

# 1 Expropriated voice

## Transformations of gender culture under state socialism; Czech society, 1948–89<sup>1</sup>

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Gender culture under state socialism (in the case of Czechoslovakia 1948–89) has lost none of its topicality despite that period's sliding further into the past, indeed it may even have gained some: the generation of men and women with no first-hand experience of those times has now reached maturity, and many doubtless believe that they are shaping their lives in a new age, including its gender dimension, in a new way, different from the past. However, some do appreciate that here, as in other regards, there is something like a local cultural legacy, whether seen as a direct consequence of the forty years of gender politics of the communist government, or as the resumption of an indeterminate cultural tradition with roots in the remoter past.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately after the 1989 revolution, there was a rash of works dealing with the legacy of state socialism as it affected the position of women in society. These works were mostly driven by an urge to draw international comparisons after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and so to formulate the specifics of the female experience and of policies relating to women within the socialist system. Typical of these early reflections were some fairly generalized theses about 'women in Central and Eastern Europe' and 'under state socialism' as homogeneous concepts, broadly typified by the remarkable discrepancy between the claims that communist regimes had merely exploited women without liberating them and that post-socialist women were in a better position, or were stronger, than women in the West (e.g. Corrin 1992; Deacon 1992; *Hypatia* 1993; Funk and Mueller 1993; Einhorn 1993).<sup>3</sup> Following in the wake of these works came studies of gender relations in post-socialist countries as part of the political and social transformations taking place on a broader scale worldwide (Moghadam 1993; Waylen 1994; Kaplan *et al.* 1997).<sup>4</sup> Since the end of the 1990s, works on the social standing of women in Central and Eastern Europe have looked back on communist gender policies and the socialist experience chiefly to provide an historical backdrop against which to foreground the current transformation of gender relations, their object not, then, being any systematic examination of gender in the state-socialist era (Gál and Kligman 2000; Einhorn and Sever 2003; Kay 2007; Kraft 2008).<sup>5</sup>

Since the 1990s, the numbers of theoretical and historical studies dealing with gender culture in the period of state socialism rather than with the status of

women has been steadily rising. To date, there have been few works that sought to grapple theoretically with individual aspects of the gender culture of state socialism and its transformation since 1989, though there were already some in the early years following the fall of communist regimes in East Central Europe (Watson 1993; Molyneux 1994; Sieg 1995), and again in the new millennium (Ferree 2001; Goven 2002; Fodor 2002; Oates-Indruchová 2003; Brandes 2007; Havelková 2009). In recent years, there has been a burgeoning of historical works. Their focus has been primarily on the changes of approach to women's emancipation in communist policies and on cultural discourses of gender. Works in the former vein evidence the complexity of gender culture in the period of state socialism by the simple fact of their sometimes contrary conclusions: on the one hand they record the shift from the 1950s disruption of the traditional gender order to the return to traditional roles from the 1960s on (Harsch 2007; Fidelis 2010), while another view exposes a largely unaltered conception of the gender order in certain areas (as in, for example, Asztalos Morell's 1999 study of the gender aspects of Hungarian agriculture) and the unequivocal opposition of communist power to any autonomous women's movement from the very outset, since the late 1940s (Nečasová 2011). Works examining cultural discourses of gender have mostly dealt with representations in cultural commodities and the products of propaganda (Evans 2000; Bren 2010), but also with the broader political contexts of opposition to communist power (Penn 2005) or everyday life (Penn and Massino 2009).

The last decade has seen the appearance of a number of books concerned directly with Czech society from the gender perspective and wholly or in part for the period of state socialism, but it is in itself symptomatic that they appeared only in English, whether inside the Czech Republic (Oates-Indruchová 2002; Hašková and Uhde 2009), or beyond its frontiers (Saxonberg 2003; True 2003; Feinberg 2006; Sokolová 2008; Bren 2010). This is, then, a continuation of the odd situation in the 1990s, when many of us engaged in intense debate on the gender specifics of Czech society arising out of the era that had passed; however, it took place practically away from Czech scholarly debates, and consequently, its content, or even that it took place, is little known even within the local feminist community.<sup>6</sup> Most post-1989 gender-oriented publishing in Czech has been about the current situation or the transition that preceded it (e.g. Hašková *et al.* 2007), although many do contain implicit reflections of the period of state socialism (Havelková 1992, 1995b; Chřibková *et al.* 1999).<sup>7</sup> Since 2000, that is, following a break of sorts, there have been more studies on gender culture under state socialism (e.g. Šmausová 2011 [2006]; Havelková 2007; Jechová 2008, 2009).<sup>8</sup>

The present volume – the output of a three-year team project – aims at an innovative perspective in its theoretical and methodological approach, and also in its maximally differentiated approach to 'gender and socialism'. In terms of historical continuities and discontinuities, the project's focal point is the state-socialist period in its own right, not as the backdrop to interpreting the period of transition. This has made it possible not only to place greater emphasis on continuities and

discontinuities with pre-communist history, but also to trace the inner discontinuities of the state-socialist era from a gender viewpoint.

The first consideration is to stress the concept of gender order and so overcome the tendency to reduce gender to the usual question of 'the position of women under socialism'. The position of women is only ever a subsidiary manifestation of the given gender order, which our investigations have studied at its basic levels of analysis – the symbolic, institutional and personal. However, we have called the object of our research *gender culture*. Although our research was founded on the assumed existence of a gender order and has operated with gender as the key term in the analysis, it is not presently possible to examine and document it in its systematic entirety. The studies collected in this volume each focus on a selected area, which allowed us to investigate only specific practices and symbolic manifestations. We call these together 'gender culture' in the anthropological sense of a wide-ranging social practice.

