

Victimisation or Democratisation?

Czech Women's Organising Potential in a Globalising Political Economy

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My women friends among the dissidents undoubtedly know a great deal about the sad position of women in our country. Despite this, they found even the vague suggestion of feminism in the fact that the [peace] declaration in question was to be strictly a women's affair intrinsically objectionable. I do not wish to ridicule feminism. I know little about it and am prepared to believe that it is far from being the invention of a few hysterical women, bored housewives or cast-off mistresses. Still, I have to note that in our country, even though the position of women is incomparably worse than in the West, feminism seems simply "dada".
— Vaclav Havel, *Anatomy of a Reticence*, 1985¹

Since the revolutions that precipitated the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989/1990, western liberal and socialist feminists² have sought to investigate the plight of women in subsequent post-communist "transitions" to democracy and market economies. The dominant thrust of western feminist scholarship has been to document how the majority of Central and Eastern European women have been disadvantaged and deleteriously affected by post-communist transformations due to the rescinding of former socialist rights to employment, childcare, political representation, public services and social assistance (Mies and Shiva 1993; Einhorn 1993; Watson 1993). Contrary to this widespread view, in this essay I argue that at least in the case of the Czech Republic, women are by no means "victims" of the transition. Rather, the past six years of political-economic restructuring have evidenced greater socio-economic class differentiation, that has brought both opportunities and contradictions for Czech and other central and eastern European women, and as a result they have begun to develop new political strategies – for survival and community.

Frequently also, western feminists have interpreted the *anti-political* conviction³ of central and eastern European women's organising, their avoidance of parliamentary politics, and formation of professional, humanitarian, ecological, motherhood, and traditional women's associations, as conservative, conformist, victimised, or anti-feminist (Šiklová 1991; Vodrázka 1994).⁴ They explain this apparent conservatism in terms of women's reaction against communist emancipation projects that forcibly integrated them on a massive, unprecedented scale, into the post-war industrial labour-force, and created a dual burden of waged labour and unwaged household work in their daily lives. However, now that communist regimes have fallen and new democratic gov-

ernments are in place, western feminists attribute a certain “false consciousness”⁵ to post-communist women; what they perceive as their passivity under transformed political and economic conditions. Here I propose an alternative interpretation. I argue that Czech women’s ideas and activities are not simply ideologically anti-communist and as a result blind to women’s “real interests”, (i.e. material and psychological well-being), but that we can also understand them as forms of resistance to the destabilising and often impoverishing effects of post-communist reforms. In this way, Czech women’s rejection of existing politics may potentially be a form of democratisation from below and expression of local dissent in the face of the global spread of neo-liberalism: that is, the subordinate integration of East-Central Europe into the global political economy, the formation of a new Czech neo-liberal state, and the dominance of neo-liberal ideas in political parties and other “political” fora, that has characterised six years of post-communist transition in the former Czechoslovakia and more recently the Czech Republic. Seen from this perspective, western feminist empirical work and theorising about “Eastern Europe” is conditioned by universalist assumptions and categories, which may lead to the analytic exclusion of the full range of democratic potentials that might counter neo-liberal reform and forge foundations for transnational feminist co-operation against its globalisation.

This essay is a critique of notions of democratisation and the discourses of post-communist transition associated with them, as well as a critique of certain developments within western feminism that have contributed to a theorisation of transformation in the former East bloc. I challenge popular feminist analysis of Central and Eastern European women and anti-feminism because I believe it is vital to acknowledge “the different forms that feminisms take and the different practices that can be seen as feminist movements” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994: 20). At the same time, to speak and act effectively, I realise that we must arrive at some common understanding of the term *feminism*. Yet, that understanding, as Karen Offen (1988: 119) heeds, “cannot be derived exclusively from our own culture, it must be not only historically sound but comparatively grounded” and I would add, receptive to differences among women. In the analysis that follows, I attempt to summarise and engage with some of the assumptions and errors of recent western feminist analysis, and with what I consider some of the crucial points relating to the conservative politics of Czech women and the anti-feminism that has been attributed to Czech culture, while situating these in a broader context of post-communist transformation and a globalising political economy.

