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# GENDERED NATIONALISM AND “NEW” NATION-STATES: “DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS” IN EASTERN EUROPE

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A breathtaking change of governments and political systems in the late 1980s has swept away the structures and instruments of Soviet-influenced oppression in Eastern Europe. To some observers, this change appeared to be unquestionable progress toward the creation of a more egalitarian region of emerging democratic nation-states. The existence of extremely heterogeneous populations—in terms of race, class, ethnicity, religion, language, and gender—has created tensions within these newly formed “communities” as they discover the challenges of creating democratic societies. These tensions, nevertheless, are masked by leaders’ demands for national unity in order to confront the “real” challenges of nation-state building and economic crisis. For citizens oppressed by these moves, the present bears a striking resemblance to the recent past.

Feminists challenge the apparent “progress” of democracy in the East European context by drawing attention to hierarchical gender relations retained in these emerging nations. Such analysis reveals that the processes of democratization and nationalism are gendered and that the patriarchal socialist order of nation-states has merely shifted to a different type of hierarchy which is glossed over as “democratization.”<sup>1</sup>

Feminist research links nation-state building to the institutionalization and legitimation of gender hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> While democratization may carry many bene-

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1. In this article, patriarchal, masculinist, and gender hierarchy refer to systems of male domination that appropriate and regulate women’s bodies, labor, and forms of knowledge. See V. Spike Peterson, “Security and Sovereign State: What’s At Stake in Taking Feminism Seriously?” in *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)visions of International Relations Theory*, ed. V. Spike Peterson (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992). This article is a critique of gender relations. It is not intended to suggest that no benefits or “progress” can accrue in current democratization processes.

2. Peterson argues that European and post-colonial state-making reveals a gendered pattern, specifically, “the interaction of exploitative accumulation, military consolidation of state power, and patriarchal control over and regulation of women’s productive and reproductive powers” (Peterson, “Security and Sovereign States,” 39). The following are ways in which women are linked to national processes: “(a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; (b) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; (c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; (d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences—as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the

fits, it also tends to codify a dichotomy of public and private spheres that has, historically, discriminated against women.<sup>3</sup> An examination of current transformations in Eastern Europe suggests such developments. Patriarchy appears to be central to these new democratic nation-states and, in particular, to their manipulation of nationalist ideologies. Patriarchal dynamics are revealed in familiar processes of marginalization and co-optation of women now visible across Eastern Europe. The promotion of separate public and private spheres already reveals gendered effects: women's loss of public economic power, reduced political representation, and "use" as symbols when, for example, motherhood is glorified as a patriotic duty. In short, contemporary developments promote men as public sphere actors and women as dependents in the now celebrated private sphere. These patterns raise questions about how "democratic" or "progressive" current developments are for women.

Through a critical lens, this article examines the experiences of women cross-nationally in the integration and disintegration processes of three East European states: the former East Germany, Hungary, and Poland. Specifically, it examines how women's experiences are shaped by nationalism, the movement toward democratic nation-states, and the creation of a national identity that supersedes alternative identities, including sub-national and global identity.

### Germany

Many women in former East Germany were initially, and still are, skeptical about the benefits of unification. This skepticism includes concern about the loss of their jobs and social security which they had achieved with great effort and organization since the end of World War II.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, these women played a major role in the October democracy movement. They demonstrated for equal wages, leisure-time, and improved living standards. Compared to other new nation-states, the women of East Germany were and remain perhaps the best organized and most active before, during, and after the reunification movement achieved its goal in 1989.<sup>5</sup> The current women's movement activities reflect a growing concern over the government's elimination of many hard earned women's rights.

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construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories; (e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles." Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, "Introduction," in *Women-Nation-State*, ed. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 7. See also George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985); Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

3. Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

4. Slavenka Drakulic, "In Their Own Words: Women of Eastern Europe," *MS* (July/August 1990): 40-41.

5. *Ibid.*, 40-42; see also Barbara Schaeffer-Hegel, "Makers and Victims of Unification," *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 15, No.1 (1992): 110.