The second consideration, our differentiated approach, also goes with the gender-based perspective that assumes that a tissue of gender-based organization is present in every part and at all levels of the life of a society, and also that the thoughts and actions of all members of a given community, irrespective of sex, participate actively in shaping it, whether in sustaining and reproducing it or continuously modifying and so transforming it. The project sought to apply the differentiation in two ways: first, foregrounding plurality and the broad spectrum of 'subjects' or 'actors' involved in co-defining gender culture, and second, identifying the various phases of gender politics in the era of state socialism. This approach seeks to get away from the still prevailing binary reduction of the actors involved in the 'regime' (as actant) on the one hand, and on the other, the 'people' (or, as applicable, women) as the object being acted on; but it also seeks to turn aside from the no less dominant idea – where gender culture is concerned – of the state-socialist era as a monolith undifferentiated through time. It would be proper to record here that other works of history have appeared in recent years that have equally sought to break down the old binary approach, also called the 'totalitarian' model,<sup>9</sup> though in them the gender aspect is practically absent.

Multidisciplinary composition of the research team has enabled us to illustrate the diversity of gender cultural practice in different areas of society, depending, amongst other things, on the positioning of the actors in relation to 'power' and 'society' at a given time and what space they had for negotiating with power. The chapters in the volume review the gender-relevant legislation produced by the ideologically non-homogeneous legal community (Barbara Havelková) and expose the brutally instrumental treatment of women's organizations by the agents of communist power (Denisa Nečasová) at one end of the scale, continue to the ambivalent theorizing and practice of sexologists (Věra Sokolová) and the authors and choreographers of the Spartakiade mass performances (Petr Roubal); the array of actors continues with canonical literary figures (Jan Matonoha) and the most widely read works of literature (Libora Oates-Indruchová), film-makers and film critics (Petra Hanáková and Kateřina

Kolářová) and individual women (Kateřina Záborská). The object of this differentiated approach was not of course merely to create a mosaic, but to arrive at a synergy. Apart from the expected (1) varying degree of agency in the various spheres and (2) the undoubtedly significant differences in the gender composition of the actors in each sphere, what also clearly transpires from one study to the next is that (3) the gender culture of the state-socialist age was moulded by clashes between the direct action by communist power with various forms of negotiation and resistance; (4) the fact that in many respects we are talking about an 'unfinished project' is not down to communist power alone, but often also to the very actors who stood in opposition to it; (5) in the majority of areas actors can be found with their own pro-women or feminist agendas.

It must be emphasized that this approach neither trivializes nor denies the all-embracing framework of power and ideology. On the contrary: it has made it possible to identify with far greater precision the specific nature of particular restrictions along with the strategies employed to circumvent them, negotiate round them and break through them.<sup>10</sup> The present approach contributes to the diversification of perspectives on gender culture of state socialism advanced, particularly, in the recent volume edited by Shana Penn and Jill Massino (2009), which looked at the everyday negotiations by women, or in the more specifically focused work of Małgorzata Fidelis (2010). These publications drew attention to women's agency, thus shifting the perspective from the emphasis on the regime to the women. The present volume aims at an investigation of a plurality of actors co-creating the gender culture of state socialism.

Besides dismantling the blinkered 'regime versus women' viewpoint, the present project has aimed to dismantle the customary conception of the state-socialist era as undifferentiated through time with respect to gender, and has had the additional objective of outlining a periodization of the age with particular reference to the specific areas examined in the individual studies – in terms, for instance, of developments in gender-relevant legislation or changes in the ideological content of Spartakiade compositions. It has transpired that (1) different spheres have their own specific turning points; (2) right across the chapters the important fact emerges that the usual stereotypical image of gender politics under socialism only applies to the situation in the 1950s, indeed really just the first half of that decade. The dramatic and relatively early changes that state policies underwent in later decades have broadly failed to reach common knowledge. One might cite the telling example of the stereotypical view of mothers snatched from their babies and driven back to work, so at variance with the actual (and internationally unique) evolution of maternity leave, which from the 1960s on was constantly extended until it became the longest in the world. (3) Periodization of the Czech state-socialist age in gender terms may change nothing to the basic division into Stalinism, de-Stalinization, thaw, Prague Spring and Normalization (i.e. 1969–89), but it does suggest that the various stages may be assessed in other ways than by the usual political, non-gendered approach. By way of example, take the body of evidence that the 1960s, rightly considered the freest in ordinary political terms, actually brought new limitations

to women's freedom with such phenomena as the objectivization of the female body. (4) In terms of comparison with the West, this volume also illustrates some asynchronous development between the two: with the modernization of gender-relevant legislation beginning here almost 20 years earlier than in the West, so too the backlash (against the policy of emancipation), which for the United States Susan Faludi dates to the 1980s (Faludi 1991), began in the late 1960s.

The crosswise linkages among the chapters has led to a revision of certain theories or theses that have made regular appearances in previous literature on this or that topic. To put it at its strongest, certain 'myths', more precisely stereotypes, need to be refuted: not that they are totally untrue, but their constant repetition as only partial truths rendered certain things invisible, notably the very complexity of the case, thereby inhibiting other possible interpretations. Two claims in particular strike us as most obviously 'canonized': one on the plane of gender as a social category, the other concerning gender as a symbolic category. The former is the thesis of the 'top-down imposition of emancipation', the latter that of 'feminism as an import from the West'. In this Introduction we suggest corrections to both claims, at the same time generating a different conceptual grasp on a modified theory of gender culture in the age of state socialism.

### **Gender as a social category: the myth of the top-down imposition of emancipation**

The range of works that dealt with gender issues under state socialism even before that system came to an end may come as a surprise. They have to be mentioned for the simple reason that even in contemporary feminist-oriented literature the cliché has taken hold that there was no gender-relevant research under socialism, though accessible sources disprove that claim.<sup>11</sup> Home-grown works from the period were primarily examinations of how the social status of women was evolving in terms of employment, education or women's standing within the family; theoretically they were framed by the concept of social roles, and in terms of methodology there was a clear predominance of quantitative studies. The literature being published at the same time abroad was concerned more, and critically, with official social policy and ideology and their impact on the status of women. However, even this type of literature took as the basic actor the vaguely defined 'regime' or 'power elites', with women as the object of their actions. What we do not find here is any approach to gender in the sense of tracing how sundry social actors were involved in the construction, reproduction and naturalization, but also modification, of gender culture patterns, or to how gender polarity is used by different actors in its function of natural symbols and thus instrumentalized in various cultural, social and political contexts.

