

RATIONAL ECONOMIC (WO)MEN: CZECH FEMALE MANAGERS IN THE POST-SOCIALIST ERA

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Introduction: A Western Hegemonic Discourse of "Loss" and "Passive Victimization" and its Central and East European Counter-Hegemonic Challenge

In a 1995 article titled, "New Opportunities in the Czech Republic," published in *Transition: Events and Issues in the Former Soviet Union and East-Central and Southeastern Europe*, Jaroslava Štast'ná wrote:

Since 1989, Western social scientists have largely driven debate and have transferred – often uncritically – their concerns about and concepts of the role of gender in Western society into the context of Eastern and Central Europe. They usually assume that women are the losers in the transition process, frequently portraying them as passive victims of democratization and a market society (p.24).

Indeed, Štast'ná's contention is far from groundless. For instance, in her 1992 edited collection, *Superwoman and the Double Burden: Women's Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*, Chris Corrin described the women of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as "caught in what could be seen as 'the worst of both worlds'" (p.253). In her 1993 edited work, *Democratic Reform and the Position of Women in Transitional Economies*, Valentine Moghadam contended, "...not only are women among the principle losers in the restructuring process in the short term, but the longer-term impact may be a strengthening of patriarchal concepts concerning men's and women's roles" (p.342-343). In 1996, Zillah Einstein in the second volume of *Research on Russia and Eastern Europe* identified Central and European women as "the clear losers in the economic transition" (p.106). In the same volume, Metta Spencer declared that "no longer can anyone reasonably challenge the conclusion that women are bearing a disproportionate share of the disadvantages in the transition to capitalism" (p.280). More recently, the United Nations in its *Transition 1999: Human Development Report for Europe and the CIS* affirmed that "one of the biggest setbacks for the countries in transition, as they have attempted to transform their centrally-planned economies into more market-oriented ones, has been a marked increase in gender inequality in the political, economic and social spheres" (p.66).

In general, Western feminist scholars have drawn these conclusions by focusing their attentions principally upon "women's status" indicators (e.g. male/female wage differentials, political participation, occupational distribution, etc..) from which they inferred a number of "patterns of [female] marginalization" transpiring throughout the region including deepening gender divisions in the economic sphere (e.g. unemployment and discrimination), the "feminization" of poverty, the marginalization of women in the political arena, and the deterioration of women's reproductive and legal rights.

Rather than aligning themselves with (and amplifying) the conventional wisdom of Western feminist scholars regarding the trajectory of "gender in transition," many Central and East European scholars have contested these characterizations. Their challenge operates on three levels: first, they reject what they view as Western feminist scholars' co-optation of their experiences into a Western paradigm of patriarchy (i.e. historical homogenization); second, they point to the limited understandings of Western feminist scholars who overdetermine the shared nature of Central and East European women's experiences (i.e. historical and cultural homogenization); and third, they challenge the universalization of Central and East European women as "losers" or "passive victims" in the post-socialist era (i.e. social homogenization)¹.

Among Central and East European scholars, Czech feminist scholars have been (and continue to be) particularly vocal in this challenge. Czech sociologist Jiřina Šiklová has repeatedly deemed the post-socialist responses of Central and East European women to be configured by a legacy of state paternalism, not patriarchy, as well as by the cultural, economic and political particularities of their respective societies. Certainly, Šiklová is among the key proponents for the recognition of *difference* between women of the region. I actually recall a conversation with Jiřina during the summer of 1997 in which she described her 1995 journey by train along with other Central and East European delegates to the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. For Jiřina, it was a unique opportunity to talk at length with other women of Central and Eastern Europe about their pre- and post-socialist experiences. I recollect Jiřina emphatically proclaiming that she *knew* they were different, but she didn't fully realize *how* different until this time. Marie Čermaková, also a Czech sociologist who heads up the Gender team at the Institute of Sociology in the Czech Republic, has affirmed that transition has meant little disruption in Czech female labor; in fact, she posits that many Czech women have improved their labor market position, suggesting

that Czech women's gains outweigh their losses. And, Jaroslava Štast'ná, with whom I began, echoes Čermaková and further maintains that a key element of Czech social development lies in the emerging self-determination of Czech women – "following their own economic and individual interests" (p.61).

It is this tension between West-East that was the impetus for the research on which this work is based because out of this discord come more questions than substantive answers about the post-socialist lives of Central and East European women. More specifically, are Central and East European women *agentially* responding to political, economic and societal transformations and if so, how? In what ways are their respective historical and cultural legacies salient (or not)? And, how might their disparate social locations (i.e. gender, class) affect their experience in and of a post-socialist world?

Reframing the Nature of Inquiry

Towards providing *some* answers to these questions, I methodologically reframed the nature of inquiry – from universalities (i.e. Central and Eastern Europe) to specificities (i.e. Czech Republic), West (i.e. outsider) to East (i.e. insider), and objective (i.e. positivist) to subjective (i.e. interpretivist) – in an effort to theoretically reinform understandings of "gender in transition." This paper utilizes, in part, personal narratives collected between September 1999 and October 2000 from 26 Czech female managers² (age 35 years of age or older)³ employed in the light manufacturing sector⁴ of Prague, Czech Republic about transformations (and the lack thereof) in their work and family lives⁵ in the transition from socialism to capitalism. Relying upon narratives, I suggest, illuminates not only how individuals *make sense* of change(s), but the contingencies of interpretation and response. In accordance with more recent treatments of narratives, I construe narratives as "an ontological condition of social life" in which ... "people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives" (Somers and Gibson 1994:38-9).