This concern seems to be well founded. In the tremendous economic and social crisis since reunification, Delia Davin estimates losses for women in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on most or all of a range of "indicators." These indicators include the movement of women into and out of the workforce, increased objectification of women manifested by sexual assaults, loss of reproductive rights as a result of more stringent regulation of abortion and contraceptive rights, and reduction in political representation.<sup>6</sup> The forms and extent of women's subordination were different for East and West Germany. As Schaeffer-Hegel asserts:

Government policy and state intervention in the two Germanies has been so utterly different that the lifestyles of the women in the two countries are very far apart. While, for example, East German women enjoyed a great degree of sexual self-determination, the political regulation of West German women's sexuality differs significantly depending on region.<sup>7</sup>

Even with this diversity of experience, women in both regions of the now fused nation-state share a common oppressor. In the pre-unification period as well as today, the ever-present influence of a patriarchal framework is visible. Women's cultural roles appear to have been similarly stated in reproductive terms in the policies of the two German governments.<sup>8</sup> Unification has brought uniformity to the specific policy manifestations of this overarching framework. In fact, the recently elected conservative male leadership seems prepared to implement national policies that reduce women's options. These policies involve limiting access to contraception, increasing restrictions on abortion, and enhancing the dichotomy between public and private roles through reducing women's representation and formal political power. The constitutional equality gained by women under the East German regime provided extensive welfare, including some degree of comparable worth in work and wages, childcare, and parental leave legislation. The loss of state-provided childcare for the majority of the population represents a giant leap backwards.<sup>9</sup>

Now that East and West Germany have been joined, there is a surplus of labor that hits women in uniformly more dramatic ways than men. By February 1991, 54 percent of the officially unemployed were women.<sup>10</sup> Familiar patterns of the "ghettosation" of women into service oriented jobs is also occurring, especially in the East German region. In addition, women have two-thirds less money overall than men.<sup>11</sup> Yet many women continue to work second and third shifts—

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6. Delia Davin, "Population Policy and Reform," in Shirin Rai, Hilary Pilkington and Annie Phizackleas, *Women in the Face of Change: The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China*, (London: Routledge, 1992).

7. Schaeffer-Hegel, 104-105.

8. *Ibid.*, 105.

9. Barbara Einhorn, "German Democratic Republic: Emancipated Women of Hardworking Mothers?" in Chris Corrin, *Superwomen and the Double Burden* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1992), 133.

10. *Ibid.*, 151.

as mother, laborer, and housekeeper. This continued association is in part responsible for blaming women when the young "rebel."<sup>12</sup>

Objectification, a form of violence against women, has been made more public through the proliferation of pornography in the Eastern region, which in turn has been presented as a positive shift from puritanical and repressive Stalinist attitudes toward sexuality.<sup>13</sup> Women in the former GDR have reacted angrily to both the increase in pornography and its justification as "a sign of liberalization."<sup>14</sup> Their critical reaction demonstrates an awareness of the underlying politics of objectification.

With newly-imposed regulations, women have experienced a step back with regard to reproductive rights as free access to abortion has ceased in the GDR.<sup>15</sup> Germany has identified biological reproduction and recreating cultural institutions as key to the construction of the new "German" national identity.<sup>16</sup>

The most recent elections demonstrate the loss of women's formal political representation in Germany, as well as in other East European nations. While women held 33.6 percent of the seats in the lower house in the GDR in 1985, in 1990 women won only 20.5 percent and only 20.4 percent in 1991.<sup>17</sup> Schaeffer-Hegel argues that the elections have "boosted patriarchal obstruction" and will "destroy" many feminist achievements.<sup>18</sup>

Not surprisingly, given the association of women with the private sphere, responses to women's oppression has been identified by the new, unified regime as problematic and anti-nationalist.<sup>19</sup> This accusation—coupled with the severe economic hardships suffered by women, especially in the former East Germany—has impaired the organization of women's groups capable of appealing to both East and West German women. While the future for women's rights in reunified Germany remains unclear, there is little doubt that German gendered nationalism—which brought down the Berlin Wall and built a "unified" Germany—has also encouraged a retrenchment of patriarchy that marginalizes women in both sections of the country.<sup>20</sup>

11. *Ibid.*

12. There is evidence of groups not really blaming but rather punishing women and certainly "others" and foreigners. For examples of such violence, particularly in Germany, see "Old Hatreds in Europe are Causing Crises From 'Moscow to Madrid,'" *Arizona Daily Star*, 11 November 1992, A-8.; Jack Kelley, "In Germany, A Dark and Dangerous Beat," *USA Today*, 23 November 1992, 4a; "Refugees, Jews Targets of Neo-Nazis," *USA Today*, 23 November 1992, 1a-2a; Stephen Kinzer, "Neo-Nazi Arson Kills Three Turks: Attacks Spread," *New York Times*, 24 November 1992, A1 and 4; and Craig Whitney "Eastern Europe's Frustration Finds Target: Immigrants," *New York Times*, 13 November 1992, A1-4.