Methodology

With the goal of advancing the above theoretical and practical agenda, this paper is part of a larger project to develop a critical feminist analytical framework and normative perspective. Indeed this paper gives substance to three dimensions of transnational feminism. First, it assumes a much more compre-

hensive and differentiated concept of globalisation than is usually understood by the economic rhetoric of *globalisation*. The notion of globalisation implied here goes beyond transnational historical materialist theorisations that incorporate the ideological and socio-political globalising forces, but do not analyse the gendered discursive and reproductive context of the spread of markets, commodities, desires, signs, democratic, feminist and other ideas, and the revolution of knowledge and information that are transforming our social, political and economic relations. This feminist formulation contributes to transnational historical materialist analysis, especially insofar as it illuminates the differentiating processes of globalisation, particularly the globalisation of neo-liberalism. This relates to the second dimension of feminist transnational historical materialism, that globalisation constitutes and indeed depends upon different genders and state forms, and thus that resistance and alternatives to neo-liberalism must be differentiated. In short there will be different kinds of counter-movements to neo-liberalism depending upon the space and location.

Thirdly, feminist transnational historical materialism reveals how neo-liberalism as a social mode of reproduction is simultaneously gender-neutral and gender-differentiating, and therefore contradictory. On the face of it, neo-liberalism represents and interpellates the generic individual as an abstract commodity to be empowered through the mechanism of possessive individualism across time and space. This gender-neutrality has the effect of incorporating some elite women into the ideals and practices of neo-liberalism, further differentiating women along class lines and making their solidarity more difficult. In practice, however, neo-liberalism also undermines its own social bases of reproduction and relies on ideologies and state institutions that effectively re-gender the marketplace and family (and other sites of reproduction) insofar as they are kept separate. Some women may suffer the gender-differentiating outcomes of neo-liberal policies that rescind public provision for non-market social reproduction. Consequently, these women, and men similarly situated, are likely to turn against neo-liberalism as they are forced to pick up the slack of the state, while being further alienated from increasingly technocratic forms of politics and political representation. Thus, the potential for new local and transnational democratic social movements is central to the theory and practice of feminist transnational historical materialism. I turn now to the processes of transformation in East-Central Europe and the potentials for Czech women's organising in this context.

Czech women and democratisation

The Czech lands have a rich and recent history of transnational solidarity and networking with the experience of communist-dissidents and their human rights *Charter 77* movement. Transnational citizen co-operation has thrived on the post-communist opening of Central and Eastern European societies and markets, as have foreign investors. Here, of course, the measure and currency exchanged is not the material culture of money, but the relatively free-circu-

lating, "self-regulating", political culture of ideas, language, and movement. East-West feminist co-operation is a constituent element of this post-communist restructuring. Indeed the networking and co-operation between women and women's movements worldwide, which I call *transnational feminism*, is a constitutive dimension of globalisation. Transnational feminism moreover, conceptualises interaction at the level of theoretical ideas and political strategies between different forms of feminism (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; True 1997).

There has been much contestation among Czech women scholars and activists, in the national and international media, and within East-West feminist dialogues, about the meaning and value of feminism in the Czech-lands (Gzowski 1993, Ascoly 1994; Wheatly 1992; Funk and Mueller 1993; Šmejkalová-Strickland 1993, 1995; Šiklová 1991, 1994, 1995). In Eastern Europe, Ann Snitow (1994) declares, feminism has been called a bourgeois luxury, drab totalitarianism and *everything else in between*. I have questioned elsewhere why feminism is received as cultural imperialism from outside, when in contrast, foreign investment, business practices, constitutional models, and tourist onslaught are, more often than not, celebrated (True 1995). Clarification and bridge-building is clearly needed from both East and West perspectives (Heitlinger 1996), and I attempt to do this by exploring a number of western assumptions about Czech women and (anti) feminism in Central and Eastern Europe.

