



ON FEMINISMS IN CZECH POLITICAL CONTEXTS

Blanka KNOTKOVA-CAPKOVA¹

ABSTRACT

This paper is suggesting a periodization of Czech emancipist women's movement within historical, political and other contexts, from the perspective of feminist analysis. The first phase (roughly up to 1860s – 1870s) represents the beginnings of the movement. This period of the emancipist movement was much influenced by liberal thoughts, namely those of John Stuart Mill. The main emphasis was put on female education. During the second phase (up to the end of the First World War and establishing of independent Czechoslovakia), new political aims were articulated, especially the struggle for the female suffrage. In 1905, a "Committee for women's suffrage" was founded. This phase can be characterized as a shift from more vague emancipism to feminism as a political program. The period between the First and Second World Wars is often called as a „Golden age of feminism in the Czech country“. By the constitution of the new state, education became equal for all the citizens, women got the right to vote and be elected. Czech feminist movement became a part of the world's movement of the times. This development was cut by the war. The communist dictatorship (1948-1989) suppressed any activities from below, feminist activities included. Women as obligatory "builders of socialism" remained loaded with the duties in the private sphere (family) and thus faced a double burden work. Their "emancipation" was rather doubtful. After 1989, a beginning

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Gender Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

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of a transfer to democracy opened the scene for independent activities, the feminist ones included (NGOs). Some laws supporting equal opportunities were passed but some are waiting for acceptance. In the academy, gender studies emerged for the first time – a separate Master’s department was established at Charles University, Prague. Feminism has been developing as a plural system of thoughts, with the specifics of the Czech historical experiences.

Keywords: Czech, feminism, gender, post-totalitarian, discrimination.

INTRODUCTION: EMANCIPATION, FEMINISM AND STUDYING GENDER

Since the beginning of the 1990s, discussions of gender, apart from other aspects, have swayed towards theoretical reflection and terminology usage in the Czech women’s movement, emancipation (emancipist) movement, feminist movement, feminist studies, and gender studies. These discussions are underway in the public sphere (in the media and other public platforms), in academic circles, and recently also in the political sphere. To summarize, most discussions remain influenced by myriad prejudices and resentments, especially where the notion of “feminism” is concerned. They tend to consider “women’s rights” as something either already accomplished, or, if not, reduced more or less to issues of the labour market, e.g. fair pay – and, as such, are justified rights. “Gender studies” are either on their way to being respected as an academic discipline or tossed in with “feminist studies”.

The relationship between these two terms is not understood the same way, even among Czech feminists. This confusion may either have a pro-feminist point of view (gender studies are inseparable from feminist studies and methodologically stem from them), or an anti-feminist one (gender studies are “serious”, while feminist studies are “just a radical ideology”; or, according to the typically ignorant proclamations of extremist anti-feminists, both disciplines and their feminist members are here to torpedo democracy and destroy the family).² Reasons for this special distaste for the word *feminism* will be discussed later in this text. I support the view of understanding these disciplines as stemming from the same theoretical sources, but I am also open to the suggestions that the historically based term “feminism” – denoting just *one* of the

² “It is no secret that the conceptual opinions of feminists are focused on suppressing and removing the family. Instead of integral support of the **natural** [accentuation BKC] family bonds, they support the family fighting against each other, or rather, all together against the man.” Quoted from (transl. BKC): Zrno, 2005, p. A6.

genders³ (femina=woman), may today perhaps sound exclusivist; the present development of gender/feminist studies emphasizes addressing the problems of both women and men.⁴ However, the topic of women's suffrage – i.e. the political reflection of women's emancipation – belongs without a doubt in the “feminist” camp.⁵

1. EDUCATION OF WOMEN AS THE MAIN FOCUS OF EMANCIPIST ACTIVITIES BEFORE 1918

I would roughly divide the history of Czech feminism into five phases. The first and second stages, beginning in the 19th century, would cover the period when the area comprising today's Czech Republic was a part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire (up to 1918). The first efforts to gain more rights for women focused on women's right to education – the first secondary school for girls was established in 1890⁶ at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. It accepted the first female students in 1897, and in 1900 they were permitted to attend the faculties of medicine and pharmacology.

Education and the role of women in the national revival process dominated feminist discourse in those times, and this mostly corresponded with the liberal and patriotic discourses⁷ – the fight for women's rights was framed within the search for national identity and the emancipation of the nation. In her study, “A Liberal History of the Issue of Women in the Czech Lands”,⁸ Hana Havelkova (with references to Catherine David-Fox⁹) interprets the liberal character of Czech feminism – which has, to a remarkable extent, prevailed till today – the result of several factors: relatively high economic development and education, an ambivalent (or in some respects even negative) Czech attitude to the conservative Roman Catholic tradition, a dearth of Czech nobility (many were exiled after 1620), and the dominance of the petty bourgeoisie. Political thinking at the time was strongly liberal, represented mainly by professor and later president Tomas Garrigue Masaryk (Havelkova 1995, 24). Masaryk, in cooperation with his

³ Or a group of gender identities.