13. Einhorn, "German Democratic Republic," 147.

14. *Ibid.*, 147.

15. *Ibid.*, 151.

16. *Ibid.*, 141.

17. Mira Janova and Mariette Sineau, "Women's Participation in Political Power in Europe," *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol.15, No.1 (1992): 115-128; The Interparliamentary Union, *Distribution of Seats Between Men and Women in National Parliaments: 1945-90 Series "Rapports et Documents,"* No. 18, Geneva, 1992.

18. Schaeffer-Hegel, 107.

19. *Ibid.*, 108.

20. Einhorn, "German Democratic Republic," 52-53.

## Hungary

The continuous presence of political, economic, and social indicators of patriarchy suggests that Hungary has changed very little through its many revolutions. While the introduction of Soviet influence in war-torn Hungary after 1945 represented significant changes for all citizens, it meant an even greater burden than in the past for women citizens. It transformed women's existing domestic burden of housework, childbearing, and childrearing into multiple burdens encompassing domestic responsibilities and waged labor. In this period, "equality" policies focused narrowly on economic issues.<sup>21</sup>

Women's participation in the Hungarian workforce after World War II hardly affected the patriarchal superstructure. Equality did not include a socialization of the domestic sphere neither in practical terms nor in the consciousness of Hungarians. Socialist rule simply institutionalized the double and triple shifts in the construction of what Corrin calls the "superwoman complex": fulfilling mother, worker, and housekeeper roles.<sup>22</sup> In practical terms this meant that, in addition to working eight hours for wages, Hungarian women spent the majority of the remaining hours of the day nurturing children and husbands and taking care of the household. The latter involved shopping tasks that included standing in lines for daily necessities—when they were available. While women's lives were structured around their double and triple work shifts, men's lives were bounded by wage work and far fewer domestic expectations.

Today's new regime deals with many of the same issues that socialist regimes encountered. Hungarian women have suffered through the socialist period along with men, but now, as in the socialist period, little attention has been focused on women's oppression generally or on women's rights specifically. Today women face new difficulties posed by the retrenchment of the public-private dichotomy.

Similar to other East Europeans, some Hungarians blame "women's emancipation" for the basic problems of society, past and present. They argue that granting rights to women, giving them too much autonomy, caused the destruction of the society.<sup>23</sup> According to Corrin, these leaders make "a basic problem of society into a fault in the personal lives of women."<sup>24</sup> A familiar claim was that women's rights achieved during socialism had been awarded to undeserving and perhaps ill-prepared women.

In fact, the processes that have accompanied the revolution and resurgent nationalism have entailed a redefinition of divergent male and female responsibilities with regard to their duties as citizens of the refashioned nation-state. As Corrin suggests, there is a sense of nostalgia for the past "where there were 'solid' values of Christianity, family and a sense of nation."<sup>25</sup> Today, loyal women

21. Drakulic, "A Continent in Transition," 57.

22. Milica Antic, "Yugoslavia: The Transitional Spirit of the Age," in Chris Corrin, *Superwomen and the Double Burden*. See also Corrin, "Gendered Identities," in Rai, et al., *Women in the Face of Change*.

23. *Ibid.*, 178.

24. *Ibid.*, 178.

25. *Superwomen and the Double Burden*, 31.

in the new nation-state are supposed to return to a purely domestic role.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of reproductive rights, there are contradictory patterns. While more stringent regulation of abortion is likely to come in the next few years, contraception is becoming easier to obtain. However, the quality and availability of contraception is limited, and the social atmosphere is decidedly negative towards abortion. According to Corrin, women who have abortions have been labeled "murderesses" by both society and its leaders.<sup>27</sup> Beyond a loss of some rights and gain of others, what this may mean for women is unclear. What is clear is that, once again, a nation-state is regulating women's reproduction as a component of "national interest."