The politics of the market

Feminist empirical work published in the west on the situation of women in the former East bloc, has tended to focus on the extremely deleterious effects of post-communist reforms on women in some of the worst case scenarios and countries (e.g. Russia, the former East Germany), and to generalise these to all women in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In doing so, western feminists have created the category of the victimised "Eastern European woman", not unlike the "Third World woman" that Chandra Mohanty (1991) has located and criticised in western feminist scholarship (see also Jung 1994). It is not that the impoverishment, suffering, and insecurity, which this feminist empiricist work documents is inaccurate (that it does not *exist*), but rather that it conveys and reinforces the popular impression that post-communist social and economic transformation is an entirely coherent, elite-driven, homogenising and determinant process that will necessarily disadvantage women over men.⁶ In my view, the gendered processes of neo-liberal restructuring and post-communist political and economic reform generally are contradictory, in the way they include and exclude different social forces, and are contested by these same social forces.

In the Czech Republic the economic situation is particularly contradictory and under transition, such that conclusions about women's defeat in the transition seem at best premature, and at worst, self-fulfilling. Due to the socialist

state's promotion of women's higher education and economic activity, Jaroslava Štátná (1995) contends that Czech women are less the victims than the beneficiaries of new opportunities in the market economy. In contrast to the experience of most western and former socialist states, privatisation of industry and employment in Czech Republic has actually closed the wage-gap between men and women by ten percent: women's average wages are currently 78% of men's (Cermakova 1996). Women workers constitute forty percent of private sector employment, located primarily in the growing tertiary sector of tourism, financial, administrative services in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. At the same time, in part attributable to the historical legacy of communism, women place great importance on their family roles and are held primarily responsible for family life in Czech society. Thus women entrepreneurs, who made up approximately seven-percent of the labour-force in 1994⁷, may be evidence less for the gender-neutrality of the market, than of women seeking to use the market structure to accommodate their duals roles as mothers and professional workers. This is obviously not evidence that entrepreneurship alters women's structural position within the labour market or within Czech post-communist society generally however. The same could be said for the opportunities that the market offers for flexible part-time and homework and combining family and career, informal and formal work. Julia Szalai (1995) argues that these home-based female strategies of adaption and the family-bound forms of women's self-protection in Hungary are especially important in the transition period and one of the reasons why women are disinterested in feminist or other women's organisations.

Valentine Moghadam's (1992) work on post-communist macro-economic transformations provides another instance of western feminist scholarship foreboding the plight of Eastern and Central European women in order to prove a general theory of women's global economic oppression. She predicts that the integration of former socialist economics into the global political economy will effectively reduce female employment, just as the global integration of third world economies has increased the employment of women workers, on the global assembly line (Moghadam 1992: 62-3). She argues that female labour always plays an essentially more important role in the transformation of employment structures. While this later statement may be true, without specific analysis over a period of time, it is not obvious what the role of female employment/unemployment will play in the restructuring of the Czech economy, and to what extent it will be "essentially more important".

The almost immediate adoption of a neo-liberal reform programme six months after the communist government fell in the former Czechoslovakia, created some unemployment, only half of which is accounted for in registered (3.6%) unemployment figures (Rutland 1993: 126). The other half is generally ascertained to be voluntary departures of women and elderly people from the paid labour force (Murray 1995). Moreover, between 50% and 60%, a disproportionate, but not overwhelming percentage of registered unemployed are women (Paukert 1993). Unions, however, have accepted redundancies in feminised sectors, symptomatic of gender-segregation in the socialist-derived

economy and the gender-bias in Czech society. According to Peter Rutland (Ibid: 125), Czech union officials volunteered comments such as: "a lot of these girls were not really productive workers anyway".⁹ Organised labour's adaptation to neo-liberal policies thus appears to be occurring along gender lines, in continuity with the masculine-bias of socialist economic policy. The only Export-Processing Zone established in post-communist Czech Republic for example, is the textile manufacturing industry on the Western Bohemian border with Germany: not surprisingly most of the workers there are women, often migrants (Murray 1995).

At the same time, the gendered use of woman as a sign or sexual symbol in advertising and marketing of new products and services, in the mass-media and information-exchange is a common and politically-charged device for extending commodification (Williamson 1987: 102-3; Indruchová 1995). This is a particularly powerful and widespread strategy in the emerging markets of post-communist East-Central Europe. Gender difference in the popular culture of capitalism reinforces Czech women's absence from public space and political power. Moreover, it undermines their expressions of agency and equality in entrepreneurial business activity and the importance of their voluntarism in non-governmental organisations and civic initiatives.