Despite the difference in their analytical approach from today's gender research, each of the chapters in this book takes this earlier body of works into consideration; what follows here is an overview of those works that have a bearing on gender as a social category, though, broadly speaking, they deal

almost exclusively with the position of women. Besides numerous papers and research reports that appeared primarily in the journals *Demografie* (Demography) and *Sociologický časopis* (Sociological Review) a number of books were also published. Below, we list those whose very title indicates the focus on women; the list would be much longer if we included works about the family. Chronologically, the publications on women are: Brejchová *et al.* 1962; Radvanová *et al.* 1971; Matulová and Jarošová 1976; Jirková 1982; Možný 1983; Hájková 1983; Šolcová 1984; Bauerová and Bártová 1987; Bauerová 1988; not to be forgotten are also such items as Libuše Háková's chapter in a groundbreaking collective volume on the social structure of socialist society (Háková 1966).

All these works deal both with how the position of women at work changed over time, foregrounding *de facto* all the problems with which sociology is concerned today, such as horizontal and vertical segregation or unequal pay, and with their family role and the problem of harmonizing the two roles. As for the position of the woman within the family, particularly noteworthy is the contradiction that is to be found in almost all these works, namely the conservation and reinforcement of the idea that women's primary responsibility is the raising of children alongside the unexpected attention to the question of the internal democratization of the family. It has to be said that in their assessments and proposed solutions the positions of the authors – and let it be noted how far and away women dominate in this field of research – are by no means at one, and that would seem attributable primarily to the very nature of the case, that is ongoing transformations of the social status of women. These works seek causal connections, evaluate statistical data and opinion polls, and look for explanations for any new phenomena. Even here, though, political changes have also left their mark: while in the 1960s discrimination against women and the problems brought in with new policies came ever more openly to the fore (notable in Háková 1966), publications from the period of Normalization (1969–89) essentially make light of the problems and are more by way of an apologia for socialist policies vis-à-vis women (e.g. Bauerová and Bártová 1987).<sup>12</sup> Academia's potential for social criticism was also blunted by the radical weakening of the State Population Commission in that period (Havelková 2013). The findings of specialists were duly incorporated in compendia intended for the general public. Symptomatically, only women were of any interest: see *Encyklopedie moderní ženy* (*Encyclopaedia of the Modern Woman*; Klabouch 1964 and *Encyklopedie 1966*) or *Encyklopedie mladé ženy* (*Encyclopaedia of the Young Woman*; *Encyklopedie* 1978). Omission of the subject of men is typical of this output. Now and again the views of men are noted, but are not a topic of gender-relevant enquiry. One exception to this is a work by Ivo Možný (1983). It contains chapters such as 'The man in the family of an employed woman' and generally handles the dynamics of gender relations within the family in ways quite close to the modern sociology of gender.

The second type of publications includes those where there are no grounds for suspecting limitations imposed by censorship or self-censorship. These are foreign publications with either a broader Central and Eastern European focus

and containing, *inter alia*, chapters on the position of women in Czechoslovakia (e.g. Connor 1979; Wolchik and Meyer 1985; Moore Jr. 1987), or publications dealing specially with Czechoslovakia, whose authors had either emigrated (such as, Köhler-Wagnerová 1974 and Heitlinger 1979) or had been resident in the country for some time as aliens before returning to their home countries (most noteworthy here is Hilda Scott 1974). Yet Alena Köhler-Wagnerová's assessment of socialist policy as related to women also reads relatively positively compared to her experience of West Germany. Alena Heitlinger is more critical and pays more attention to the poor enforceability of rights. Hilda Scott considers conditions of women's emancipation in Czechoslovakia to be fairly good by international standards, though she does also go into the 'disillusionment' that came in the wake of the initial expectations and points up the factors that slowed the emancipation project down, including tendencies to 'go into reverse'.<sup>13</sup>

It cannot be said that either factually or in the identification of the basic problems of the status of women the home-grown output differed in any significant way from uncensored works, although it undoubtedly differs in the measure and nature of any criticism, and it has to be noted that the second type of writings mentioned is written from feminist positions, while works from inside Czechoslovakia sought to be an alternative to the feminist approach and generally disassociated themselves from it. One fundamental finding is, however, that in neither type of works arising during the state-socialist period is the politics of emancipation *per se* seen as a problem, something imposed upon women inorganically from above; on the contrary, any criticism is directed more at the failure to bring the emancipation project to fruition (Scott) or at the unfree backdrop (Heitlinger). Only with post-revolutionary hindsight does the inclusive conception of 'the top-down imposition of emancipation' come to the fore, and that now needs subjecting to new critical debate.<sup>14</sup>

The narrative of policies imposed on women from above reflects the fact that the communist authorities had literally annihilated the earlier women's movement and, with that, any chance for women to articulate their demands themselves, as it were 'from below'. As Denisa Nečasová demonstrates herein and in an earlier monograph, not even the women's organization newly set up under the aegis of the state was treated by the state as a partner in the shaping of gender policies, but merely as an instrument by which to promote its own political aims among women, and it explicitly did not want this organization to act from a position of advancing women's interests (Nečasová 2011). There is also no doubt that at the same time policies aimed at women and what in today's terminology could be broadly called the gender agenda began to be managed by the state. Nonetheless we find this concept theoretically imprecise and misleading for two reasons: first, it conceals the fact that management of this agenda was delegated on a major scale to experts, by which it became largely *decentralized*. What then matters here is that decisions and recommendations emanating from specialist circles cannot now be described as 'central', given that the position they took was more that of 'intermediary position providing a link between state-led ideology and policy making on the one hand, and shop-floor experiences on the

other', as Ildikó Asztalos Morell has put it (Asztalos Morell 2007: 42). Hana Havelková (2013) shows that the Czech situation is also covered by Asztalos Morell's thesis that those experts did not entirely yield to political rhetoric, since they came onto the scene at a time when 'power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of the technocratic elites' and ideological rhetoric was open to question and revision (Asztalos Morell 2007: 43). A major part of our case is that the community of specialists was a mediator between political goals and people's everyday experience. Hana Havelková showed in her recent work that even such a state-run body as the State Population Commission was no mere executor of state directives, but a relatively autonomous actor that systematically followed, assessed and influenced actual gender policies and, in the circumstances prevailing, partly supplied the missing, silenced voice of women via the latter's views as researched in the course of its investigations (Havelková 2013). This is further eloquently evidenced in this volume in Věra Sokolová's chapter on the impact of Czech sexology.