⁴ For the purpose of the textual argument, this simplification should not be understood as an essentialist concept of gender – as a simply a dual category with fixed identities – without inner heterogeneities and cross-categories.

⁵ As Elaine Showalter periodizes the development process of women's self-realization (in literature), into three phases – “feminine” (penetrating the public sphere of women as individuals), feminist (political struggle) and female (further free search for identity) (Showalter 1977/1978).

⁶ The school was named Minerva, it was founded by the female writer and emancipist Eliska Krasnohorska. It was not only the first secondary school in the Czech kingdom, but in the whole empire.

⁷ Olympe de Gouges 1791, see bibliography.

⁸ See, Havelkova, Hana, “Liberalni historie zenske otazky v ceskych zemich”, in: Havelkova 1995, 19-30.

⁹ David-Fox, C., “Czech Feminists and Nationalism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy: ‘The First Austria’”. In: *Journal of Women's History*, 3/2, pp. 26-45 (quoted in Havelkova, 1995).

American wife, Charlotte Garrigue Masaryk, understood the issue of women's rights as a part of the larger issue of human rights and sharply criticized numerous gender stereotypes – like those of the essentialized, self-sacrificing motherhood, the enclosing of women into the private sphere, the cultural and economic subjugation of women, or the lack of societal responsibility to the family on the male side (Masaryk 1930). His inspiration can be directly traced to the thinking of John Stuart Mill, of whom Masaryk was a philosophical follower – in particular Mill's text *The Subjection of Women* (1869).

In the 19th century, the leading voices of women's rights used the word "emancipist" rather than "feminist" (cf. Horska 1999, 90 and 92, and Lenderova 1999, 225 et al.). They were women, mainly writers, of the middle class.¹⁰ Some of them¹¹ represented a rather conservative branch of feminism of the times in respect of reproducing the division in male-female gender roles – especially, woman as mother; father as breadwinner. Even so, they achieved remarkable success in the field of female (although traditionally gendered) education. Most of these writers' thematized the unhappy fates of heroines who rebelled against patriarchal values and tried to establish a free alternative of self-expression rather than the traditional one.¹² These writers' emancipism, however, mustn't be limited only to literature. They initiated the establishment of women's associations, which became an important basis for further development of the emancipist movement.¹³ Bozena Nemcova – perhaps the most analyzed female writer of the time till today – was also a political activist, persecuted for her patriotic attitudes, at some points in her life even living in poverty. Her image took on another cultural connotation: Nemcova was a very attractive woman and a mother of four children; in later patriotic discourse she was made into a female icon of the Country. She symbolically combined the suffering and sacrifice of motherhood with victimization – as well as erotic attraction.¹⁴

¹⁰ Namely, Magdalena Dobromila Rettigova (1785-1845), Bozena Nemcova (1820-1862), Karolina Svetla (1830-1899), Zofie Podlipska (1833-1897), Eliska Krasnohorska (1847-1926), Tereza Novakova (1853-1912), Bozena Vikova-Kuneticka (1862-1934), Ruzena Svobodova (1868-1920).

¹¹ Namely, the writers Rettigova, Krasnohorska, Svobodova and Vikova-Kuneticka. See, e.g., Horska, Pavla, "Ceske emancipistky a feministky" (Czech emancipists and feminists), p. 317. In, Vodakova & Vodakova 2003.

¹² The literary heroines of e.g. Karolina Svetla end mostly unhappily; on the other hand, Bozena Nemcova's stories construed rather idealized pictures of females, which often came to a (sometimes nearly a fairy-tale) happy end; but she also supported ideas such as women's right of choice and the harmonization, of women's motherly duties and their creative potential.

¹³ Svetla, Podlipska, Krasnohorska, Novakova were especially active in this field.

¹⁴ See, e.g., a collection of poetry by Frantisek Halas, "Our Lady Bozena Nemcova" (1940, see bibliography), which represented an important source of patriotism during the Nazi occupation. One of the recent volumes dedicated to interpretations of Nemcova's life and work, see Dörflova, Y., et al. (eds), 2001. On the role of women in the nationalist discourses of the Osman empire and, comparatively, European countries, see a brilliant theoretical analysis by Jitka Maleckova (2002).

2. POLITICAL PHASE OF THE EMANCIPIST MOVEMENT: FIRST WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS AND THE FIGHT FOR THE VOTING RIGHTS OF WOMEN

In the second half of the 19th century, female associations started to emerge (from 1865¹⁵), and their aims were presented mostly on the pages of women's journals.¹⁶ The most important topics were female education, promoting opportunities for women at the labour market – for the socially weak, as an existing need¹⁷ (although truly poor women never had had the “privilege” of being a domesticated housewife); for the rich as a way to economic independence, and as a form of self-realization and self-expression. The most prestigious professional role a woman could have was that of teacher – although some later radical feminists, like Frantiska Plaminkova, strongly opposed the law requiring celibacy as a condition for the profession. In 1896, 28% of teachers in the Czech kingdom were female (Lenderova 1999, 255); their oldest professional association (“the Prague Female Teachers’ Association”) was established in 1874, and a journal “Czech Female Teachers’ Paper” emerged in 1885. Some of the female teachers were very non-conform, e.g. Karla Machova (a close friend of Charlotte G. Masaryk). For an article she penned, which was inspired by the ideals of French revolutionary liberalism and the idea of equality between sexes, Machova lost her job as a teacher (ibid., 256). Afterwards, she concentrated on political and media work, became an unsuccessful candidate for the Social Democratic Party in the 1908 elections (she only just lost), and edited a regional social-democratic journal, “The Female Paper” (1892).