Still, the political and economic responses of Czech women do not suggest their capitulation to capitalism or patriarchy, rather, I would argue that their responses are contradictory. On both statistical accounts of labour force participation and accounts of personal preferences, Czech women value their competency in paid employment as well as their family roles. This view is in contrast to arguments such as Elzbieta Matynia's (1995) which state that in Czechoslovakia "one of the most puzzling trends ... post-1989, has been the expressed desire of women to withdraw from the world of work into the world of the household, domesticity, and the family." Further, disputing such arguments about women's retreat to the home, Czech society appears to approve both of self-regulating market principles and a strong state sector for social provision. Since 1989, changes in social policy have been contradictory too. Post-communist social policies have been designed in compromising ways to assist the market transition, but against the background of a neo-liberal philosophy that valorises "the private sphere" and a neo-liberal state that bases its legitimacy on ensuring access to markets and maximising the scope and autonomy of this private sector. Consistent with the state's constitutional gender-neutrality, legal maternity leave has been extended to men as well as women, to become "parental leave", and has been increased from three to four years — probably the longest parental leave in the world. However, exceedingly few fathers have yet to put this gender-neutral provision into practice, and it would seem to encourage women to "stay home". In contrast, to the apparent extension of social benefits, childcare and abortion facilities have been privatised and since 1991 have operated on an increasingly user-pays basis. There was little politicisation of this shift from state to market provision which primarily affects women (Cook 1993; Reuters 1993). Additionally, Václav Klaus's government has suggested that there will be a similar shift to user-pays university

education and health services in the future. For the time being however, housing subsidies and social security benefits for pensioners, single parents, unemployed persons have been reduced only slightly, although they are not at a level that keeps pace with today's market prices.

When western feminists state that Central and Eastern European women are returning to the family (and not therefore "to Europe") they make universalist judgements about the patriarchal nature of the state and the family across communist and post-communist state forms.⁸ During communism, the private sphere was highly valorised as a place of freedom from state domination (Mische 1993). It was also a place embedded in deep-seated notions of gender difference which preserved traditional roles for men and women. The maintenance of conventional gender divisions of labour and power in Central and Eastern Europe, Barbara Einhorn (1993) suggests, has had much to do with the desire to keep the family as a de-politicised sphere, in a form of passive resistance to what was perceived as an ubiquitous state presence. At the same time the communist-era gendered discourses of the family and private life are a potent resource for Czech neo-liberals who want to rewrite the collectivist social contract (Klaus 1991). Post-communist states have capitalised on the way communist state forms constructed gender as a hierarchical social relation, whereby women worked a double day as "workers" for the state and as "women qua women" in family households. In the course of its restructuring, the Czech post-communist state has cut social expenditures and benefits and begun to privatise responsibility for the social safety-net. It has been able to rely upon the continuity of gendered notions of responsibility and social reproduction in transferring their burden to women. Such gendered structures of social responsibility ease the pace of change. They are, moreover, partly the dialectical result of women and men's resistance to the Communist project of emancipation.

Thus, the family is now part of the neo-liberal *totalising* economic zone and seen as a reflection of a market society (Cot: p. 301): the natural order of the market converges with the genetic order of nature in the neo-Darwinian household. However, this process of co-opting private households, and women in particular, to provide goods and services formerly the responsibility of the state sector is highly contentious in a society that strongly approves of collective redistribution and values the family for its relative distance from and limit to opportunism, individualism and commodity power. I suggest that given its history, rather than becoming an *invisible [female] hand* to the neo-liberal market, the family-household might just as well become a symbolic and material *site of resistance* to neo-liberalism and its impoverishing effects.

Neo-liberal restructuring therefore, provokes a "double movement" in post-communist gender relations (cf. Polanyi 1957). On the one hand, some women experience the break-up of traditional gender arrangements by way of market expansion and changed gender relations of production: They seek self-protection from patriarchy in the free market of labour. On the other hand, women experience disadvantage in selling their labour due to the historical, global devaluation of "women's work" and increasing struggle in daily life as they

attempt to balance necessary waged with unwaged domestic work. They seek protection from this unjust market in patriarchal relationships within particular state and family forms. The historical gender contradictions of capitalism are arguably heightened in this era of global restructuring and post-communist transformation. Contradictory articulations of gender-neutrality and gender-difference in emerging neo-liberal structures and post-communist symbolism achieve this function of legitimation.