Although individual biography is inherent in each of these Czech women's narratives, this inquiry centers upon the convergence of understanding embodied in their stories which is derived from a larger narrative frame upon whose "logic" these women draw. This collectively-imagined story, I find, is largely an assimilation and reification of market rhetoric, *heavily* infused with a neoliberal subtext, originating in

the public discourse⁶. This rhetoric symbolizes socialism's alternative, offering the means to empowerment and ultimately, emancipation. In order to illuminate the contours of this public discourse, I draw upon public articulations of marketization from throughout the 1990s, most especially from Czech[oslovak] dailies. I contend that public discourse and personal narratives overlies one another as evinced by these 26 Czech female managers' mutual incantation of *freedom, opportunity, self-reliance, responsibility, and independence*. However, among the critical consequences of this invocation is that gender, in which "woman" constitutes a category of constraint and difference, is rendered invisible – incompatible with a hegemonic neoliberal discourse whose theoretical subtext is about freedom and opportunity. Moreover, it is a fabrication in which history and culture achieve significance primarily in their contemporary rejection.

In this paper, I recreate this collective account, highlighting its ideological possibilities and impossibilities. I begin by detailing how these 26 women, via newly-created openings in the economy's structure, gained access to loci of authority becoming, in socioeconomic terms, part of the new elite in the post-socialist Czech Republic— now marked as *winners – success stories* of the Czech transition – with the majority (21) earning higher than 92.28% of the total Czech populace and 96.41% of Czech women⁷ as of 2000 (Czech Statistical Office 2001). I posit that success in the new market economy is dependent upon the possession of certain human capital requisites and the adoption of particular behavioral ideals. The latter contingency commands a transformation of roles and responsibilities, not only in the market, but also within the family and towards the state. I show that this assumption of market ideology in their self-representations as "successful" individuals in the new market economy mutes the possibility for acknowledgment of gender identity. In addition, this reconciliation of ideology and experience seemingly renders history and culture extraneous as individual's behavior in the free market is driven solely by their rationality.

Windows of Opportunity

The establishment of new economic, social and political relationships will offer greater individual responsibility, freedom and even power.

-Václav Klaus⁸, *Literární Noviny*, April 26, 1990
(1991c:16)

Every one of us has the chance to seek out new comparative advantages and to realize the limits of one's possibilities.

-Václav Klaus, *Lidové Noviny* July 22, 1995

For Czechs, management, transliterated identically from English to Czech, is a post-socialist discovery, yielding new occupational pathways and demanding a different, unfamiliar kind of expertise⁹. During the early 1990s, foreign management courses and degree programs quickly established themselves locally in a rush to fill the knowledge gap. Despite the lack of know-how, companies, especially newly-arrived multinationals, in dire need of managers, sought individuals who could learn to manage on-the-job. Companies relied heavily on human capital as the best measure of individual qualification for a position in management. Consequently, university-educated individuals with a knowledge of English, French and/or German were in greatest demand¹⁰. In this way, *windows of opportunity* were opened, enabling certain individuals to access positions of wealth and power.

Of the 26 managers in this study, virtually all are in some manner part of an emerging elite, having accessed middle and top level positions in management. For these women, there is a dramatic disjuncture between their past and present lives as impossibilities became possibilities. In Sabina's words:

...1989 meant such a major break in a person's life, because suddenly, new possibilities opened up for you and suddenly, you could see that it is possible to find something in a completely different environment, in another dimension...a person's idea of their future life completely changed.

Emilie metaphorically explains, "after the revolution, they removed the lid from the pot and some, at once, had the opportunity to move up, and some did really move up." In Herma's mind, economic reforms have created a "better world" since "before 1989, with the same education and with the same knowledge, opportunities were few, now we have lots of opportunities."

Remarkably, only seven of 26 have experience in the manufacturing industry itself. Lucie, Miluše, Ivana, and Tylda have stayed in the same industrial sector and, with the exception of Ivana, the same industrial sub-sector; however, all four have changed companies and management positions. With their jobs eliminated due to company shut-down and merger, respectively, Lucie and Miluše were, in essence, pushed out. Ivana and Tylda, in contrast, made self-initiated lateral moves in management to a company of the same industrial sector. Three (Karela, Dora, Petra) continue to work at the same manufacturing firm they were employed at prior to 1989; however, Karela and Petra have advanced to

management during company privatization and restructuring¹¹. The remaining 19 managers accession to management is, by Western standards, unconventional. Effectively, these women *leapt* from either an internal or external location into management. An *internal leap* involves a promotion within a firm from a secretarial/administrative role to a managerial position. This leap occurs during company expansion. *External leaps*, in contrast, are of two variations whose starting points, although both external, are different. This leap into management originates in either: 1) an already established professional career (e.g. doctor, lawyer) or 2) an unrelated position and/or industrial sector. The work histories of Irena, Margareta and Heda exemplify these three occupational jumps:

Internal Leap: Irena

Irena was employed for a year and a half by a research institute prior to 1989. At the time of the revolution, she was on maternity leave. Although she had not exhausted her maternity leave, Irena opted to return to the labor market in 1990. While she could have returned to her former job at the research institute¹², Irena wanted to use her English-language skills – now a possibility in the changing economic environment. She responded to an advertisement in the newspaper and was subsequently hired as an administrative assistant for a newly-established multinational firm. As the company grew, she was offered her choice of managerial posts. She chose the job of personal director.

External Leap – Type 1: Margareta

During her final year of study at university, Margareta began working as a reporter. She remained at this same newspaper for years as a reporter. Shortly before the revolution, however, she moved to another newspaper offering better wages. She soon became editor-in-chief and remained at this newspaper agency until 1992. Wondering about her "value" in the new market economy, Margareta, at this time, began taking courses in communications and marketing. With the assistance of an employment agency, she interviewed for 12 jobs. From several offers, she decided upon a position as a communications manager with a formerly Czechoslovak, newly privatized, multinational company.