Towards the end of the 19th century, the feminist movement in the Czech kingdom became more clearly defined within the broader movement for voting rights in the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy (we can describe it as its second stage), although in the beginning this movement demanded voting rights only for men. Austrian law from 1867 restricted the membership of political organizations to adult men by prohibiting women and non-adults from participating. Conservative groups in the Czech political scene¹⁸ were rather reserved to Czech feminism, characterizing it as a movement weakening the

¹⁵ In 1865, Karolina Svetla and Vojta Naprstek (a liberal burgess, active in many cultural fields) founded the American Club of Ladies. – Previous women's associations from the first half of the 19th century were more philanthropic in their nature (Lenderova 1999, 231).

¹⁶ *Zenske listy* (Women's Papers, 1873-1926), *Zensky svet* (The Female World, 1897-1930), *Zensky obzor* (The Female Horizon, 1900-1937/38), *Zenska revue* (The Women's Review, 1905/06-1918). Source: Masaryk's Institute of the Academy of Science of the Czech Rep., Prague. – Most of the editors of these journals were emancipist female writers (Krasnohorska, Novakova).

¹⁷ In 1869 a German women's production association was founded; two years later a Czech one, with Karolina Svetla as its president.

¹⁸ The main conservative group was called “Starocesí” (“The Old Czechs,” “old” meaning “traditional” here).

national unity. In addition, the Czech Catholics repeatedly refused to support the political rights of women – with the argument of the “natural” roles and rights of men and women.¹⁹ That left Czech feminists with no other option but to try and cooperate with the liberal²⁰ or left-leaning (social democrats) political groups. The Social Democratic Party never prevented women from joining as members; it was also the first political party to include the requirement of female suffrage in its political programme. This requirement also became a central theme at the first Convention of Czechoslovak Women in 1897, during which the “Central Association of Czech Women” was established. The Association emphasized the idea of emancipation as a humanitarian movement, with aspects of social justice as well as the idea of equal rights for women and men in education, politics and social duties (cf. Lenderova 1999, 269 and Horska 1999, 106-107). Another important step was the establishment of the “Women’s Czech Club” in 1901, under which, a “Committee for Women’s Suffrage” was founded in 1905, with a clear focus on the specified issue. The Committee was headed by Frantiska Plaminkova, a leading Czech feminist of the period.²¹ Women’s associations organized a meeting, which passed a resolution, later on published in “Zenske listy” (The Women’s Papers, 21 December 1905). The resolution appealed to Czech men, specifically political representatives, to articulate women’s right to vote. It characterized the situation as unjust to women, many of whom had actively worked in the national liberation movement. If the male representatives would not enforce women’s suffrage, the resolution said, “we do not believe in their honesty, justice and progressiveness!” (ibid.) The Committee for Women’s Suffrage organized lectures, discussions and manifestations for female voting rights, and were also being encouraged by similar efforts in other European countries, namely Great Britain since 1903.

In 1907, a reform of the electoral law was passed, according to which the electoral right was “equal” – in fact, ascribed to *men* over the age of 24 with permanent citizenship. Women were “forgotten” again. However, social democratic suffrage activists found that the electoral law from the 1860s did not explicitly forbid women from standing for elections. So, in the 1908 elections, even though women could still not vote, the Social Democratic Party presented the first female candidate on its list, Karla Machova. She passed through to the second round, and though ultimately not elected, suffrage activists considered it a success that she stood for election.

The glass ceiling was first broken four years later, in the by-election of 1912. The National Liberal Party (former “Mladocesi”) put the writer Bozena

¹⁹ Conventions in 1899 and 1908 (see, Lenderova 1999, 269).

²⁰ The main liberal group was called “Mladocesi” (“The Young Czechs”, “young” meaning “progressive” here).

²¹ Alice Masarykova, a daughter of the soon-to-be president Masaryk, also cooperated.

Vikova-Kuneticka, a conservative emancipist (see above) on its candidate list. She tended to distance herself from the more radical feminist movement of the time and advocated a “universalist”, not gendered, national discourse. Non-feminist activists like her continued to see the main objectives of their work devoted to female education and enlightenment. They supported an “undivided” nationalist discourse and refused to cast doubt on the traditional female roles of mother and housewife. That standpoint, however, might have been the reason she was accepted by a wider political spectrum political spectrum, and she was successfully elected with 850 votes. Still, she was denied to be given the representative certificate on grounds of being elected “just thanks to a law imperfection” (Nedvedova, 2004). Karla Machova, who was again a candidate of the Social Democrats, did not receive enough votes to be elected.