The second reason concerns the actual content of the agenda in question: the concept of emancipation imposed from above also suggests an assumption that the given measures were brought in in defiance of local traditions and under the influence of the Soviet model and so was alien to 'Czech women'. However, it is easy to prove that communist policy vis-à-vis women reflected, above all in legislation, ideas and demands arising not only from Marxist, but also from liberal first-wave feminisms, and that for a time the policy even matched the demands of Marxist and liberal second-wave feminisms.<sup>15</sup> Below we offer evidence of how the ideas involved chimed with the local feminist tradition, and particularly Věra Sokolová's chapter herein demonstrates the continuity of the gender-equality line of the pre-state-socialist tradition into the ideas and people involved in the actions of specialist communities under state socialism.

For the act described, when the women's movement was destroyed, only to be taken over as part of the agenda of the state, we suggest replacing the expression 'imposed emancipation' by the term *expropriation*.<sup>16</sup> We believe that the latter term better captures the situation where the state took the women's movement's agenda from it with the object of managing it itself – and supposedly better. 'Expropriation' is used expressly to denote an operation analogous to the economic expropriation by which the communist powers stripped property from its owners, convinced that they would manage it better through central planning and with the aid of science.<sup>17</sup>

We deem the term '(top-down) emancipation' also misleading. The changes in legislation affecting women, introduced at the start of the state-socialist era, can undoubtedly be described as modernizing (see Barbara Havelková's chapter herein), this thanks, among other things, to the aforementioned erstwhile egalitarian (modernizing) policy enunciated both with the women's movement and in specialist circles. The term 'modernization' (of the social status of women) is accordingly thought more appropriate. Furthermore, as Denisa Nečasová demonstrates in the present volume, the upper echelons of communist power were not interested in women's emancipation and themselves saw to its gradual displacement from policy documents of women's organizations.

There are other assumptions connected with 'imposition' that can be refuted as counterfactual. It has been customary to cite the driving of women into work on the basis of a legal obligation to work, or the concept of an equality based on making traditionally masculine jobs available to women and suppressing the 'natural' feminine role of, especially, motherhood. In reality, however, the legal duty to work outside the home was never applied to women in full, as Barbara Havelková shows in this volume, and this is also borne out by statistics that show that the difference in female employment rates between the 1930s and 1950s was in no way dramatic and that the rise during the socialist period was relatively gradual (Šprincová 2013). Of support in maternity something has been said already. It may be true that the attention paid to its protection practically from the mid-1950s was originally driven by the drop in the birth rate, later on so-called deprivation theories played their part; these led to a fundamental counterbalancing of the policy of women's employment by pro-motherhood and pro-family policies. But then, as Joanna Goven (2002) and others have pointed out, support for families with the traditional arrangement of gender roles was never abandoned even in Stalinist times; all that was 'revolutionary' was the political rhetoric. Another level of the case against the term 'imposition' is the matter of whether and to what extent women themselves exploited the new conditions as an opportunity, or how far they identified with, say, the egalitarian ideology. This private level is represented herein by Kateřina Záborská's chapter, which makes use of interviews with women conducted in the first half of the 1990s and in which the author shows that women were more troubled by the failure to bring the emancipation project to its proper conclusion.<sup>18</sup>

### Gender as a symbolic category: the myth that feminist and gender approaches were an import from the West

A direct consequence of the expropriation of the feminist agenda from the women's movement by the Communist Party was that the odd flashes of scholarly or even public discussion of gender issues were rendered invisible and feminist discourse became submerged way down in cultural consciousness. In this regard, communist power was so successful in terms of cultural hegemony that although academic discussion of feminist issues opened up very shortly after the change of regime, the myth survives right down to today – often sustained by feminist researchers as well – that feminism and gender studies were imported from the West.<sup>19</sup> The speed with which gender-based and feminist approaches entered academic – and in part also public – debate in this country on the one hand speaks of the relevance of feminist concepts and categories to the establishment of a local feminist and gender agenda, and on the other it permits us to infer a pre-existing domestic 'mycelium': a kind of awareness of the relevant issues and an academic readiness at the theoretical level. Thus in this part we shall attempt at least to outline the evolution of Czech feminist thinking and associated work with the analytical category of gender in its symbolic dimension.

As mentioned above, Czech research into the social status of women, which went on throughout basically the entire socialist period, became 'invisible' to specialist circles after November 1989, given that the very existence of a gender-relevant approach failed to register, and in consequence even today any gender-oriented approach to representations – gender in its symbolic dimension – features, even in academic discourse, as something extraneous, 'outlandish'. And yet there is something of a tradition of feminist thinking and of a gender-oriented work with representations in the Czech environment traceable through the whole of the twentieth century. The various chapters in this volume are a contribution to this 'discovery' process.

The Czech feminist tradition reaches back to the first half of the nineteenth century, when, in addition to moves towards improvements in the legal status of women and in education for women (Horská 1999; Neudorfflová 1999), the problem of gender penetrated the public awareness chiefly via literature – a trend that only grew as the National Revival took off and a link was established with the nationalist movement (for much more detail see primarily Malečková 2002). Unlike the fairly general awareness of feminist or pro-women strivings in the nineteenth century, the consciously gender-oriented work in the cultural arena during the First Czechoslovak Republic remains far less well known. The existence of a feminist awareness in the inter-war period has been documented through research, though that which has been published does not yet permit us to draw any final conclusions on gender culture as a whole.

There have been several articles on the women's movement in the First Republic (e.g. Garver 1985; Nolte 1993; Feinberg 2007), and to date two major books (Burešová 2001; Feinberg 2006). While Burešová's study uses archival finds to document the fairly broad range of activities of women's associations and the advanced state of organization of the women's movement, she also notes the territorially limited reach of the majority of those associations (confined mostly to Prague and a few other Czech towns, with very little outreach to Slovakia) and the fact that the movement was driven by relatively small numbers of women. If Burešová approaches women's emancipation from below, that is, from women doing the organizing, Melissa Feinberg investigates the issue from above, from the role of the state. Her study also draws on original archival research, but in her case on legislative and policy documents and discussions. She records the downturn in the commitment to emancipation that had been expressed in the first Czechoslovak constitution of 1920, which did give men and women equal rights as citizens, however by the end of the inter-war period the leaders of the young republic were placing rather more emphasis on the interests of the nation and society than on the rights of the individual.