External Leap – Type 2: Heda

Heda graduated from university in 1989 and took a job at a transport company, arranging the transportation of various goods for export. After a year at the company, she, by chance, came across an advertisement for a position as personnel coordinator at a newly-established multinational firm. Unhappy with the physical conditions of her job at the transport company (i.e. poor air quality, dirty work environment) and possessing language abilities (i.e. English and French) incommensurate with the job demands (for German), Heda applied for and got the job of personnel coordinator despite knowing "nothing at all" about human resources.

While the leaps of Irena and Heda can be understood as progressions, this is not as readily apparent in Margareta's case. Six other women, like Margareta, were already pursuing professions in law, medicine or academia. In many societies their actions might be considered as occupational regression; however, this is

not the case in the Czech Republic (nor was it with its Czechoslovak predecessor). In fact, it is, to the contrary, perceived as an advancement – a step upward to greater social status, influence and remuneration. Managers, especially those employed by multinational firms (15 of the 26 managers in this study)¹³ are among the most well-compensated individuals in the post-socialist era in terms of monetary (i.e. wages, bonuses, etc...) and non-monetary benefits (e.g. company car, cellular phone). Moreover, in most instances, these women are leaving professions such as medicine and law which became heavily feminized during the socialist era, resulting in their social and financial devaluation. In addition, the healthcare and education sectors, plagued by privatization and restructuring difficulties, have lagged well behind others in the financial revaluation of its professions. Thus, the motivation for these career disjunctures can be located, in part, in the social and/or financial valuations of certain professions.

The Market as Freedom

In a free society, my success (and in close correlation the living standard of myself and my family) depends in no way upon my hypothetical capabilities, knowledge or skills, but solely and exclusively on how I take advantage of these abilities.

-Václav Klaus in *Česka Cesta* (1994:122, *my emphasis*)

The possibilities are greater today and not everyone knows *how to take advantage* of them.... -Heda, *my emphasis*

In the new market economy, macro-economic upheaval produced *windows of opportunity* – or what might otherwise be understood as structural openings – to sites of authority. This, however, is only a partial facet of the inner workings of the economy. Human capital delimited the pool of individuals eligible for admission, but the question of why and how particular individuals were able to seize opportunity is unanswered. A response to this query necessitates attention to the micro-level vicissitudes of the economy and more specifically, to the subjective meanings which underlie individual action.

For these 26 female managers, their success in the new market economy is fundamentally an agentic accomplishment relying upon: first, the adoption of “ideal market behavior[s]” – specifically self-reliance, responsibility and independence and second, an acceptance of the market in its ideologically-prescribed form (Dilley 1992:23). Significantly, agency is realized by these managers, not only in the

market, but also in the family and towards the state. Their ideological assimilation of the market encompasses the totality of their lives in their roles as workers, citizens, wives, and mothers. As Miluše declares, "...freedom is independence and freedom is responsibility, in everything." Whether society or self, all can be reduced to the market alone.

"Before the Communists Were on Top, Now the Capitalists are on Top" ¹⁴

...the single basis of our new free society...it requires above all responsibility and in first place for ourselves alone.

-Václav Klaus in *Česka Cesta* (1994:121)

Throughout the transition, public discourse has been permeated with pleas and admonitions to the Czech(oslovak) populace regarding their behavioral adaptations (and lack thereof) to the free market. Throughout the transition Czech(oslovak)s have been publicly chastised for past mistakes, but are offered a capitalist repentance¹⁵. Other public proclamations appealed to Czechs to discard their immature, infantilized socialist ways in favor of mature, adult behaviors[s] – deemed imperative to the success of and success in the new market economy. For instance, in an early February 1990 *Lidové Noviny* article, Marek Boguszak, Ivan Gabal and Vladimír Rak wrote of "...the necessity to finally start to 'behave like adults,' to take responsibility for one's life and independently make decisions about it." Meanwhile, Miloš Zeman declared in a July 1990 article in *Lidové Noviny* "...in the process of economic reform we are first and foremost trying to change the economic behavior of individuals." Figuring prominently among the laudable behaviors are self-reliance, (personal) responsibility and independence.

The 26 managers in this study have incorporated these "ideals" of self-reliance, responsibility and independence into their worldviews, appropriating public market rhetoric into their own personal narratives. Inherent in this act of acceptance is an act of rejection – a dismissal of their socialist referents, most especially dependence. In the post-socialist Czech Republic, self-reliance, individual responsibility and independence take primacy in the hierarchy of values – their socialist oppositions now devalued. Success, individual and societal, is contingent upon the assumption of these "ideal market behavior[s]." In their own understandings, articulated and implied, these 26 women see themselves as representing this success and its privileges. Significantly, they frequently depict their own behaviors in binary opposition to

a categorical and marginal "Other." This dichotomization enables managers to identify *who they are* and *who they are not*. This classificatory schema, is mapped on to a larger interpretive frame about *who succeeds* and *who fails*.

In the narratives of several managers, the polarization between self and others is openly stated. For example, Lucie explains, "there are people who can't get used to it [i.e. capitalism and democracy]. They were accustomed to always having someone lead them. I'm happier when no one is directing me. I am doing what I want, but I have to take care of everything." Zdenka declares, "I think that few people have this feeling of responsibility....I have a strong feeling of responsibility, personal responsibility, that is that I'm responsible for myself." As Emílie espouses, "the problem in this society here is that everyone relies on the state solving everything or that someone, something will resolve everything. There isn't enough of this feeling of responsibility for one's life, like with me, generally." Margareta's sentiments echo those of Emílie, "for a lot of people, its difficult to live because they haven't forgotten the past in the sense that before, the state resolved everything for them." She later adds, "I don't receive anything from the state. And, I think that's all right. I feel good that I'm responsible for myself and my family." In Heda's view, "people here are still not used to having to take care of themselves....every person should take care of himself....I think that competent, healthy people should have to work and should have to take care of themselves and not want help from the state"; she would rather "rely" on herself and her family. In some instances, either the "self" or "others" is an implied, rather than spoken, category of distinction among managers. For instance, Tylda claims that the "entire logic of this society" has changed; she now agrees with Václav Klaus that "everyone must take care of themselves" whereas before 1989, "the state took care of everything, it arranged your life for you." Julie comments, "in the past the state was like a mangy hen which took care of everything in its way, though ridiculously, but it took care...people weren't required to take care of themselves and it was, of course, wasn't good at all." The subtext couched in all of these remarks is that what is *good/superior* (i.e. of value) is autonomy and responsibility, qualities which *I* have; what is *bad/inferior* is their deficiency, qualities *others* do not have.