At the time, patriotic discourse was quite characteristic of the Czech feminist movement – within the context of the national liberation movement and efforts to establish an independent Czech state. It was also accepted by more radical feminists (namely Plaminkova), but no longer was it used as a critical framework for women’s discrimination. Some of these discussions also included the idea of an educated and educating mother. As the writer and translator Pavla Moudra (1861-1940)²² put it: “Humankind will be like the mothers it has ... and the Czech country already had, and has had even today, its mother heroines”, she maintained. “... There will be no child that would not condemn renegation in his/her mind as the worst crime, and all children will be conscious that he/she himself/herself would never be capable of the renegation – if the parents or teachers at school bring him/her up in this idea” (Moudra 1932, 42).

Frantiska Plaminkova (1875-1942) already fully represented the second feminist stage of the self-conscious political fight for women’s rights. She was a member of the Czech National Socialist Party,²³ which strongly supported the idea of patriotism. This can be seen in the activities of women’s associations attached to this party even in the first half of the 20th century (Buresova 2002). But Plaminkova also emphasized the need to include Czech feminism into the framework of movements in other countries. She visited international feminist conferences and was also known abroad. All her life she remained an active citizen, fighting any form of injustice and discrimination. This approach was ultimately fatal for her during the Second World War, when, together with other

²² Moudra followed, like the Masaryks, the protestant reformation (Czech Brethern) interpretation of the Czech history (cf. Buresova 2002, 269).

²³ In the Czechoslovak Republic, the SNSP was a successor of the National Social Party, founded in 1897.

foremost personalities of Czechoslovak political and cultural life, she was executed by the Nazi regime.²⁴

3. WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE ACCOMPLISHED – NEW TASKS APPEARED

A universal concept of women's suffrage was put through into the Washington Declaration by Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, the leading representative of the Czechoslovak (or Czech and Slovak) struggle for independence and political identity. The emergence of an independent state, politically oriented to a secular liberal democracy (somewhat atypical for Central Europe after the First World War) meant an organic blossoming of a till then non-existent free space for activities, including those of feminists. Women gained the right to vote under the first Czechoslovak Constitution of 1920 – much sooner than in a number of other European countries. A citizen's rights and freedoms were established in Part 5 of the Constitution: "... privileges based on origin, sex or position are not recognized"; all citizens' lives and freedoms were fully protected, irrespective of language, race or religion. (121/1920 Sb., § 106, 1-2).

In the succeeding period between the two world wars (let's call it the third stage of Czech feminism), non-governmental feminist activities in the new state flourished; historians call this period the "golden age of feminism in the Czech lands" (see, Horská 1999, 115-117). After the war, the International Women's Council called for the establishment of national councils. In Czechoslovakia, this took form in 1923 through the foundation of "Women's National Councils", presided over by Plaminkova. In 1925, Plaminkova was elected Senator for the National Socialist Party. The Women's National Council had its press organ, the "Women's Council". In 1935, the organization had 50 member organizations with liberal goals and 27,000 members (Buresova 2002, 268). Feminist discourse of the First Republic can be characterized as primarily liberal; Social Democratic and Communist feminists were less dominant.²⁵ Mainstream communist discourse tended towards Lenin's view that supported only women's rights activism that accepted Marxist ideology and identified with the international working class movement.²⁶ Hence, Czech feminists on the political left suffered, we can say, a sort of a double marginalization.

²⁴ The worst persecution occurred after the Nazi "Empire Protector" Heydrich was assassinated by the activists of the Czech resistance.

²⁵ Social democratic feminist discourse was represented by Karla Machova (see above); communist feminist discourse by journalist Jozka Jaburkova. In 1931-1939, Jaburkova was a local political representative for the city of Prague; in 1942, she was tortured to death in the Nazi concentration camp in Ravensbrück.

²⁶ "The first proletarian dictatorship is a real pioneer in establishing social equality for women. It is clearing away more prejudices than could volumes of feminist literature. But even with all that we still have no international communist women's movement, and that we must have." ... (Lenin quoted in Zetkin 1920)

For the few women who managed to enter political structures of the new state, the situation was not easy. They lacked sufficient political experience, while a lot of prejudice against women as politicians remained among voters – both male and female. Many women still preferred to vote for men; there was a lack of women’s solidarity as far as political representation was concerned. The new female representatives could hardly form a lobby as they lacked the numbers; moreover, they did not agree on issues like divorces or abortions. In 1920, out of 270 representatives in Parliament only nine were women, i.e. less than 4%. The percentage of female representatives (who actually carried out their duties) exceeded 4% between 1920-1925 and 1929-1935, both in the National Assembly and the Senate (Ondrejova, in <http://www.hybaskova.cz/>, p. 2). With one exception, no female representative reached a higher parliamentary post during this period.²⁷

Women were members of various parliamentary committees (in none of them, however, did they have a majority). But these committees generally dealt with health matters or social policies. Once again, that reflected the gender stereotyped prejudice that women are “naturally” disposed towards social and medical care. Female representatives also had to fight for women’s issues within their own parties, political clubs and parliamentary committees. They finally succeeded in passing some reforms in family law: rights of the mother were made equal with those of the father, as well as more effective protections for widows and children born out of wedlock.