Nationalism in Hungary has meant a reconsideration by the male leadership of rights, duties, citizenship, and democracy. For women specifically, this rethinking is related to the worker-mother duty duality. Women's participation in the waged workforce has been devalued and reduced. As compared to the pre-1989 period, the poor work conditions, wages, and training of women today provide evidence of the "deskilling" process of women out of the public and into the private sphere.<sup>28</sup> The gains that had been made in the form of available low-cost or free childcare were all but eliminated by 1991, in part, forcing women back into the home.<sup>29</sup>

Today women in Hungary are hardly visible as agents in the political/public sphere. In terms of representation, Hungarian women not only fail to appear in the upper echelons of power, but are also absent from even the parliamentary level offices. Hungary has experienced a serious decline in women's legislative representation from 26.6 percent in 1985 to 7.2 percent in 1990, and 7.0 percent in 1991.<sup>30</sup> In fact, unlike women in the GDR, few Hungarian women are actually involved in opposition groups. For the majority of organizations, except for the Green Party, women's issues are not on the agenda. While women in Hungary remain, as in all the other countries in this region, the primary domestic workers, nurturers, childbearers, and caregivers, there are no women in the high positions of power that create and maintain women's secondary status. The men in power in the nation-state of Hungary have failed to move away from patriarchal conceptions of citizenship and are working instead for the continuation of gender hierarchy.<sup>31</sup>

What is the future potential for feminist movements? In Hungary, it will be necessary to eliminate the association of women's issues with the former state-socialism that its citizens hold in such disdain. The potential for this change is limited given the continued insistence by the new government that the current "crises" must have priority over everything else, including women's issues.

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26. *Ibid.*, 71.

27. *Ibid.*, 64.

28. *Ibid.*, 31.

29. *Ibid.*, 47.

30. Janova and Sineau, "Women's Participation in Political Power in Europe," 117; The Interparliamentary Union, *Distribution of Seats Between Men and Women in National Parliaments: 1945-1991*, 1991.

31. Corrin, "Gendered Identities," 169.

### Poland

For women in Poland, as we have seen for East German and Hungarian women, the Socialist period was one of mixed successes and failures. Legal equality for women did not occur until the post-WWII period and even then their rights were more on paper than in practice. Women's roles became very much defined in terms of the familiar worker/mother dichotomy.<sup>32</sup> In terms of work, women in the Socialist period were kept in gendered roles. In fact, women's work outside the home for the most part was hidden because it was informal, underpaid, and sporadic, and was associated with private sphere activities.<sup>33</sup> As workers, women received less pay and suffered from high unemployment. As Pine suggests,

The association of women with "natural" motherhood in rural ideology, reinforced continually by the central position held by Mary in both Catholicism and nationalism and juxtaposed to the real hardship of many mothers' real lives, is symptomatic of the problems, practical and ideological, faced by women under "actual existing socialism."<sup>34</sup>

In fact, an even greater means of exploitation was used in Poland over women—the combined patriarchies of the Catholic Church and the centralized state. While it has been present and active for years, the recent "freedom" created by the Solidarity movement has provided the Church an opportunity to make women's bodies into reproductive battlegrounds. That is, women's placement in the private domestic sphere was and is naturalized through the association of the home with the ideal of the Virgin Mary, an image that today is gaining even greater importance as the Church acquires more strength.<sup>35</sup> Ironically, the freedom achieved by Solidarity has placed women in increasingly oppressive situations. As noted Polish sociologist Anna Titkow put it,

What I'm worried about is the visible retrogression to the past in customs, symbols, and morals in publications, the hatred of communism plus the influence of the Catholic Church brought to the surface conservative values that are gathering momentum. The Church is today in this country treated as a political party. In fact, it is.<sup>36</sup>

The duality of worker and mother came under attack by the Catholic Church almost as soon as it was instituted under the communist regime. It became the target of even greater concentration of Papal energies after the revolution. Solidarity itself publicly denounced contraception, abortion, and sex educa-

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32. Frances Pine, "Uneven Burdens," in Corrin, *Superwomen and the Double Burden*, 70.