I often say that homo economicus rests in each of us who impatiently awaits his awakening....I refuse [to accept] that, in us, within himself, a satisfied homo sovieticus dominates who has grown accustomed to the conditions of the past and doesn't want to be emancipated from them.

-Václav Klaus, in *Reflex* June 5, 1991 (1991b:21)

...I do not doubt that East Europeans are part of the tribe called homo economicus, for I am sure they react to the same incentives as their counterparts in Western countries. Our tremendous task, therefore, is to create an environment which will make it possible for all economic agents to behave rationally (in the economic sense).

-Václav Klaus, from a statement at a meeting organized by the Bretton Woods Committee and the Commission of European Communities, May 23, 1990 (1991a:26)¹⁶

Among the core assumptions of neoclassical economics¹⁷, in which market rhetoric in the Czech Republic finds its roots, is that of *homo economicus*, otherwise known as "rational economic man". Homo economicus is an "economic animal driven by rational self-interest"¹⁸ (Tickner 1991:191). As such, the environment (e.g. society) has no influence on homo economicus; society and the economy are autonomous. Homo economicus is a human being who acts without reference to history, culture or society – a selfish, unrestrained individual, indistinguishable from any other. Instrumental rationality reigns supreme as the guiding mechanism behind the behavior of homo economicus. Individuals as rational actors strive to maximize their personal gains in the ultimate pursuit of self-betterment. For Czechs, the appeal of homo economicus lies, to a great extent, in its negation of socialism's collectivist tenet. For Czech female managers, their adherence to market mandates manifests in their self-constructions as homo economicus'. This ideological conformity transforms them into genderless agents focused upon the enhancement of their productive capacity as workers in an ultimate attempt to foster market growth¹⁹. For these 26 women, gender disrupts the coherence of a market-based narrative whose critical emphases are opportunity and choice. Gender, a social construct with its category of constraint, woman, is an irrationality – inconsistent with the market's liberal precepts of individual rationality and unrestrained freedom. Homo economicus is the embodiment of success; failure is the socialist woman.

Genderless Careerists

The foundation of a successful economic program must unequivocally be the principle of individualism.

-Václav Klaus *Mladá fronta Dnes* January 12, 1991
(1991b:97)

In their discursive representations of self in the economic arena, these 26 female managers are purely individual workers, unqualified by social differences. One of the most intriguing expressions of this individualism is found in female managers' co-optation of the terms "*kariéra*" and "*kariérista*," meaning career and careerist, respectively.

Prior to 1989, *kariéra* existed in Czechoslovakia, however, its connotations were politically derogatory and overtly gendered. As Emílie claims, *kariéra* was a "profane" term. According to Ester, under socialism, a *kariérista* was "a person who climbs over others' backs," exploiting party contacts in order to gain "key positions." Such individuals were most often male. This self-serving conduct was, in a paradoxical sense, deemed undeserved, "indecent" and "objectionable" on both public/political and private/personal fronts. Publicly, the notion of *kariéra* was antithetical to the socialist values of collectivism and egalitarianism. As Eva Věšíňová-Kalvodová elucidates, a "political climate" prevailed which was "hostile to individual differences and that did not acknowledge individual achievement" (1998:362). However, for the many Czechoslovaks who were trying to, in Sabina's words, "escape from the communist society" by retreating into "the circle of the family," the political adherence (i.e. to the communist party) upon which the *kariérista*'s ascent depended was personally aversive. As Irena explains, "if you wanted to have a good job, then you had to be in the party and those people in the party advanced because of it [i.e. party membership]."

In the post-socialist era, however, the meanings of *kariéra* and *kariérista* appear to be undergoing a transformation, evidenced by the invocation of these terms by several of the managers in this study in their own personal accounts of work and in their more general commentary about the possibilities of the market for Czechs. For Czech female managers, *kariéra* is a possibility in the new market economy. As Sabina describes, "...before [1989] the family was essentially the one possibility – a person had the possibility to build something that was only his....And now perhaps it isn't, because a person has the possibility to build a career...." Irena contends that "it's [now] the fashion to talk about career." The political and gendered nuances of *kariéra* and *kariérista* are now being discarded. In their contemporary

usage, these terms are no longer linked negatively to politics and men, but positively to economics and individuals. Furthermore, the basis for achievement is now individual merit.

Discrimination, Contradiction and Complicity

The notion of a "genderless self" among Czech female managers also emerges in their reactions to inquiry about sex discrimination. Although they affirm the existence of sex-based discriminatory practices in the Czech Republic (and former Czechoslovakia), most managers dissociate themselves from the experience. For these managers, sex discrimination is an obstacle *other* women face. As Miluše comments, "I haven't encountered it in my own life. I hear about it. In the news they write about it. On television they talk about it..." Hátá complains that women are often not treated by their male colleagues as an equal partner, but quickly adds that "I personally...don't feel this treatment in which someone would behave in a discriminatory way towards me because I'm a woman." Lucie asserts, "I don't have the feeling that someone would not give me an opportunity or somehow hinder me [because I'm a woman], definitely not." As Miloslava Umlaufová, President of *Asociace Podnikatelek a Manažerek*²⁰ (i.e. Association of Female Entrepreneurs and Managers), explains it, "...I think that definitely here there are [i.e. wage discrimination]...[but] if this woman is capable, has an effect, is a good partner for them [i.e. men] in what she works with them on, then they don't regard her as 'you're a woman'...they regard the work results, as such, as they are and they don't notice that it is a woman." Managers alleged immunity from sex discrimination poses a provocative challenge to the wealth of statistical data²¹ illustrating the pervasiveness of sex discrimination in the Czech Republic (and former Czechoslovakia)²².