Another important feminist activist who must be mentioned is Milada Horakova (1902-1950). As a student Horakova was persecuted for her pro-independence views and, before the end of the First World War, she was expelled from grammar school for her active participation in an anti-monarchy demonstration. Like Pavla Moudra, she supported the Reformation (protestant) idea of Czech history. After the formation of an independent Czechoslovakia, Horakova completed her studies in law, and specialized in social work on the social position of women within the Czechoslovak Red Cross. She entered the Czech National Socialist Party and the Women’s National Council, where she became acquainted and cooperated with Plaminkova. During the Second World War, Horakova worked in the resistance movement and was imprisoned. After the war, she continued working in her party’s organizations and for the women’s movement – she cooperated on amending laws discriminating women, such as family law. Horakova, with a group of female lawyers, successfully amended the

²⁷ The exception was Frana Zeminova (1882-1962), a representative of the Czech National Socialist Party (like Plaminkova). In 1935, Zeminova became vice president of the Permanent Committee of the National Assembly, a very important committee of 24 members dealing with urgent matters. (Maly 1999, 285) In 1938, after the Munich Agreement, she resigned from public office.

law, explicitly removing the concept of “head of the family” and fixing in law spousal equality, in all respects (Havelkova 1995, 25). However, the perpetual democrat, Horakova went on criticizing the Communist’s political steps towards dictatorship and totalitarianism and actively worked against it. For this she was condemned for high treason by the Communist regime – in a fabricated judicial process in 1950 – and, as with Plaminkova by the Nazi regime, executed.²⁸

4. TOTALITARIAN REGIME, STATE SOCIALISM AND GENDER ISSUES

On 25 February 1948, the parliamentary system in Czechoslovakia was overthrown, and political power was usurped by the Communist Party, which declared itself to be the “ruling force of society”. Other parties (those not banned) remained independent in word only; in deed their leaders or press organs merely echoed the ruling party’s discourse. All underground civic activities not accepting of the ideology and refusing to conform to the regime’s new measures were banned.

As the Communist regime declared itself to be the representative of historical progress, it verbally (mis)used much of the agenda of the feminist movement of the previous period. It’s questionable whether we can refer to this period as the fourth stage of the Czech feminist movement, or if this would-be fourth stage is in fact vacant, emptied out, and – if speaking about a movement representative of free activity – non-existent. In many areas of social life, the period personified a hypocritical game on equality. In practice, to echo George Orwell, some were “more equal”. In theory, women were equal to men, they could divorce, have an abortion; the law guaranteed them the right to employment and to hold executive positions. In practice, employment was not a choice; it was a legal duty for everybody as well as being an economic necessity – a working-class family could hardly have survived on just one average salary. Men dominated higher positions in the party as well as in society, with more than 90 per cent of such jobs going to men. The line between the powerful and the powerless was drawn politically: if a woman supported the dominant discourse and actions, she might succeed in gaining a good position (although not as easily as a man), while those opposing the regime were marginalized or persecuted, regardless whether a man or a woman. Many who disagreed with the regime saw the crucial political difference as a struggle between “them” (the Communist oligarchy in power) and “us” (the dominated ones). This simplified dichotomy of the politically powerful and powerless inadvertently obscured

²⁸ Frana Zeminova (as well as other members of the Czech National Socialist Party) was also judged in the process together with Horakova and condemned to 20 years in prison; she was released in 1960, the result of a presidential amnesty. She died two years later.

many other societal differences and possible discriminations from the perspective of gender as well as of age, education, party membership, or other categories and their intersectional overlaps.

Feminist thoughts and new schools, which were developing at that time in Western Europe and in the U.S.A., did not elicit much response in Czechoslovakia during that period.²⁹ We could find both pragmatic and contextual explanations for that. The former would point to the fact that books representing different (or even partly polemical) ideas than the doctrine of state socialism were forbidden from being distributed in any form (printed or typed), and, as travelling was very restricted and police controlled, practically speaking it was very difficult to get access to such books. The latter explanation again calls to mind the above-mentioned black-and-white scenario, dividing people into those who conformed (regardless of the various levels and intensities of conformity) and those who didn't conform (ranging from silent opposition to openly protesting). However, feminism was not an agenda for either of them. The conformists believed (really or apparently) that the new system had achieved enough rights for women; the non-conformists regarded everyone to be deprived of their rights. The official discourse proclaimed class struggle; the dissident discourse proclaimed a struggle against the regime.

Apologists of the policies of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia usually emphasize, the following achievements in respect of women: maternal benefits were very high, although that happened only in the 1970s;³⁰ and women massively entered the labour market – i.e. the public, stereotypically “masculine” sphere. However, as some critics point out (cf. Havelkova, 2005), the private “feminine” sphere remained a woman's responsibility. Women under state socialism suffered the double burden of employment and housework; the model pattern for them was that of a “superwoman” – a working mother, managing both job and household. The superwoman became the ideal feminine role and identity.

