova, feminism as a movement with political aspirations is not relevant in Central and Eastern Europe, while feminism which articulates from different perspectives questions of female identity and self-identification, has more attractions.³⁹

Zuzana Kiczko and Etela Farkasova, two Slovak writers, who express support to the new direction in feminist theory that pays close attention to problems of identity and specificity of women, point out that

it is relevant to distinguish between formal and real emancipation. Formal equality appeared in the form of the sexual neutrality of many social roles and in the form of universalism. Real equality must start with sexual difference as a given; it should articulate the specific nature of female subjectivity and identity. Formal equality always brings with it the possibility of real disadvantages and discrimination veiled behind data, numbers, charts and blinding statistics, thereby legitimizing and legalizing purely formal equality.⁴⁰

This opinion reflects the writers' own experience from the socialist period. Women who underwent this formal emancipation possess a more real experience of emancipation than do Western women. As a result, Central European women do not react politically or ideologically to their own emancipation:

The women's question here is not their independence but rather their dignity, because the great emancipation also brought disrespect and degradation with it. [Women]...were reduced to a cheap source of labour that could be plugged in everywhere without regard to specific capabilities, prerequisites, and ambitions... Women...had no chance to become aware of and determine for themselves what it meant to be a woman and to express it in their lives, their social roles, and their personal expectations.⁴¹

39 Tatiana Sedova, 'K možnostiam a limitom feminizmu v našich pomeroch' [Towards opportunities and limits of feminism in our country] in *Rodina ako predmet vedy* [Family as an object of science] (Bratislava, 1994), p. 126.

40 Zuzana Kiczko & Etela Farkasova, 'The Emancipation of Women: A Concept that Failed' in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (ed.) *Gender Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 93

41 Zuzana Kiczko & Etela Farkasova, 'The Emancipation of Women: A Concept that Failed', p. 87.

Therefore new independent women's groups in Central Europe define their main task in terms of moral re-evaluation of women's roles, distinctive qualities and interests, such as nurturing motherhood and down-to-earth 'practical' common sense.⁴² Moreover, some writers call for the advancement of those qualities into public life, into politics. For instance Jirina Siklova believes that

our women who have had the experience of living under totalitarian regimes will not merely mimic men but will discover a new form of political participation and leadership with enough space for solidarity, one that will uphold our 'traditional' female qualities. I welcome more of such feminine traits in politics and leadership.⁴³

Also some Western feminists recognize the potential value of feminism that is hidden behind the experience of post-communist women. As Canadian feminist Laura Busheikin points out, contemporary Western feminism is being challenged by Western women themselves who feel it does not sufficiently address their realities. They start to accept that 'men oppressing women' is perhaps too simple a formula, they give up celebrating sisterhood and begin celebrating differences instead. Busheikin emphasises that

if we begin to listen to East-European voices, we are taken even further in this direction and find ourselves in entirely new territory... If we really want feminism which would be about women and not only about some women, we must understand the women from Eastern Europe and cooperate with them.⁴⁴

Here again one faces the issue of the existence of many different feminisms. Cavarero admits (in her article for the Slovak feminist

42 Heitlinger, 'The Impact of the Transition from Communism on the Status of Women in the Czech and Slovak Republics'.

43 Siklova, 'Are Women in Central and Eastern Europe Conservative?', p. 82. Similar ideas are also expressed by the Prague-based women's group New Humanity which calls attention to the fact that 'man's and woman's shares on the face of the world are precariously disharmonious, with female influence missing from society and male from the family...' (quoted in Busheikin, 'Je sesterstvo naozaj globalne?' [Is sisterhood really global?], p. 52).