This denial of "personal" disadvantage while concomitantly acknowledging "group" disadvantage is a phenomenon which is not temporally or culturally unique to Czech women; in fact, Faye Crosby (1982) found this to be common occurrence among employed American women. In her theoretical accounting of these perceptions, she argues that the "notion of deserving" is firmly entrenched in categorical conceptualizations because in its very "essence"²³ the reference of justice (and therefore, injustice) is to a "class" of individuals, rather than to a single individual (Crosby 1982:162). Accordingly, she reasons:

...one can sustain more easily the claim that a class of individuals have been denied their just deserts than the claim that a particular individual has not received her or his just deserts. When one asserts that a particular woman is the victim of sex discrimination, one treats the individual woman as a member of a larger class, woman (Crosby 1982:162).

Indeed, it is plausible that the same mechanism is at play in the Czech context. Lacking in Crosby's explanation, however, is an identification of the larger narrative frame in which "justice" is embedded and its conceptual linkages. In the Czech milieu, this construct is situated within the confines of a market narrative steeped in neoliberalism and is implicated in its conceptual repertoire of freedom, opportunity and choice. It is in this way that for these 26 Czech women *being a woman* becomes an irrelevance.

Being a "Good Citizen"

We know that it is our permanent responsibility to fight against the incessantly expanding state which is the dominating tendency of the twentieth century, a century of socialism with an entire succession of confusing adjectives. In the Czech Republic, we want to show that the return to a truly free societal order is possible.

-Václav Klaus, from a speech at given at Toronto University, February 2, 1997 (1997)

Market rhetoric in the Czech Republic delineates not only the "ideal worker," but also the "good citizen." Adhering to neoliberal prescripts, the state and its citizens fundamental orientation is towards the market and the promotion of its development²⁴. This precept is based on the assumption that market efficiency is best insured if "...market forces operate, and products and services are not subsidized, heavily regulated or produced by the government" (Sparr 1994:1).

Essentially, states and citizens exist primarily *for/to serve* the market. While under socialism, the economy was, in many ways, subservient to the Czechoslovak state, in the post-socialist economy, the proposed dynamic is reversed. The socialist state assured the common good through an intertwined complex of economic (e.g. guaranteed employment) and social rights. Although rhetorically constructed as universal, social rights were principally directed at mothers and families; entitlement to such rights (e.g. childcare subsidies, maternity leave, family allowance, etc...) was conditional on having worker status. In this way, the state created a system of mutual and engendered reliance; itself dependent upon women to labor and women dependent upon it to mother. In the post-socialist Czech Republic, proponents of

neoliberalism seek to sever this tie, allowing the market, instead, to determine its labor requisites and to meet the "needs" of its laborers. In this twist, citizenship is subsumed by the market. Citizens and workers are, in their conceptual connotations, ideologically conflated as invocations for self-reliance, independence and responsibility discursively slip between them; being a good citizen effectively means being an ideal worker and vice-versa. Drawing upon the work of Daniel Drache (1992), Janine Brodie writes, "...the good citizen is one who recognizes the limits and liabilities of state intervention and instead, works longer and harder in order to become self-reliant" (1994:57).

In their collusion with neoliberal ideology, Czech female managers are no longer looking to the state for support. In a market economy, there can be no such expectations of the state. Czech citizens must "begin to rule over" their own lives, asserted Václav Klaus (1995c). As Josephina pragmatically explains, "we lived in debt. It wasn't free. It had to come from somewhere." Capitalism is establishing itself and "it [i.e. capitalism] means you don't get anything...", states Zdenka. Lucie recollects:

...there were definite advantages [in the past]...there were family allowances and the like, but you know it isn't right. I think I don't expect anything from anyone. A person must be self-sufficient and they have to learn in life how to take care of everything. I don't expect help from the state or anyone....

Herma also declares, "I don't expect anything from the state." Emilie and Miluše can't even fathom what to expect. Miluše comments, "I don't know like what I should expect from the state."

For most of these women, their present expectations (or lack thereof) of the state are contingent upon their dissociation from the past and its universalities. In her reflections upon socialist state support Josephina declares, "it's a fact that there were a lot of advantages [i.e. before 1989] which now there are not... but, you know what, everything that was before the revolution, I don't like..." Julie believes that mothers (and families) should draw upon their own, rather than state, economic resources and therefore, she advocates the gradual, but complete elimination of state support:

I think that if I decide to have a child, I would know that I can take care of this child, that I'm economically strong enough....In the transition from that [i.e. socialist] regime you can't cancel everything at once because a lot people, though, would collapse economically. Nonetheless, I think that definitely, gradually it should be cancelled.

Ester has only one "need" from the state:

I don't need anything from the state [other than]...to create a legislative framework...in order for firms which don't have a chance of survival to finally go bankrupt, so that the

economy is cleaned up in order to begin growing because if there is growth, then, of course, the entire situation is going to be better. That's the one thing I would like from the state.

Their stance is absolute; where the state once resolved everything, it should now resolve nothing.