Paradoxically, more far-reaching destructive influences struck masculine identities. For many people dissatisfied with the public political space during communism, the family, close relations with friends, and people they could trust seemed to be the only meaningful sphere of life. Escape into privacy (inner emigration) was a significant feature of the time. This, however, was the

²⁹ That situation may find parallels in the histories of other countries belonging to the Soviet bloc during the Cold War, but a comparative analysis would require a substantially broader scope of research and goes beyond the focus of this study.

³⁰ After suppressing the democratization process of the “Prague Spring” (with military assistance from the Soviet and other socialist countries' armies), “normalization”, led by conservative Communists, began. The maternal benefits were to stimulate supported population growth.

traditional “feminine” sphere. Men had to face the depressing world outside without a respectful way out – there was no legal option for them to stay on parental leave, in place of mothers. The painful dilemma between collaborating with the régime, and the danger of persecution if one protested, must have been very stressful. The private sphere may have been a refuge (although for some people a constrained one). That also revitalized traditional (conservative?) family or community values. To save the image of the family as something harmonized, not alienated in the outer alienated world, many people – both men and women – played the game of being happy within the traditional confines of the home, and this included a traditional gender order.

A critical reflection of post-communist feminisms can result from the “politics of location”. Czech literary and gender studies theorist, Viola Parente-Capkova (Parente-Capkova, 2005, 30) wrote that for a Czech researcher, the radically “other” woman may be both a woman from the “West”, as well as a woman from the “East”. Parente-Capkova thus points to the fact, that reflections of post-communist women’s movements in Central and Eastern Europe with their specific experiences have somehow fallen through between the post-colonial conceptual analyses of the “West” and “East”. Post-communist countries do not unambiguously belong to either of these groups, and their experiences have yet to be appropriately studied. Jirina Siklova put it in the following way: “We will never, we women in the Czech Republic and other post-communist countries, survive the same discussions and self-searching which proceeded in the West among feminists of the 1970s and 1980s. ” [...] “We will rather choose thoughts from various branches and schools, and enrich the accepted ones with our own experience. I believe, that even with this eclectic attitude, we will be accepted by our “older sisters” from the West as partners of their dialogue, that they will not look upon us with only indulgence, and that we will also enrich them with our approach” (Siklova 1999, 137). In my opinion, this problem can find obvious parallels in Asian, African, or Latin-American feminist experiences. It urges us all to be sensitive to the cultural, social and political specifics of post-colonial feminisms and avoid simplified generalizations.³¹

As this period still forms a remarkable part of the memories and emotions of people (excepting the youngest generations), analyses of its political, social, gender, and other aspects are only now in progress,³² and an unbiased evaluation

³¹ As strongly recommended by, namely, theorists of Indian origin – e.g. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, G. C. Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Swapan Majumdar, as well as many others (Mohanty 1991, Spivak 1987, Bhabha 1997, Majumdar 1987).

³² E.g., Siklova, Jirina 1999, Havelkova, Hana 2005, Hanakova, Petra 2006, Kapusta-Pofahl, Karen 2002, et al.

will probably require some more time.³³ In this part of my text (which tends more towards an essay than the previous parts), I admit to be much more influenced in my interpretations by my own experience. My location and positionality stems from a personal history (*her-story*) of a daughter of a dissident family. To be honest, I can't really remove myself from that standpoint; so let my interpretation here represent just one of the voices.

5. AFTER 1989: NEW FEMINIST SEARCH

The fifth phase began after 1989, when the Communist regime collapsed. Once re-established, democracy enabled diverse discussion, which opened a new space for feminism, too. But what is democracy, or what should it be? After answering a resounding “no” to state socialism – a difference in opinions emerged, and because free speech had been suppressed for several decades, many people mistook democracy and freedom for “no limits”, improper expression was included in this. Feminist discourse, on the other hand, has supported political correctness, which, after only just throwing off totalitarianism, was not a popular idea at all. Apart from that, feminists did not refute their perceived positioning on the left of the political spectrum, which was extremely unpopular. Not long ago, for many people being socially conservative meant being democratic, simply because it went against the regime. And last but not least, feminism did not resist from presenting itself as an ideology. Since “ideology” had been linked with a specific doctrine, many people reduced the notion to believe that any ideology was a sign of something oppressive.

So the 1990s were generally marked by a reluctance, or even a resistance, to feminist arguments. Another reason for such views may be explained as poor knowledge or ignorance of what feminism represents. For many Czechs,³⁴ knowledge of feminism was limited to the radical branches of the 1960s in the United States or to the strikes of suffragettes from the beginning of the 20th century. For these Czechs, “feminist” was a dirty word, a indicative of an extravagant dislike of men.

³³ Just before finalizing this text for publication, a new book in Czech, edited by Hana Havelkova (co-edited by Libora Oates-Indruchova) was published (2015, see bibliography). The book offers deep analyses from a gender perspective of case studies from various spheres of Czechoslovak society between 1948 and 1989. “Expropriated” voice refers to the violent expropriation of many private/independent properties and activities after the Communists seized power in 1948 – as, despite the many slogans on equality, the new regime’s ideologists expropriated the agenda of the Czech pre-war emancipist movement. The book is oriented around issues such as gender constructions in marriage, sexuality, the obligatory employment of women and its consequences for (non)equality, gender (non)stereotyping in literature and film, and others. The authors search for interpretations that are as balanced as possible, not stemming from a priori prejudiced standpoints of any of the possible opinion positions.