The politics of the political

The second major assumption that western feminist scholarship has commonly made is that Central and Eastern European women are apolitical and passive, evidenced by their absence for the most part from national democratic institutions.¹⁰ Czech sociologist Jaroslava Štátná (1995) in part accepts this analysis when she suggests that women are passive in the political realm because they largely accept the representation of their citizen interests in the existing democratically-elected government and thus choose to retreat from representative roles themselves. She sees no contradiction between her characterisation of women's political passivity and her prior assertion of women's active entrepreneurship (above). Her view betrays a tacit endorsement of the neo-liberal separation of politics and economics and the discreteness of political and economic life. Alternatively, Julia Szalai (1995) argues that "party-politics is an arena for meeting men's needs in the transition, a channel to correct masculine patterns of occupational mobility. This situation in Hungary, she says, reinforces women's sceptical attitude towards party politics, which they do not perceive as the best place for developing alternative visions of society. I support Szalai's observation, but would add that women *are political*, albeit not in terms of their activity within formal political institutions such as political parties and national parliaments, and that these are in any case historically male-biased indicators of political expression and activity.

Currently, the dominance of neo-liberal ideas in Czech political parties and institutions appears to converge with their male domination. Structural and cultural barriers to gender-equality in political office are not the only issues at stake; leading women who are active in formal politics also generally have a distaste for the economism of the Prime minister Václav Klaus and his governing civic-democratic coalition (Hauser 1996; Vodrázka 1996).¹¹ Ironically, the neo-liberal assumption that women's material and social position will improve with increased participation in the market, is remarkably similar to state socialist prescriptions for women's emancipation. Post-communist citizens are highly critical of the economic form of women's emancipation under communism, but will they be so critical of neo-liberal gender-equity and gender hierarchy? "Yesterday's Althusserians" Meaghan Morris (1992: 29) remarks, "can become today's econocrats". Like marxist solutions, neo-liberal answers do not comprehend the resistance that integrating women into market sphere "is likely to encounter in the household, in the actual marketplace, and in state

apparatuses" (Kabeer and Humphrey 1991: 98). Jaroslava Štátná (1995), among others who celebrate the market economy, does not mention gender discrimination in recruitment, employment and remuneration practices, sexual harassment in the workplace, unequal pay structures, the structural constraints on small business entrepreneurship, *inter alia*, that are beginning to be politicised by Czech women from below (McClune and Stojaspol 1996, Perlez, 1996).

Feminist perspectives illuminate the gender nature of neo-liberal politics. Neo-liberal philosophers Von Hayek (1989) and Milton Friedman (1962) propose not only *private property* as a minimal state-sponsored institution necessary for the successful operation of the market, but also the *patriarchal family*. Free markets depend upon legitimate property regimes, founded on class exploitation, and legitimate family regimes and their non-instrumental social relationships, founded on gender exploitation. Gender identification with constructions of rational and autonomous masculinity and traditional femininity is promoted by neo-liberalism. Indeed, major structural change convergent with neo-liberalism may be mediated through shifting forms of masculine identification; from worker egalitarianism to entrepreneurial individualism (Morris 1992). Neo-liberal theory and practice appeals to men and women in gender-specific ways. It appeals to men whose identities have been historically tied-up with the economic sphere of production separated from the social sphere of household reproduction, private (family) life, and feminised domesticity. In contrast, neo-liberalism may appeal to women who can take advantage of institutionalised "gender-neutrality" and the material and cultural opportunities that the market offers for their liberation from public and private patriarchal structures. Further, neo-liberal discourses may mobilise men, whose masculine identities are undermined by the disintegration of class-based state forms and related changes in gender relations and the gendered organisation of everyday life. They may also mobilise women who have been marginalised by leftist or communist politics and have experienced gender-based exclusion within the class-formations of welfare and socialist states.