44 Laura Busheikin, 'Je sesterstvo naozaj globalne?' [Is sisterhood really global?] in *Aspekt*, no. 2 (1994), p. 52.

journal)⁴⁵ that historical conditions and circumstances create for every woman a different context and a different perspective; therefore she considers harmful one universal doctrine that suppresses differences among women and their specificity as well as uniqueness. In the same vein, Busheikin writes about the impotence of words like 'equality', 'liberation from patriarchal oppression', 'emancipation', etc. in an East European context.⁴⁶ Finally, Claire Wallace also underlines that East European women find that 'many of the universalising assumptions about gender held within Western feminism apply only to those contexts in which they originated. The experience of post-communist women speaks differently',⁴⁷

When Busheikin looked over the literature written by East European feminists, she noticed that rather than accepting Western frameworks and terminology, the writers challenged them and used them in their own different situation. Eastern women have the power to question Western feminist theories, traditions and convictions; typical feminist practices are mostly inappropriate in Eastern Europe. This throws in doubt the Western feminists' claim of global sisterhood. Busheikin concludes that feminism imported from the West works only when it is transformed by the journey to fit the local conditions and circumstances.⁴⁸

What is the future of feminism in Eastern and Central Europe then? What kind of feminism is likely to succeed? Many writers agree that 'maternal feminism' could develop in the region. Heitlinger defines maternal feminism as such 'which rests on the complementarity of sex differences and the special moral qualities and needs of women'.⁴⁹ Hauserova indicates that it is quite possible that Central and Eastern European women will maintain the importance of the family and the cult of motherhood. She argues that these values

45 A. Cavarero 'Rozhovor' [Interview] in *Aspekt*, no. 2 (1994), p. 29.

46 Busheikin, 'Je sesterstvo naozaj globalne?' [Is sisterhood really global?], p. 52.

47 Claire Wallace, *A Western Feminist Goes East*, p. 3.

48 Busheikin, 'Je sesterstvo naozaj globalne?' [Is sisterhood really global?], p. 50–51.

49 Heitlinger, 'The Impact of the Transition from Communism on the Status of Women in the Czech and Slovak Republics', p. 95.

may be an East European (Central European) or Slavic feature rather than a feature caused by totalitarianism.⁵⁰

Seemingly, post-communist women convey an important message for their Western counterparts: they are probably more emancipated than their Western colleagues.⁵¹ Most of them know that the best thing for them, for their personality and identity as well as for their families is a combination of paid work and family responsibilities. After forty years of 'full employment' it is natural for them to be employed; however, they also appreciate the value of motherhood, which is often overlooked by most Western feminists, who question 'traditional' social roles.⁵²

Yet, in order to achieve a desired and balanced combination of the family and employment, it is necessary to change the organization of work in the society in such a way that would reflect the needs of *both* men and women; e.g. flexible working hours, part-time jobs and opportunities to work from home when possible..⁵³ This is summarized by Nanette Funk:

Post-communist women's concerns should reinforce for Western feminism that work simpliciter is not the goal. Rather, a feminist demand must be for

50 Hauserova, *Na kosteti se da i litat* [It is also possible to fly on the broom], p. 33.

51 Although they are oriented toward their families - thus from Western point of view quite traditionally and conservatively, they are aware of the value and importance of their household work. As an example one can mention that eight out of ten respondents in the Czech republic, both men and women, state that the work of women in the household and their child care should be rewarded financially (STEM, Trendy 9/1993). On the other hand, to illustrate women's activity in the workplace it may be useful to mention one piece of statistical data: 53% of doctors in medical professions in Slovakia are women.

52 Hauserova claims that the American feminists, mainly those from the period of 1960-1970, looked at career in the same way as the child looks at his/her craved for toy. In last years they became a bit disappointed: the toy is not as attractive as it seemed. Central European women are better aware of it (Hauserova *Na kosteti se da i litat* [It is also possible to fly on the broom], p. 54).

53 Hauserova, *Na kosteti se da i litat* [It is also possible to fly on the broom], p. 80. Changes in the organization of work are also necessary in order to avoid the problem of 'feminization of poverty'. Otherwise many women who are single mothers or divorced mothers and who, therefore, have to work full-time and also care for their children could have considerable financial problems.

meaningful work in a rationally organized, humane society that reconciles the importance of the collective good and intersubjective needs of all persons with the instrumental needs of society.⁵⁴

The “women’s ‘question’ understood in this way have a good chance to be quite widely supported by postcommunist societies in Central Europe. Some signs of this development are coming up and issues of ‘work – family balance’, ‘work – life balance’, and ‘quality of life’ have been arising in recent public and academic discussions. We will see how modified expectations concerning the role of women in democratic societies and widely publicized concerns in women’s issues help to alleviate the problems that have to be faced in both private and public realms of postcommunist societies.