Although very different in their conclusions (Burešová concludes that only the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia by Nazi Germany on the eve of the Second World War interrupted the bold plans of women's associations further to coordinate and expand their activities), the two studies permit the inference that unlike the English and American women's movements, in which the high visibility of feminist issues in public debate before the First World War was

followed by a period of anti-feminism in the inter-war period (for a useful overview see Pugh 2000 [1992]), the woman question remained alive and very much present in public discussion in Czechoslovakia.

As in the period before the First World War, so too in the inter-war years there was a certain culture of gender thinking in the intellectual arena. Women's organizations continued to publish their periodicals, moreover Prague publishing houses did not seem to shun even fairly gender-radical texts: *Orlando* was, next to *Flush*, the only text by Virginia Woolf translated into Czech before the Second World War (Woolf 1929, 1938), the translation coming out a mere one year after its appearance in English; and the Czech translation of Radclyffe Hall's 1928 lesbian classic, *The Well of Loneliness*, came out in 1931 and was reprinted at least twice before the outbreak of war (Hall 1928 [1931]).<sup>20</sup> This text, as Věra Sokolová's oral-history study in this volume shows, was of paramount importance to the shaping of lesbian identities even into the period of Normalization. Much more original research in a variety of areas that would include, for example, literature, print media and academic discourse, will be required before a comprehensive assessment of the state of feminist/gender culture in the Czech lands between the wars can be arrived at. As of now, at least the moderate conclusion can be drawn that gender as an issue did have an audience during the First Czechoslovak Republic, not just in the political sphere, but also in the cultural, and that that audience survived the Second World War.

It may, then, be inferred that, in the treatment of gender in its 1950s representations, a time that saw a radical attempt to deconstruct the petit-bourgeois model of gender order, as the period has been described by Hana Havelková (Havelková 2007), ideological pressure on the emancipatory character of representations comingled with the persisting feminist and gender-sensitive thinking of the times that preceded the communist takeover. Jan Matonoha's chapter herein provides evidence of balance in the representation of gender in certain novels of the 1950s, but no such signs in the exile and alternative literature of later years. And Petr Roubal's analysis of representations of the human body points on the one hand to a connection to work on gender stretching from the (pre-socialist) Sokol *Slets* to the (socialist) Spartakiades, and on the other hand to the creation of a model of 'instrumental gender' that abstracted the binarity of the female and male body of the Sokol model from the world of unchanging family values in which that model was anchored (p. 143). This remodelling, symptomatic of Spartakiade choreography and Socialist Realism in general, was anchored 'in the new regime's social engineering, which plans and re-draws the new society using categories that were created arbitrarily' (ibid.).

If research interest in feminist thought in the inter-war period has been far slighter than interest in nineteenth-century manifestations, the 1950s and 1960s are an almost absolute blank that the chapters in this book are more or less the first to begin to fill in.<sup>21</sup> Thus for the study of continuities there is very little material available. Nevertheless, even here, we may judge there to have been a degree of continuity leading up to the reforming 1960s, whether from the gender-culture studies contained herein, or from the more general evolution of



culture. To take the example of book publishing: it is apparent that radical political turning points in the history of Czechoslovakia are consistently matched by tendencies towards picking up on the previous stage of development that had been interrupted by the political situation. *The Well of Loneliness*, as previously mentioned, is a typical example of a more general trend: the novel was translated between the wars (the National Library catalogue gives 1930 as the date of the first translation), a relatively short time after the appearance of the English original (1928), and subsequently the same translation was ready to be printed after the war, but before the communist putsch (1948), then again during the period of relative ideological relaxation in the late 1960s (1969), and then not until after the changes in November 1989 (1992 and 2002 – still in that original translation, though no longer with the original Toyen cover). We will find the same publishing history with countless other books.<sup>22</sup> There is no novelty in the finding that in other spheres of social and cultural life, too, the 1960s saw a return to issues squeezed out of public debate after 1948. For our purposes, of relevance here is the plurality of ideas on gender arrangements that had been quashed in the 1950s – at least in the cultural sphere – in favour of the monolithic ideology of emancipation promoted by the ruling communists. Hana Havelková has previously drawn attention to the debate that broke out in *Literární noviny* on the occasion of the publication of selections from Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (Beauvoirová 1966) in 1967 (Havelková 2009).<sup>23</sup> In the present volume Petr Roubal and Petra Hanáková offer evidence of active work with gender in the design of the Spartakiades (Roubal) and in the cinema (Hanáková) of the 1960s. Roubal demonstrates both a return to the Sokol conception of gender (and the comeback of Sokol personnel) in the choreography of the Spartakiade mass gymnastic performances and a return of counter-emancipation voices to professional discourse on sport and physical education. For her part, Hanáková looks at the work of film-makers Věra Chytilová and Ester Krumbachová through the prism of women's writing, at the same time providing a sensitive analysis of the contemporaneous deconstruction of gender stereotypes and the re-appropriation of symbolic, feminine coded spaces – incidentally, a creative approach very similar to the feminist questioning that arose in the run-up to second-wave Feminism in Anglo-American culture at the same time.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact in August 1968 and the onset of Normalization a year later again interrupted gender-relevant debate within the culture sphere, just as it had been taking off. This was in part due to the emigration of key participants, male and female, in part to censorship achieved by the imposition of publishing bans on particular individuals and in part to changes in culture policy. The entire period of Normalization (1969–89) is marked by an ideological return to a conservative conception of gender relations (Havelková 2007), analysed in detail in a number of studies herein (most significantly, in chapters by Barbara Havelková and Roubal). Barbara Havelková traces the conservative turn in legal discourse to the state's effort to remedy the mainly economic and demographic difficulties of late state socialism – by instrumentalizing gender roles. Roubal relates the representations of gender in all three

of the Normalization Spartakiades to wider strivings of the normalizing regime to find the lowest common denominator between the wishes of the political leadership and – in this case – the gymnasts and the spectators, to find a 'consensual ritual' (Roubal 2006: 87; in this volume 150). Among foreign researchers, Paulina Bren is particularly notable for her attention to the gender dimension in Czech culture of the period of Normalization, finding the petit-bourgeois model of the family extrapolated onto the socialist state in the television serials of Jaroslav Dietl (Bren 2010).