Reconciling Reproductive Labor: Changing Possibilities, Changing Values

...before [1989] the family was essentially the one possibility – a person had the possibility to build something that was only his....And now perhaps it isn't, because a person has the possibility to build a career.... -Sabina

In first place [today] is knowing how to make money and knowing how to enjoy oneself and live well, but the family goes all the way to the back...*for people the ranking of life values has changed*...whereas before the values were, in my opinion reversed, people were more oriented towards family, to family life. -Irena, *my emphasis*

During the socialist era, coercion and constraint were the unspoken correlates of productive labor. All Czechoslovaks, men and women alike, were obligated to work; ignoring this state mandate meant punishment for the crime of parasitism. Socialism, among its effects, disrupted the historically and culturally rooted division of traditional gender roles of the male breadwinner and female homemaker as women were forcibly drawn into the labor force. For Czechoslovak men and women, however, this dislocation was public and partial; women became supplemental wage earners, but their roles as wives and mothers in the private sphere²⁵ endured with little alteration²⁶. Nonetheless, in spite of its inherent inequities, the family was for many Czechoslovak citizens, "an escape," as Sabina describes – a sacred domain out of the reach of a profane state. In the sanctified realm of the home, reproductive labor was work of value. For Czechoslovak women, their roles and identities as wives and mothers merited preservation rather than opposition. Thus, their emancipation became an impossibility.

In the post-socialist era, the valiance of freedom for these Czech female managers has shifted; the market now represents freedom and productive labor is deemed of highest value. Among the surprising ironies of the Czech Republic's transition to the free market is that women's emancipation becomes a possibility. While socialism stabilized the gender division of labor in the home; capitalism possesses the potential for its destabilization.

In a strange paradox, capitalism, unlike socialism, addresses individuals solely as productive laborers, not as reproductive laborers. Efficiency, competition and growth constitute the preoccupations of the alliance between neoliberalism and capitalism. Non-market activities (i.e. reproductive) are construed as empty of economic worth, and therefore, immaterial to economic inquiry²⁷. When this divide is crossed, as in the case of Czech female managers, neoliberalism holds no answer; its only identity of value is that of the worker. In the market, their identity as workers, rhetorically and ideologically conjoined with choice and opportunity, is now what merits preservation.

In neoclassical economic thought, market activity is without boundaries – the availability and elasticity of labor are infinite. Although the “rules” outside the market are ambiguous, they must be in keeping with the theoretical directives of the market. As such, reproductive labor, an infringement upon productive labor, must be contained. Heda recollects the timecards of the past which limited work hours to 42.5 hours a week. Now a manager, there are no time cards and she can come and go freely, but it is now Catch-22 in which you can’t leave until the work is done and “the work is never done.” In the transition from a command to market economy, 8.5 hour days have become 10 (or more) hour days for female managers. Moreover, work is brought home, impinging upon evenings and weekends and constricting the potentiality for pursuit of non-market activities. As Karela tells it, “less time must be enough for women” to do work in the home. Julie deems this high time investment in productive labor as being about responsibility in order to succeed; as she asserts, “if you want to achieve something, if you want to work in management, then it isn’t eight hours daily. It’s about responsibility....” A woman, fully devoted to her career can’t manage everything on her own, claims Sofia, and trying will just make a woman ill.

Czech female managers are responding to market imperatives (i.e. of availability and flexibility) by agentically redefining the productive/reproductive labor dynamic. In an attempt to strengthen and solidify their economic foothold in the market, these women are – rejecting culturally-scripted gender roles – agentically devising methods of liberation from their “double burden” and establishing what Irena characterizes as a “*rational* division of labor”²⁸. Their strategies are of two variations: in the first, they relinquish their household duties (e.g. cleaning, babysitting) to lower-class women, effectively converting reproductive labor into a market activity; or in the second, they radically revise the gender division of labor in the household in favor of a more equitable distribution²⁹.

Making Reproductive Labor into Productive Labor

Among the innovations of the market economy is the availability of workers for hire to do household tasks such as cleaning, babysitting and food preparation/delivery. For those individuals and families with the financial resources, many household tasks can be performed (for a fee) by individuals outside of the family. As Irma affirms, "financial security and the like makes it possible for us such that these things [i.e. domestic demands] are not so miserably difficult." With the increasing array of goods and services (since 1989), "you can now make life a little easier," says Sofia. HÁta and Sofia exemplify how high-status Czech women are adapting to the free market by appropriating domestic duties to lower-status women. As HÁta recounts:

...when I started to have greater work responsibility, I realized that it isn't in my power to balance [work and family] so that I would, at least, have a weekend because I worked from morning to evening every day. On Saturday morning I went shopping, started to cook, in the afternoon I washed, hung things out to dry and on Sunday I spent the entire afternoon at the ironing board because a man needs one or two shirts daily. And I said, this isn't a life. I went to work on Mondays horribly worn out.

HÁta hired a woman to do household cleaning and ironing. She adds, "Without her I think that it would be very difficult to coordinate everything together because to be a perfect mother, perfect employee or boss, to have everything at home perfectly cleaned at home – it's nonsense!" Sofia also hired outside help, claiming that "it isn't possible to balance everything." She elaborates, "I don't have this [cleaning] woman so that I can lay in the garden and get a tan. I have this woman because I have other work which I must also do. And this work she can't do for me, nor anyone else, but that work [in the home] she can do for me."

Revising Gender Roles and Ideologies

Emilie initially hired household help to assist with childcare and cleaning, her ideological discomfort, however, resulted in more dramatic modifications to the gender distribution of labor in the home. As she elucidates:

it was a help for me [hired household help]. And it came to my mind, I wasn't very comfortable with that because I knew that my sons see that while they don't do anything at home, there is an external person coming to the flat and cleaning the flat and I felt its

not a very good example for them. So, I wasn't comfortable with that..... I discussed it with them [i.e. husband and sons] and that's how it all started. And I told to my sons, "Look if we get an external person...I have to give part of my salary to that lady so it will influence the family budget." And I told them "Look, if you want in-line skates or whatever, we will not be able to go for a vacation each year to the seaside or something like that" and I told them that "if each of us do a small part...we are four people in the family and we have a small flat and if we divide the job it's fair enough" and they agreed that it's fair enough. So, I am trying to, I don't want to make cleaning ladies out of them, of course, but I want them to understand that something happens in between, as I say, from the time that you take a dirty shirt and put it in the bathroom until it appears, by some miracle, again washed and ironed, folded properly on your shelf. So, I want them to understand that something is there and somebody has to do these things – and I really think it's very good for life³⁰.