Bibliography

- Bodnarova, Jana, ‘Makky feminizmus’ [Soft Feminism] in *Aspekt*, no. 2 (1994), p. 29.
- Busheikin, Laura, ‘Je sesterstvo naozaj globalne?’ [Is sisterhood really global?] in *Aspekt*, no. 2 (1994), pp. 49–52.
- Cavarero, A. ‘Rozhovor’ [Interview] in *Aspekt*, no. 2 (1994), p. 29.
- Funk, Nanette, ‘Feminism East and West’ in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (eds.) *Gender, Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 318–329.
- Fuszara, Malgorzata, ‘Does the Law Protect Polish Women?’ in Mavis Maclean & Jacek Kurczewski (eds.) *Families, Politics and the Law: Perspectives for East and West Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 239–260.
- Hauserova, Eva, *Na kosteti se da i litat* [It is also possible to fly on the broom] (Praha: Nakladatelstvi Lidove Noviny, 1995).

54 Funk, ‘Feminism East and West’, p. 328.

- Havelkova, Hana, 'A Few Prefeminist Thoughts' in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (ed.) *Gender, Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 62-73.
- Heitlinger, Alena, 'The Impact of the Transition from Communism on the Status of Women in the Czech and Slovak Republics' in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (ed.) *Gender, Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 95-107.
- Hradilkova, Jana, 'Rozhovor' [Interview] in *Aspekt*, no. 2 (1994) pp. 63-64.
- Kiczakova, Zuzana & Etela Farkasova, 'The Emancipation of Women: A Concept that Failed' in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (ed.) *Gender Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 84-93.
- Kurczewski, Jacek, 'Privatizing the Polish Family after Communism' in Mavis Maclean & Jacek Kurczewski (eds.) *Families, Politics and the Law: Perspectives for East and West Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 25-52.
- Mozny, Ivo, *Moderní rodina: Myty a skutečnost* [The Modern Family: Myths and Reality] (Brno: Blok, 1990).
- Rosova, Tatiana, 'Ženy na Slovensku. Vyhodnotenie výsledkov kvalitatívnej sociologickej sondy' [Women in Slovakia. An Interpretation of Qualitative Sociological Survey] in *Aspekt*, no. 3 (1994), pp. 113-116..
- Sedova, Tatiana, 'K možnostiam a limitom feminizmu v našich pomeroch' [Towards opportunities and limits of feminism in our country] in *Rodina ako predmet vedy* [Family as an object of science] (Bratislava, 1994), p. 126.
- Siklova, Jirina, 'Rozumi zapad nasim zenam?' [Does the West understand our women?] in *Listy*, no. 5, (1991), pp.14-17.
- Siklova, Jirina, 'Are Women in Central and Eastern Europe Conservative?' in Nanette Funk & Mueller, M. (eds.) *Gender Politics and Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 74-83.
- Siklova, Jirina, 'Inhibited Factors of Feminism in the Czech Republic' (The paper prepared for the conference *Crossing Borders*, Stockholm 27-29 May 1994).

- Smejkalova-Strickland, Jirina, 'Do Czech Women Need Feminism?' in Sylvia Trnka & Busheikin, L. (eds.) *Bodies of Bread and Butter* (Praha, 1993).
- Wagnerova, Alena, 'Socialismus propousti ceske zeny' [Socialism fires Czech women] in *Aspekt* no. 1, (1994), p.22.
- Wallace, Claire, *A Western Feminist Goes East* (Central European University Paper, Praha, 1994).
- Woleková, Helena, 'Socialna politika' [Social welfare policy] in *Slovensko 1996 [Slovakia 1996]* (Bratislava: Institut pre verejne otazky, 1997, pp. 185-196.