³⁴ On 1 January 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully split into two new countries: the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

A third group of negative reactions to feminism may be interpreted psychologically. The formerly suppressed were now free; many people (especially males) were inebriated with the chance to disobey orders, even perhaps to become powerful themselves, enjoying privileges which had been reserved for the Communist oligarchy. On the other hand feminists wanted them to accept new limits on non-discriminatory expression and behaviour toward minorities. But also, many women were reluctant to accept the feminist label, since for them it meant “radicals”, and they continued to fulfil the role of guards of the patriarchy, finding a safe space in the position of “proper”, traditionally feminine, woman.

On the other hand, civil society began to develop. The first women’s consciousness-raising groups began appearing already within the dissident movement of the eighties, Professor Jirina Siklova being a leading voice. Her private book collection formed the foundation of the first gender studies library in then Czechoslovakia (partition of the country took place in 1993). Today, this library belongs to -or forms a part of- one of the most well-known feminist NGOs, Gender studies, o.p.s., which hosts social and cultural activities. Following the establishment of the NGOs, feminism began developing rapidly, both as it relates to activism and academia. Several NGOs³⁵ were established that focus on practical help for women in need (forced prostitution, trafficking, domestic violence, abuse, sexual harassment), in equal political representation, etc.

At the end of 1990s, rights for minorities of non-heterosexual and queer identities became a focus of public and political debate. It should be mentioned here that compared to other post-communist countries (like e.g. Poland or the countries of Eastern Europe), Czech society has been more liberal since at least the first half of the 20th century of Masaryk’s Republic; moreover, the influence of the Church(es) has been much less important here.³⁶ At the dawn of the millennium, discussions about the rights of non-heterosexuals reached Parliament; after several years of negotiations, the House of Deputies (on 15 March 2006) overturned the President’s veto, and the law on registered partnership was approved. However, registered partners do not have the same legal standing as married couples and are prevented from adopting children. Today, debate has shifted to the topic of adoptions.

New laws strengthening gender equality were also passed – against sexual harassment (passed 2005, valid since 2007) and establishing parental leave

³⁵ E.g. ProFem, Rosa, Bily kruh bezpeci (The White Circle of Safety), Forum 50 Per Cent, and others.

³⁶ Homosexuality was decriminalized in the Czech Republic as early as 1961, which was a rather progressive act – even for Europe.

instead of exclusively maternal leave (2006).³⁷ As a new member of the European Union (since 2003), the Czech Republic accepted (or had to accept, at least in theory) the policy of equal opportunity, which was declared to be an EU priority.³⁸ However, the Czech Republic was the last EU member to pass an anti-discrimination law, which it finally did in 2009.³⁹

In the second half of the 1990s, efforts were made to establish gender studies also within academia. The history of the Department of Gender Studies and its uneasy beginnings have been described in the Yearbook (2005) by Petr Pavlik in the essay “On the migrating branch, or gender and power in practice” (Pavlik, 2005: 40-44).⁴⁰ Gender studies as an independent MA programme⁴¹ was accredited by the Ministry of Education in 2004. In the same year, the department was established, and in September 2005 it began its first academic year. Curricula of the department has been designed as interdisciplinary: there are gender courses in philosophy (namely ethics), history, sociology, cultural

³⁷ However, discrimination of working mothers still is an oft-mentioned phenomenon, as e.g. the research on maternity/parental leave in seven European countries (2012) argues: “Czech mothers face discrimination. Discrimination in labour market, whether at work or while looking for job, is perceived by 54 per cent of mothers with children under 10. After maternity leave 54 per cent of mothers would like to use flexible working hours or combine working from home with the office (43 per cent). Half-time employment would be welcome by 43 per cent of mothers. Unfortunately, this is not matched by the offer: after maternity and parental leave only 23 per cent of respondents were allowed flexi-time, and only 10 per cent were able to sometimes make use of a home-office. The most frequent obstacles faced by women are: questions about the number of children and child care options during job interviews (63 per cent), refusing job candidates due to (potential) parenthood (43 per cent), being refused other than full-time work after maternity or parental leave (35 per cent). Mothers feel a strong need to achieve a work-life balance; they are interested in alternative work arrangements, mostly during parental leave, and in childcare facilities. They would also like to work during parental leave (63 per cent). They are mostly motivated by finances (78 per cent) and by the need to broaden their engagement beyond family (50 per cent). Up to 60 per cent of respondents are interested in childcare provided by (or cooperating with) their employer. In total, 53 per cent of mothers did not work during parental leave due to the lack of child care facilities. *The above-mentioned figures are the result of a survey of 605 respondents conducted by Ipsos-Tambor on behalf of Gender Studies.* (Jonášová – Frýdlová – Svobodová, 2012: 48).