The reassertion of the petit-bourgeois model in state policy had the side effect of a stronger reassertion of patriarchal discourse, which feminists had begun to dismantle back in the First Czechoslovak Republic and which in the early days of socialism had been pushed into a 'residual' position chiefly through the rhetoric of emancipation (Oates-Indruchová 2002, 47–59).<sup>24</sup> In the matter of representations of gender, this meant a regression in representing gender differences – as well as, in cultural and social practice, differences in psychology and status – towards their biologization, as if they arose from the biological difference and so were down to nature. Because biologization has always been the legitimizing principle behind the petit-bourgeois model, any discourse shaped on that basis effectively suppresses or silences any critical perspectives on gender. 'Gender silence' is discussed herein by Jan Matonoha, taking the example of the recent Czech literary canon. The texts in question – works by Bohumil Hrabal, Milan Kundera, Arnošt Lustig and Josef Škvorecký written between the mid-1960s and the 1980s – were, when they appeared, among those works that state-socialist culture marginalized, or they were written in exile. All make wide use of representations of gender, though invariably in terms of (patriarchal) gender stereotypes within the tenets of the petit-bourgeois model. With his systematic analysis of the empirical evidence Matonoha has, then, confirmed the previously anecdotal thesis that Czech alternative culture was, in gender terms, entirely mainstream.<sup>25</sup>

Residual patriarchal discourse is found to have reached the level of hegemony by Kateřina Kolářová in her study of Věra Chytilová's late-1980s canonical film about AIDS, *Kopytem sem, kopytem tam* (*A Tainted Horseplay*). This nonconformist film-maker – even gender-nonconformist in the 1960s – in a film whose central metaphor is of social decay as an infection, mobilizes gender stereotypes without a hint of irony. It is as if the focus on a social problem with a political relevance interpellatively silenced any critical approach to gender, an area suppressed and undiscussed in the environment of period discourse. Paradoxically – and for today's audience surely uncomfortably – gender hegemony was created and sustained by official and alternative culture alike.

Nonetheless, by the time of Normalization, gender discourse in Czech society was overall an amalgam of residual patriarchal discourse and the partially absorbed effects of the ideological authoritative discourse of early socialism, which lay the ground for the emergence of a whole range of gender discourses (Oates-Indruchová 2002). For unorthodox gender elements kept surfacing, for instance in the form of limited expert discourses (Oates-Indruchová 2003),

though these were only ever quite disparate and unsystematic. Also alternative discourses were in circulation during Normalization, and these may be surmised to be a continuation of the pluralist, public-sphere discussions of gender that had been silenced. In this volume, especially Petra Hanáková, Kateřina Záborská and Libora Oates-Indruchová encountered such discourses in the research for their studies. All the materials with which they worked – films made by women in the 1960s (Hanáková), oral-history interviews on the status of women conducted in 1994–5 (Záborská), and popular works of literature from the period of *perestroika* (Oates-Indruchová) – were found by all three authors to contain discourse structures similar to those described by Western feminisms, though in an environment in which any public or even academic discussion of gender was absent. Hanáková and Záborská have chosen to call this phenomenon ‘latent feminism’, Oates-Indruchová preferring ‘proto-feminism’. Only further research will reveal which – if either – of these terms will become established as the more productive for future studies of gender culture in Czech – or East Central European – societies under state socialism.

This brief outline of how feminist and gender-relevant thinking evolved in the Czech milieu from the nineteenth century up to the fall of the communist regime will have thrown a quite different light on what researchers with feminist leanings achieved in the 1990s. Their drawing on the conceptual apparatuses of Western feminisms they had only recently discovered will be seen as an exploration of a coherent theoretical framework to go with issues that they had already broached. It would of course be wrong to think in terms of the mechanical application – so ‘importation’ – of Western concepts and ideas to the Czech environment. On the contrary, the break in the native tradition of feminist thought and its effective erasure from the collective memory by hegemonizing communist historiography may be seen, from the point of view of the development of gender studies, as in some sense an advantage. Czech women researchers, who generally came to theories of feminism and gender via English, American or German sources and began working with gender in, let’s say, the first two years after the regime change, may have had some awareness of the nineteenth-century Czech women’s movement (or if not that, of the part played by culturally active women in the national movement), but only slowly did they discover odd snippets about activities associated with emancipation during the First Czechoslovak Republic, and had no inkling at all about the 1960s picking up on the interrupted discussions.<sup>26</sup> The point being that communist historiography had few qualms about co-opting the nineteenth-century women’s movement into discourse on the National Revival, thereby maintaining the visibility of individual women, if not the movement, while systematically allowing no room for the communists’ own moves towards emancipation to be seen as having any link to the inter-war women’s movement (for more on this see Nečasová 2011 and in this volume). The 1960s revival of the gender debate then met with the same fate as befell other lines of thought that departed from the uniformity of Normalization – squeezed out of public and academic discourse by a variety of contrivances.