The global spread of neo-liberalism is therefore linked to class and gender-specific identities and interests. At the transnational level, the elites who represent the interest-convergence of transnational capital and state forms are predominantly male. Stephen Gill (1990: 8) refers to an international fraternity of elites, who belong to public and private transnational institutions furthest removed from democratic accountability.¹² Thus, it is not surprising that Czech women do not find political parties and the increasingly internationalised neo-liberal state apparatuses as appropriate or desirable places for participatory and civic forms of politics.

Indeed, in the course of my reading and conversations with Czech female theorists (Trnka 1993), two of their main expressed concerns in the transition are the development of broad-based, democratic citizenship, and associated with this development, the maintenance and growth of institutions of social solidarity and reproduction, such as the family, Czech cultural community, private kin and local networks. Obviously there are generational and other

differences among the conscious political expressions of Czech women. However, what is striking about their perspectives generally is a disinterest in masculine national level politics and political parties, scepticism towards institutionalised western feminism and other identity politics, and anti-party political concern with creating inclusionary women's organisations that respond to concrete problems as they arise in everyday post-communist life. There are 33 women's organisations in post-communist Czech Republic, only seven of these relate to politics *per se* or to political parties (Prague Gender Studies Centre 1994, Hauser 1996).

In my view, the so-called anti-political perspectives of Czech women's professional, humanitarian, ecological, motherhood, and traditional organisations make sense *both* in the historical context of communist institutional framing of women's emancipation and in the present context of the implementation of western neo-liberal models for post-communist transitions. Hana Havelková (1995) argues that Czech women's resistance to adopting western feminist ideas and struggles reflects their determination, in contrast to Czech men in positions of power who accept western expertise and models; to maintain their autonomy and defend their life worlds in the process of mediating *westernisation*. Czech women have good reason to be sceptical of western feminism. They know only too well that collective identities and strategies developed in another historical context cannot be easily transplanted. Unlike neo-liberals, they understand that social movements must evolve spontaneously within their own cultural conditions and contradictions. Jiřina Šiklová (1993: 9) discusses the women's organisation *Prague Mothers* as an example of "an informal, spontaneously-arisen organisation of women who are interested in ecological problems and stand up for the interests of women". However, Šiklová explains that "they outright reject feminism and even refuse to discuss it", which they believe is for intellectual, university women. Meanwhile, *Prague Mothers* have set up networks of centres for mothers across Czech Republic, in collaboration with a German women's organisation.

Further, *de-facto* feminists in the Czech Republic are aware that a language with which to articulate problems relevant to them must also evolve locally: Gender, an anglophone word distinguished from sex, is used in the name of the Prague Centre for Gender Studies – a centre of resources, research and networking for women's organisations in the Czech Republic – but is explained in relation to the activities that develop in and around this Centre (Hradilkova 1993). *Gender* does not have an ahistorical, universal meaning. Ann Snitow (1994) tells the story of opening a bank account for the Prague Gender Studies Centre with Jiřina Šiklová on behalf of the Network for East-West Women: the teller asked if the organisation these ladies were representing was a brothel. Concepts and discourses undergo change in their translation from other languages and other contexts (Gjuricova 1991).

Czech women are also equivocal about the noted individualism of western feminism. This pertains particularly, I would argue, to American feminisms, especially liberal feminism. They perceive this brand of feminism to be a contradictory embrace of masculine power, politics, and individualism with im-

PLICIT biases towards families, men, and social solidarity generally. Šiklová (1993), hints at the egotism of western women's movements: "Sometimes women in the West abandon their traditional positions in society, rooted in their own culture, and give up the typical social roles of women without asking who will take over their tasks". Havelková (1995) notes the resistance of western social reality to feminist achievements. I interpret her observation to mean, for example, that in spite of western feminist impact on public legislation the material conditions and social status of many women have not necessarily improved.