³⁸ The practical level of implementation lags painfully behind the theory, as is clear from “Shadow Reports in the Area of Equal Treatment and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women” (Pavlik 2004), or Pavlik’s other articles (see bibliography).

³⁹ See, <http://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2009-198> (Czech), http://www.ochrance.cz/fileadmin/user_upload/DISKRIMINACE/Antidiscrimination_Act.pdf (English). The bill was suggested in Parliament several times previously. In 2008, both chambers of the Parliament finally agreed on it, but President Václav Klaus used his veto.

⁴⁰ In 1998, Gender Studies was established as a centre within the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Arts. The centre successfully received a grant from the Ford Foundation. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts then promised to establish the discipline as a department and advertised a search for professor positions. However, his conservative successor cancelled the search – with no excuse to the professor who had already applied – and demonstrated a determination not to have this discipline at the Faculty at all. He fired team members, one by one, and within two years had abolished the Centre for Gender Studies. Meanwhile, our team had been negotiating with other faculties of Charles University, and we finally found the best understanding at the Faculty of Humanities, which we are now a part of.

⁴¹ See the webpage of the department: <http://gender.fhs.cuni.cz/>

studies, language and literature, post-colonial studies, epistemology, methodologies and studies of disabilities. The courses are based on interactive methods of teaching, with feedback from students at the end of every semester. To demonstrate one idea that resulted from this – the deconstruction of power – we also decided to make the office of the head of the department rotating, which is rather uncommon in Czech academia.

Today, there are two academic gender studies programmes in the Czech Republic: a BA programme at Masaryk University in Brno (2003), and a MA programme at Charles University in Prague (2004). Some gender courses are also being taught within other departments of social sciences and humanities at other Czech universities, The Department of Gender Studies in Prague, in cooperation with Brno, organizes seminars on feminist pedagogy every year; some of these seminars focus on the popularization of gender studies as a discipline among, e.g. school teachers, NGO workers, state service workers and others, also organized are workshops for the academics. Thus far the Department has organized or co-organized several conferences and published academic, pedagogical and student texts.⁴²

6. CONCLUSION

What is the best way to conclude this brief outline of the development of the Czech feminist movement and thinking? During the nineteenth century's revivalist emancipation (emancipist) movement and the liberal First Czechoslovak Republic, Czech feminism was on par with that of other countries.] The dominant discourse focused on liberal feminism, which emphasized the education of women and, later on, also women's political rights (suffrage) and economic rights. Apart from liberalist characteristics, it represented a combination of patriotic and emancipist discourses, which can be explained within the context of the struggle for an independent Czech state and search for a modern national identity. Between the two world wars, the patriotic aspect continued to play a role within the movement, which was personified by its protagonists. In this period in Central Europe, Czechoslovakia was a rare democracy, and this enabled feminism to grow and develop.

⁴² A few examples: In 2005, an interdisciplinary conference of Czech and Slovak feminist studies, and in 2007, an international conference called Gender and Generations. After both conferences, volumes of selected (revised) papers were published. In 2005, the Department started to issue yearbooks, divided into an informational section, academic articles of staff members and/or introductory lectures for the courses, as well as selected student research reports and reflections on their study, and academic outputs representing student-teacher cooperation (e.g., Knotkova-Capkova, Blanka, ed., *Rocenska Centra/ Katedry genderovych studii* (Yearbook of the Centre/Department of Gender studies). Charles University, Prague, 2005; and, Knotkova-Capkova, Blanka, ed., *Rocenska Katedry genderovych studii* (Yearbook of the Department of Gender Studies). Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague 2007.

The Communist takeover stymied progress in the movement by suppressing free civic activities, closing the borders, and forbidding ideas representing any form of otherness to be spread; it cut the Czech feminist movement out of the world context. Some feminist objectives were appropriated by the regime, but this was not the result of discussions or activism from within. Czech feminism could not pass through all the diverse phases and branches of development that were seen in non-communist European countries or in the U.S.A. – be it radical, psychoanalytical, post-structuralist or neo-Marxist feminism. Nor could it respond to discussions of multiculturalism and feminism, post-colonial feminism, or intersectional discriminatory discourses. As a movement and theory, it had to find a new beginning at the moment many second feminist wave theories emerged – to the satisfaction of many theorists – and the debate shifted to the fluidity of categories and queer identities. Czech feminists at the beginning of the 1990s were searching for a way to surpass such a long development period. Do we start where we stopped (or were stopped) in 1948, or do we try to catch up to the world's present state?

In that respect, time helps. In spite of the difficulties of this twice-born movement, it has been finding its bases. Within society, opinions about feminism have generally become more positive. Over the last decade, a number of original Czech feminist analyses have been published in numerous fields – sociology, literary criticism, cultural studies, political studies, politics of sexuality and identity or intersectional issues (e.g. gender and disabilities). Feminism has become an established part of the curricula and of public discourse.

Feminism (feminisms) has/have been developing in the Czech Republic as a plural system of thoughts. Their particular expressions reflect the specific face of a post-totalitarian (post-neocolonial) situation that the country has survived.

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