Women academics whose research interests turned to gender issues after November 1989 thus found themselves, in contrast to those in other social sciences and the humanities, in a unique position: unless they happened to be historians of the nineteenth century, they had no springboard within their discipline nor any ‘obligation’ to rediscover their antecedents, but the field was wide open for them to reflect the situation in their own time. And since the only theories available for getting a grasp of issues of gender were Western (Anglo-American, German or French), their early essays were a getting to grips with these theories. Unlike other areas of the humanities and social sciences, which all began by latching on to local discussions cut short by the internal political shockwaves of 1968 or earlier, and only began to find out about the paradigmatic changes in their disciplines in the West that commenced around 1968, home-grown academic feminism was quick to join the mainstream(s) of international theoretical discussions, and Czech women were soon – from the mid-1990s – publishing successfully in the leading journals in the field and with major international publishing houses (e.g. Havelková 1993a, 1993b, 1996; Šiklová 1993a, 1993b; Šmejkalová-Strickland 1994, 1995; Malečková 1996). It was rare indeed, in both the Czech and the wider Central and Eastern European context, for authors who had published little or nothing abroad to make such a breakthrough onto the international stage: discussion of the relevance of Western feminist theorizing to the post-socialist context was, in terms of the numbers of scholars contributing and texts published, probably at its most productive on Czecho(slovak) territory. The texts cited above have often been quoted as evidence of a rejection of feminism by Czech women. That conclusion is misleading: none of the writers in question rejects feminism; they merely explain why it is rejected by Czech women generally, thereby developing in effect a gender theory for post-socialist conditions.<sup>27</sup> Thus the content of these texts does not really support the notion that feminism was imported into the Czech cultural environment in the sense that the Western feminist agenda was simply taken over; what is in evidence, however, is the Czech authors’ critical reservations about the conceptual apparatus and content of Western feminism (and shortly after, feminisms) and the development of a home-grown feminist and gender-relevant agenda.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusions

In this collection, we look at the transformation of gender culture under state socialism on the example of Czech society, but in the context of gender research on East Central Europe from two aspects of the analytical category ‘gender’: gender as a social category and gender as a symbolic category. The studies collected in the first part of the book (chapters by B. Havelková, Nečasová, Záborská and Sokolová) document on both archival materials and personal testimonies the ‘expropriation’ of the inter-war and immediate post-war feminist and gender-reflective agenda by the Communist Party and the instrumentalization of emancipation for its own ideological purposes on the one hand, and either residual or emergent ‘bottom-up’ pro-women and pro-feminist agendas produced by a



variety of actors at the institutional and personal levels of the gender order on the other. The contributions in the second part of the book (Roubal, Matonoha, Oates-Indruchová, Hanáková, Kolářová) complement these findings with investigations of smaller actors (i.e. not the big centres of communist power) at symbolic and institutional levels of the gender order. They, too, find the continuous clashes between the emancipatory or gender-reflective discourses and practices and a traditionalist or hierarchical perspective on gender relations. Moreover, the authors of several of these chapters find in representations what the authors in the first part of the book find concerning the social aspect of gender: the similar periodization of ideas about the gender order – from a short-lived attempt at a dismantling of the traditional gender order in the 1950s, through a reflection on gender roles in the 1960s (of which part was both a critical reflection on gender and a re-emergence of anti-emancipatory discourses), to a return to a conservative gender discourse in the 1970s and 1980s, at least in institutions and canonical representations.

Nevertheless, even during this last period, marked by a strong push by the regime's institutions toward a re-traditionalization of gender roles through its policies (despite the simultaneous steady improvement in women's status in education, marketplace or in their access to reproductive rights), pro-women, pro-feminist and alternative gender agendas continued to thrive mainly in 'non-canonical' places: expert and alternative communities, popular culture and by way of individual negotiating strategies, although an articulated feminist discourse did not emerge during state socialism. The research toward this book covered only a selective cross section of locations and actors to be able to draw a complete picture of the exact process and mechanism of the co-creation of gender culture of state socialism by the various actors. Still, all the studies collected here point to one tendency: as the State's social engineering efforts of the early years toward modernization and, particularly, its challenges to the traditional gender order waned from the 1960s onwards and were replaced by re-traditionalization, the emancipatory articulations moved from the level of policy-making (the highest institutional level of gender order) to locations at the symbolic and personal levels. At the same time, however, the State's change of attitude toward the gender order resonated with the traditionalist gender discourse of (now-canonical) dissident/alternative actors, so that at the moment of the communist regime's demise these two large actors, who stood in opposition to each other in other areas of politics, concurred on gender politics.

*Translation:* David Short

*Note on translations from foreign languages:* Unless we have identified a published English translation of works originally written in another language, all the translations in this volume were made by the authors themselves or by the translator of the chapter.

## Notes

- 1 Hana Havelková would like to thank the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR), which financially supported her, as the leader of the project Nr. 403/09/1502 'Transformation of Gender Culture in Czech Society, 1948–89', as well as the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University in Prague, who administered the grant. Libora Oates-Indruchová would additionally like to acknowledge the institutional support of the Department of Sociology, Palacký University in Olomouc.
- 2 The editors' experience as teachers has revealed a growing interest among students of both sexes in matters of cultural inheritance in this area. They have some perception that this culture influences their thoughts and actions, though they lack the capacity to pinpoint what the actual signs are. The same trend may be observed in international research: from the rising numbers of presentations at annual conferences on Central- and East-European area studies (BASEES, ASEES) to themed conferences (e.g.: the Exploratory Seminar on 'Gender, Sex and Socialism: Transatlantic Dialogues', Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, October 2012; Ethics of Oral History and Memory Studies: The Soviet Past in the Post-Soviet Present, Gender Studies Centre, Vilnius University, September 2012; or Gender and Politics under Communism: New Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe, Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile, Bucharest, May 2012).
- 3 Even quite recently, the contrast between communist 'pastoral power' and simultaneous progress towards emancipation in the socialist context has been studied by such as Ghodsee (2004) and Šmausová 2011 (2006).
- 4 In this context it is worth mentioning *Promissory Notes: Women in the transition to socialism*, a work that appeared literally on the eve of the fall of the communist regimes and examined the position of women in various regimes labelled 'socialist' wherever they were in the world (Kruks *et al.* 1989).
- 5 For the sake of completeness we should add that there has been a dearth of international comparative projects arising from an East–East dialogue, and where they have emerged they have had a more specialized focus (for example, Jalušić and Antić Gabor 2001 is a collection of analyses of politics as a gender space; similarly Lukić *et al.* 2006).
- 6 For more on the significance of these works, of which there are several dozen in all – too many to embrace here, see below under 'Gender as a symbolic category'. In recent times, Ivan Vodochodský has undertaken an analysis of the discourse of Czech post-revolutionary statements about gender under socialism, thus affording the Czech readership some access to them (2007). The discussions that took place within Czech feminism are treated also by Blanka Nyklová (2013); abroad by Argent (2008).
- 7 In the interest of completeness it should be added that in terms of historical memory new sources have also become available, if only in the form of transcribed, though not yet analysed, materials from the international 'Women's Memory' project (for the published material see Frýdlová 1998, 2006). An exception is the analysis of the interviews in the Slovak part of the project (Kiczková *et al.* 2006).  
We distinguish between 'transition' and 'transformation': by 'transition' we mean the period of political and economic changes that followed the demise of the communist power in 1989 and that is sometimes considered as completed with the accession to the European Union (in the case of the Czech Republic in 2004) and sometimes still ongoing; while by 'transformation' we mean a much less clearly temporally defined cultural changes (in this case, of gender culture).
- 8 Gender topics related to the period of socialism continue to attract the interest of students as subjects for undergraduate and masters extended essays and dissertations.
- 9 In it, to quote Michal Pullmann, the wicked 'regime' stands on one side with oppressed 'society' on the other (Pullmann 2011: 15).