Last, Czech women are critical of the western feminist emphasis on women's *political* representation and *public* achievement. This incredulity derives from women's experience of the impotency of decision-making and representative quotas in the communist state and their affinity for the Czech-dissident model of *anti-political* opposition as well. Post-communist women's organisations share, with the former *Charter 77* dissidents, a desire to expand spaces for citizen participation and initiative. They do not want to *capture the state* or that form of centralised power, but rather, to transform the civil society, the sources of social power within which the state operates within. In a post-communist context, where western analyst Stephen Heintz (in Woodard 1995) observes, there is "democracy at the macro level ... but a lack of decentralisation of political power", this post-revolutionary strategy of transformation from below is vitally important, to a critical response to depoliticising and unaccountable neo-liberal national and transnational politics. It is also remarkably similar to the practical philosophies of women's movements worldwide, the networking and co-operation between, which I call *transnational feminism*. The so-termed anti-political associations and organisations of Czech women are regarded by Czech female scholars themselves as their own kind of virtual or *de facto* feminism, in spite of the fact that many of the women involved state themselves to be "anti-feminist", or simply "not feminists".

Conclusion

In *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi argued that while the nineteenth century "laissez-faire economy was the product of deliberate state action, subsequent restrictions on laissez-faire started in a spontaneous way. Laissez-faire was planned; planning was not" (1947: 141). Thus, in the late twentieth century, protective counter-movements against the destructive effects of the global market are likely to emerge spontaneously as a result of contradictions that develop in specific structural and cultural contexts. Collective responses to the social ruin and human divisiveness of the self-regulating market are provoked by post-communist state attempts to make it operate in totalising, totalitarian ways. Social movements are mobilised in molecular fashion, creating new political spaces, social bonds, and regulatory institutions to constrain and direct globalising forces. The questions posed here are whether neo-liberalism in the Czech context will produce a feminist counter-movement to

protect society from the vagaries of the global market? And consequently, whether Polanyi's double movement is a useful way to conceptualise the context for Czech women's organising, East-West feminist co-operation and the development of transnational feminism?

Socialism, Polanyi (1957: 234) writes is "essentially the tendency, inherent in an industrial civilisation to transcend the self-regulating market by consciously subordinating it to a democratic society." Socialist states did not fulfill this inherent tendency Polanyi attributed to socialism because they failed to allow democratic struggles to occur among social forces, autonomous of, albeit related to, class forces. It is wrong today also to impose western blueprints for East-Central European democratic transformation, or an Anglo-American-derived, global model for economic development. The Czech lands have a long history of linguistic, political and ideological domination. They rightly fear, and we can learn from this scepticism, situations where "ideology precedes reality" (Havelková 1995). There is not space left to conceptualise the alternatives to current neo-liberal politics and economics that might emerge through the development of post-communist feminist challenges, supported by transnational feminist movements (see also Molyneux 1994). Czech women themselves request the time and space to think through their major social and economic transformation (Grunell 1995). Their experiences offer important lessons for rethinking politics, dissidence, and feminism for the West as well as the former East; especially urgent in states where neo-liberal policies have transformed the nature of politics and the structural relation between public and private. 1990s feminism and neo-liberal reform have "coincided with the growing apathy of most women", especially poor, married and single, working mothers (Benn 1993: 238). Democracy has become a democracy of the market, of consumers, taxpayers and owners, of those who possess individual economic possibilities (Ibid: 235) and is pervaded by technocratic experts transnationally. In the context of this "privatisation of politics", Melissa Benn (1993: 238) argues that "professional feminism has come to substitute demands for equal representation with politics itself". Like Czech women, many women in western countries shun the ruthless self-regard of career women and men who participate in public life (Ibid: 239). This serves to remind us that feminism, if it is to thrive, must not be devoid of pro-active responses to actual political struggles. As part of broader democratic movements, feminism must further strive for an analytical perspective on neo-liberalism and the globalising political economy that illuminates their process of creative destruction: how destroying old solidarities and forms of politics, in fact, opens up new potentials for building democratic civil societies. Finally, feminism must develop a normative position that critically acknowledges our global situation of unequal power relations and is committed to transforming this situation democratically.

Notes

1. I begin this essay with the full paragraph context of a quote from Havel's dissident writings consistently misquoted by several western feminists as: Václav Havel says "feminism is for a few hysterical women...". This act of misrepresentation is indicative of some of the worst aspects of knowledge produced in the West about East-Central European women and feminism.