For Milada and Miluše the intensifying demands of their jobs meant less time at home. In their minds, this change constituted legitimate grounds to insist that their husbands share more of the household responsibilities. Milada claims that her husband realized he was going to have to help with the cooking and cleaning if they were going to get done. Up until 1990, Miluše's husband was "unconcerned with household labor" – up until that time "he did nothing." However, when Miluše became part-owner of a company in 1990, she found herself no longer able to attend to many domestic tasks and "part of these concerns" her husband had to "take on to his shoulders." This was a difficult adjustment for her husband and provoked a marital "crisis." However, in time, he came to understand and accept his new responsibilities.

Conclusion

In the year 1990 a process of economic, political and societal transformation was launched whose common goal was to limit the role of the state in the economy and in other spheres in which those activities are usually carried on in a free market society. At the opposite pole of limiting the role and accordingly the responsibility of the state was the strengthening of the freedom and responsibility of every individual.

-Jiří Jonáš, *Lidové Noviny* September 1, 1995

Among the core objectives of this paper was a reconsideration of "gender in transition" by beginning from the standpoint of women's experiences (Harsock 1987; Smith 1987). Significantly, while from a Western (feminist) standpoint one may see elements of loss (e.g. in mothering) and/or victimization (e.g. discrimination) in their experiences, from the local standpoint of Czech female managers this is not the view. In their self-portrayals, these women are among the *winners* of economic restructuring. The

market is their *ally*, rather than their adversary with its neoliberal "logic" meriting its acceptance not rejection.

Making visible these local perceptions, albeit profoundly important, is not enough; understanding their contextual and processual nature is also critical. Towards this end, I've sought to identify their ideological groundings and to illuminate the salience of these ideological underpinnings in configuring the interpretive schemata of Czech female managers. For these 26 women, their realities echo the market's theoretical abstractions – reality and ideology are intertwined³¹. They have agentially seized new opportunities created by the transition and consequently, have reaped hefty financial and social gains. For these women, the market is the source of their transformation and ultimate liberation not only as workers, but also as citizens, wives, and mothers. Ironically, however, the character "woman" is absent from this liberatory tale. Moreover, it is a story seemingly immune to variances of history and culture. Whether gender, history or culture, all are incompatible with a publicly-articulated market ideology with strong neoliberal currents. In its natural "logic," the market offers freedom and opportunity to self-reliant, responsible and independent individuals without reference to past or place.

The elucidation of how dimensions of experience are read through the lens of discourse(s) renders a depiction of post-socialist realities of far greater veracity, in which the contingencies, complexities *and* contradictions become recognizable. It is through these narrative disentanglements that one can truly begin to comprehend the workings of empowerment and disempowerment and therefore, more effectively engage (and seek the transformation of) gender inequalities.

ENDNOTES

¹Importantly, these efforts to draw attention to the "differences" of (and between) Central and East European women in many ways find resonance with the critiques launched by women of color (for example, see Collins 1991) and Third World women (for instance, see Mohanty 1989 and Sandoval 1991) against the hegemony of Western feminist discourse.

² Locating managers to participate was achieved by snowball sampling and by cold calling manufacturing enterprises. The majority of these interviews were conducted at the manager's work site. Nearly all of the managers participated in two interviews ranging from 45 minutes to two hours.

³ Therefore, constituting individuals required to "adapt" to new economic conditions over the course of their work lives.

⁴ This refers to the production of "light" products (e.g. textiles, glass, pharmaceuticals, food) versus "heavy" products (e.g. steel, automobile). The intention of this industrial and sectoral confinement was to minimize the potentially confounding effects of industrial composition (e.g. feminized) and/or development (e.g. insurance) and to maximize the generalizability of findings. Notably, light manufacturing has played a principal, if not primary role in the Czech(oslovak economy), drawing in the most workers, both male and female, of any industry pre- and post-1989. Moreover, transitional processes of growth and contraction typify this industry creating gain and loss potentialities for its workforce.

⁵ This entailed an array of questions concerning pre-1989 recollections of family and work, work history, motivations for working, desire/ability to change jobs, aspirations, supports, state policy, women's vs. men's experiences, etc.... All respondents were encouraged to talk freely rather than to adhere to a strict question-answer format. At the close of the first interview, respondents were briefed on the orientations of the second interview in order to provided them with advanced opportunity for contemplation. All dialogue between respondents and myself, unless otherwise noted, was in Czech.

⁶ See Weiner (*unpublished manuscript*) for an extended discussion of the rhetorical particularities of Czech economic liberalization.

⁷ Based upon 2000 monthly wages (Czech Statistical Office 2001).

⁸ Václav Klaus has been neoliberalism's most ardent proponent in Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic) in the wake of the 1989 Velvet Revolution. He served as Czechoslovak Minister of Finance from 1990-1992, Prime Minister from 1992-1997 and has been head of the Civic Democrat Party since 1998.