- 10 This work traces the (co-)responsibility of actors who had the power to influence gender discourse and gender politics in the period of state socialism, though it cannot diagnose their actual influence on the thoughts and actions of men and women: as cultural studies have taught us, the reception of ideas is invariably active and individually selective.
- 11 Given that the term 'gender' or any Czech equivalent to it was never used, it may not be possible to speak of 'gender research' as we might today, but a broad research agenda did exist very much akin to that pursued by today's gender sociology, notably the position of women in the home or the workplace, or unequal opportunities in education.
- 12 A detailed analysis of the handling of these problems in the sociological output from the 1960s to the end of the state-socialist era was conducted by Veronika Šprincová (2013).
- 13 Relative progress in comparison with West Germany at the end of the 1960s on the one hand and the consequences of 'going into reverse' registered in post-November Czechoslovakia on the other are reported first-hand also by Šmausová (2011 [2006]).
- 14 It figures in both academic papers (e.g. Šiklová 1993a) and in works of non-fiction (Kosatík 1993).
- 15 This claim follows from Hana Havelková detailed analysis of contemporary policy documents (Havelková 2013).
- 16 The term was first introduced by Hana Havelková in a paper from 2009 (Havelková 2009).
- 17 The Czechoslovak Union of Women functioned as an actor making direct appeals to the representatives of state power only in the period 1967–70 (for further details see Čáková 2005).
- 18 The importance of the women's gainful employment for their own emancipation is also the subject of other studies (Köhler-Wagnerová 1974; Šmausová 2011 [2006]; Musilová 2008). A measure of identification with egalitarian values in the sphere of gender is also attested by opinion polls conducted during the state-socialist period (see Šprincová 2013). The interviews analysed by Záborská were conducted between 1994 and 1995 within the framework of the international research project 'Democratization, Social and Political Change and Women's Movements' by Hana Havelková and Libora (Oates-)Indruchová; at the time they were merely archived, but never used in any published research.
- 19 The first academic feminist treatises to appear post-November '89 came as early as 1991 (Šmejkalová 1991). The first university course to use feminist theories – on English women writers – was taught by Soňa Nováková at the Department of English and American Studies at the Arts Faculty of Charles University in Prague in 1991–2; then came courses in feminist literary theory and criticism given by Libora (Oates-)Indruchová at the same department, and introductory gender studies courses taught by Jiřina Šmejkalová (-Strickland) at the Charles University Faculty of Social Sciences in 1992–3 (data from the personal papers of L. Oates-Indruchová). Still the most distinctive gender-oriented NGO, Gender studies o.p.s., was founded by sociologist and former dissident Jiřina Šiklová as the Gender Studies Centre (GSC) in 1991. It is logical that all three of the lecturers on these courses, having no access to literature or courses at home, did their training in gender studies and feminist theory abroad, and the activities of the GSC would not have been possible in the early days without foreign financial support. In the matter of this influence of 'the West', however, the story of gender studies is no different from those of many other social science disciplines, theoretical and methodological, or areas of social life.
- 20 The novel was republished in 1948, 1969, 1992 and 2002. Roar Lishaugen and Jan Seidl have conducted significant research on the wealth of homoerotic literature in the Czech contexts in the inter-war period. See, e.g. their article on the creative community around the 1930s journal *Hlas: list sexuální menšiny* [*The Voice: a review of a*

- sexual minority*] (Lishaugen and Seidl 2011). For details on homosexual subculture in the inter-war period, see also (Seidl *et al.* 2012).
- 21 Thus the situation is quite different from the area we have covered under 'gender as a social category', where it was shown that research into the social status of women continued practically without a break in socialist Czechoslovakia, that it was of interest to foreign researchers, and that contemporary gender research in history also takes due account of it.
- 22 This thesis on the evolution of book publishing arises from Libora Oates-Indruchová's work on scholarly editions of, primarily, translations of literary theory and criticism.
- 23 A detailed account of the reception of Simone de Beauvoir in Czechoslovakia is provided by the historian Dana Musilová (Musilová 2007).
- 24 The concept of 'the residual', together with 'the dominant' and 'the emergent', was introduced by Raymond Williams in relation to cultural discourses (Williams 1977: 122–3).
- 25 Frequently cited in this context is Václav Havel's comment that in Czechoslovakia 'feminism seems simply "dada"' (Havel 2012 [1985]); Jiřina Šiklová, who was then actively involved in illegally importing books from abroad, has remarked on the total absence among dissidents of any awareness of feminist debate (Šiklová 1999: 133); the non-reflection of gender relations and an even rejectionist position with regard to any reflections of gender was found by Martina Hynková in her analysis of existing, oral-history interviews with women dissidents (Hynková 2009).
- 26 They wasted no time in supplying these information gaps themselves, besides working on feminist and gender theory (Hendrychová 1992; Horská and Pešková 1992; Havelková 1995a).
- 27 Regarding the purpose of those texts, it has to be said that not one of them was based on empirical research – at the time there were neither the means nor the capacities for such a 'luxury'; they are more like essays, reflecting not the lived reality of Czech women (or men) underpinned by research, but the contemporary media discourse that adopted a radically hostile or sensationalist stance against feminism (significantly not feminisms) in the early 1990s.
- 28 For an earlier version of the argument about post-November debates on gender theory see Oates-Indruchová 2011.

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