2. I use the term "western feminist" to refer to the literature produced on the former second world from the first, although I find it problematic: first, because to extent that the East bloc has disintegrated, and the bipolar world order has also collapsed, it is no longer clear to me what the "West" is, or what it means to be "western" exactly; second, "western feminist" tends to homogenises the several varieties of feminist theory and practice that exist in different countries, with different political and cultural histories, but that are broadly labelled "western"; third, to be called a "western feminist" implies a level of privilege and access to dominant knowledges that is not shared equally by those who come from western countries and may call themselves "feminist". For example I have gone to East-Central Europe as a graduate student, non-American, English-speaker who has travelled a long way and I recognise that those identities constitute particular and distinctive positions in themselves, positions that are not easily discernible within the category of "western feminist".

3. I have avoided the term "anti-politics" here which is often used to characterise the conservative politics of central and eastern European women. *Anti-politics* was coined by Václav Havel and Gyorgy Konrad to describe the moral philosophy of eastern European independent initiatives and civil society during communism. It is often misinterpreted as meaning "apolitical" when it is really intended to convey opposition to the particular Communist Party brand of politics. As Melvin Croan (1989, 190) writes, "anti-politics" is meant to convey an unconditional rejection of the ruling elites' [communist party] kind of politics. Therefore, I have chosen to dispense with the term and

emphasise the political nature of east European civil society movements, including women's organisations. Croan writes further: "Propogating "anti-politics" is thus itself a political tactic, contrived to disarm the wielders of power through the ever so slightly disingenuous assurance that their intellectual critics do no seek their jobs."

4. The small numbers of women represented in national political institutions is commonly given as an example of East Central European women's oppression and the backwardness of their democratic states. Yet, the political representation of East Central European women is not relatively low when compared with that of women in western states such as the UK, the USA, or other comparatively wealthy states such as Japan.

5. I realise that this orthodox marxist term is problematic insofar as it assumes as discernable division between science and ideology, appearance and reality, and therefore between true and false consciousness of interests and identities. Of course in a positive theory of ideology one does not assume such a division, rather ideology, identity and interests are understood to be actively constructed by groups as an ongoing social and political process. Yet, in the western feminist literature on East-Central European transitions there is often an implicit or explicit accusation that women do not know their identities and interests (yet), when they should in the context of profound transformation of their societies.

6. This is consistent with the feminist view that "globalisation" is a homogenizing, structurally-determining process that "will almost certainly shrink the public space available for women to exercise their democratic rights as voters, citizens and workers...and will reinforce patriarchal attitudes, privileges—and practice" (Menon 1996: 16).

7. Statistical Yearbook of the Czech Republic 1995, Czech Statistical Office 1995.

8. Alena Heitlinger notes, in her correspondence with the author, that the western feminist claim that women are "returning to the family" is not only empirically inaccurate in the Czech republic, but incoherent as well.

She points out that at least three generations of Czech women have grown up in families with employed mothers, and that consequently, one can hardly talk of "returning to full-time domesticity" when it has not existed in the past fifty years.

9. Sexism in labor unions is common throughout East-Central Europe. In Poland, the Business Community and the Unions oppose the costs of maintaining the benefit structure of the socialist system which is associated with women's maternity leave and childcare. Solidarity workers in Polish factories expressed the view that there are going to be fewer jobs and they want them. When interviewed male workers said that there should be no question about it; women cost too much." Speaking the language of neo-liberal economics they argued "we're technologically advanced, we want to be privatized, we want to do everything we can to make ourselves attractive to foreign investors and to Polish companies... women should voluntarily take themselves out of the work force and go home". Men expect to benefit from marketization, if necessary, at the expense of women. (In Center for Democracy and USAID 1992).

10. Few women hold high public office in the Czech Republic, although 30 out of 200 parliamentary deputies are women.

11. Good examples are; Květoslava Krínková, the only female minister in Czechoslovak government, 1990-92, Dana Němcová, former Charter 77 dissident and also parliamentarian 1990-92, and Petra Buzková, currently member of Parliament and vice-chair of the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD).

12. Richard Falk (1993) estimates that 98% of those currently engaged in capital-finance operations on a global scale are men. Here, feminists, like left critics, heed the regressive dynamics of political-economic globalisation. Mona Harrington (1992), for instance, warns us, that beyond the bonds of the male-dominated liberal state lies an even more powerful and elitist white, male economic managerial class unaccountable to "the people" especially those marginalised by the swift flight of capital and other globalising processes.

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