⁹ In crossing the divide between planned and market economies, management, in its theoretical and practical meanings, is transformed. For socialist Czechoslovakia, management transpired at the state-level – top-down and centralized. Within enterprises, individuals known as "*ředitelé*" (i.e. directors) and "*vedoucí*" (i.e. managers) were mainly responsible for insuring that production directives, formulated by the state, were implemented and fulfilled. Interestingly, the occupational titles *ředitel/ka* and *vedoucí* are still in currency, but they have been infused with new meaning. In post-socialist Czechoslovakia, and now the Czech Republic, *ředitel/ka*, *vedoucí*, and the post-1989 import *manažer/ka* are roughly equivalent in their professional reference. However, in the new market economy, management is a decentralized task undertaken at the corporate and/or individual firm level. No longer the state's henchman, managers act with great autonomy as analysts and strategists whose primary objective is to increase company profits. Meanwhile, initiative has replaced obedience as a preferred quality in managers.

¹⁰ English, French and German were languages taught at the post-secondary level. At the elementary and secondary educational levels, students learned Russian.

¹¹ Dora is the most atypical of the female managers included in this study. She has been employed by the same company for her entire adult life. During the socialist era, she was promoted from accountant to finance director and has remained in this position. The responsibilities associated with her job have decreased as the company has downsized, laying off more than 70% of its workforce. Dora is the sole remaining employee in the company's finance division which originally employed four individuals.

¹² At this point in time, Irena's employer was legally obligated to allow Irena three years of parental leave and guarantee her the same (or an equivalent position) upon her return.

¹³ While there are intimations from several of the managers in this study that multinational corporations are more female-friendly than native-owned firms, evidence for this relationship is only impressionistic. A further breakdown of these 26 managers into loosely-formulated categories of management subfields shows that the majority concentration (10) is in the area of human resources/personnel, 4 are in finance/accounting, 4 are in business, and there are 2 in each of the four remaining areas – sales, marketing, production/quality, and communications/education. Whether sex-based occupational segregation, and possibly occupational stratification, are at play here is, again, an unknown – not yet ascertained statistically and unrecognized by the female managers in this study. Factors including the newness of these occupational subfields to the Czech corporate landscape and the human capital particularities of the Czech(oslovak) labor force at the outset of transition have complicated efforts at assessing whether and how this type of labor is gendered.

¹⁴ Emilie

¹⁵ As Jiří Slama wrote in an early 1990 *Lidové Noviny* article, "neither businesses or citizens are without fault for state paternalism....Today there is no longer this dependence on the government in place. We have to stand on our own feet and take our future into our own hands." In a March 1995 piece in *Lidové Noviny*, Václav Klaus reminded Czechs that "communism wasn't a coincidence, nor was it a one-time event which fell upon guiltless victims without their fault."

¹⁶ Virtually all of Klaus' international public oratories are reproduced in print and/or electronically (<http://www.klaus.cz>) in Czech for the consumption of the Czech(oslovak) populace.

¹⁷ Marginalist neoclassical economists theoretically advocate what is frequently termed neoliberalism.

¹⁸ As J. Ann Ticker elaborates, "rational economic man is extrapolated from assumptions about human nature that have their origins in Western liberal political theory. Rational economic man is a Hobbesian man whose passions have been tamed by the rational pursuit of profit" (1991:194).

¹⁹ Market growth is assured by two simultaneous, interrelated and on-going processes: first, by individuals seeking to acquire more goods and services by increasing their "social contribution"; and second, by competition among producers to satisfy consumer demands (Demartino 2000:5).

²⁰ This non-governmental organization was founded in the Czech Republic in 1990. As of August 2000, it had a voluntary membership base of 300-400 members.

²² In the 2002 volume 2/3 of *Gender, Rovné Příležitosti, Výzkum* (i.e. *Gender, Equal Opportunity, Research*), a quarterly bulletin published by the Gender and Sociology team at the Czech Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences, Alena Křížková, drawing upon statistical data collected by the Czech Statistical Office for the year 2000, finds that male/female wage differentials are, in fact, most pronounced between men and women employed in managerial positions with female managers on average earning 54% of the average earnings of men of the same occupational category (2002).

²³ "The essence of justice, says the moral philosopher Perelman (1963) is that one must treat like alike" (Crosby 1982:162).

²⁴ As Václav Klaus (1990) publicly explained, "the government can only very little...take care of the framework of conditions for a functioning market, the stabilization of prices and the health of state finances. The government should not want to know what is going on in individual enterprises and organizations and it should not at all want to advise about what should be produced and to whom it should be sold."

²⁵ As Jeff Weintraub points out, the "grand dichotomy" of public/private distinction is deployed by scholars in variable ways which "often generates as much confusion as illumination, not least because different sets of people who employ these concepts mean very different things by them – and sometimes, without quite realizing it, mean several things at once" (1997:1) In my own invocation of these conceptual categories, my intent is primarily to draw attention to the economy of labor and its gendering with productive labor being extrafamilial (i.e. public) and conventionally male, and reproductive labor (e.g. childcare, cleaning, etc...) being intrafamilial (i.e. private) and traditionally female.

²⁶ Although socialist theorists such as Fredrich Engels claimed to hold the solution to this gender inequity by transforming domestic labor into a "public industry," the Czechoslovak socialist state failed to challenge male roles and its practical attempts (e.g. maternity leave) to reconcile women's reproductive and productive labor demands; instead, it reinforced and naturalized gender inequality (Engels [1884]1972:221).

²⁷ See, for instance, Elson (1991, 1992) and Waring (1988) for feminist critiques of this assumption.

²⁸ This is not applicable to the seven managers who lack a cohabiting male spouse or partner.

²⁹ There were several managers at the time of interview who had not instituted either strategy. However, these women did express frustration about the balance between their productive and reproductive labor which I imagine to be the stage preceding its redesign.

³⁰ During this portion of her interview, Emilie spoke English; thus, this section required no translation.

³¹ "Ideology and reality are 'semi-autonomous' for ideology is brought into a relationship with social institutions and practices through the interpretive processes of social actors" (Dilley 1992:21).

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