33. *Ibid.*, 71-2.

34. *Ibid.*, 70.

35. *Ibid.*, 67.

36. As quoted in Drakulic, "In Their Own Words," 43-44.

tion.<sup>37</sup> The emphasis on the Holy Family by the Church places women squarely in the private sphere.

Abortion has become the hottest issue for the new regime. Unfortunately, government leaders and social elites discuss abortion rights for women in the context of, as Heinen suggests, a "masculine democracy" and, increasingly, a "Clerical State," as Glaser has termed it.<sup>38</sup> This claim of the prevalence of both "democratic" and "clerical" components is expressed in statements made by Church leaders against men who spoke publicly in favor of women's choice. As Heinen quotes Senator Piotrowski, President of the Senate Committee which considered the abortion issue, government and Church officials have accused these individuals of being "neither good Catholics nor Polish patriots."<sup>39</sup> In spite of their centrality to the issue, women are not permitted to play a full role in decision-making pertaining to reproductive rights.

What is needed to free women from their oppression in Poland is a challenge to the concept of democracy as male-defined. The continued dependence on the nation-state structures hinders any such challenges. This continuing structure has encouraged the institutionalization of dichotomized roles consistent with gendered nationalism. Representation for women in the parliament remains very low and, like the absence of women in the more powerful positions, shows no signs of increasing under the current oppression by both Church and State. The representation of women has dropped from 20.2 percent in 1985 to 13.5 percent in both 1990 and 1991.<sup>40</sup> As long as women remain associated with the private sphere, change is unlikely to occur.

The negative association of feminism with the communist legacy and the negative stance of the Church with regard to feminism pose tremendous challenges to attempts to fight the control imposed by the government and Catholic Church. So far, organization has been occurring in a variety of disconnected forms—primarily on local but not national levels.

### Conclusion

When analyzing recent "progress" made in Eastern Europe, it is difficult not to feel frustrated by the reentrenchment of patriarchal systems of centralized authority. Democracy has been constructed within the same basic hierarchical framework of the nation-state. The very same nationalism that helped to bring about the shift away from socialism toward democracy perpetuates a public/private ideology. This ideology justifies a dichotomy of men's and women's

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37. Davin, "Population Policy and Reform," 88.

38. Jacqueline Heinen, "Polish Democracy is a Masculine Democracy?" *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol.15, No.1 (1992): 134; Gabrielle Glaser, "New Poland, Same Old Story," *Voice* Vol.2 (April 1991): 19.

39. Heinen, "Polish Democracy is a Masculine Democracy?" 135.

40. Janova and Sineau, "Women's Participation in Political Power in Europe"; Interparliamentary Union, *Distribution of Seats between Men and Women in National Parliaments*, 1992.

gendered identities, roles, and duties in these new nations even as it denies them substantive equal rights.

After serving as the symbols of national unity throughout the struggles for independence and being promised that their needs will be attended to after national political and economic consolidation has been achieved, women have experienced liberation from socialist constraints which has not translated into liberation more generally. Instead, women have been "pushed" back into "traditional" roles of mothers, nurturers, and cultural carriers with little attention to the needs or desires of the women themselves, or a truly equitable idea of what "democracy" might mean.<sup>41</sup> Many women have agreed to this sacrifice with the hope that governmental change will mean an eventual reduction in their multiple burdens in the home and paid workforce. Others recognize that democracy and a market economy will not be as beneficial as it seemed, as the pressures of the move to a full market economy are likely to keep many women in an inequitable workforce in order to survive.

East European nationalisms exacerbate the oppressive structures of nation-states. The cross-national patterns reviewed here demonstrate the debilitating effects of retaining masculinist institutions and traditional nation-state structures. As long as identity is narrowly defined as national, women's issues will not be considered in their own terms. The communities are being created and led by men who have effectively reestablished patriarchal dynamics in both public and private spheres. Moreover, these men have retained an acritical belief in the nation-state—and its gender hierarchy—as the vehicle for assuring their continued control within nations, necessary for survival of these nations in the context of East European transformations.

Cross-nationally it appears that on a variety of indicators, women are actually losing ground rather than gaining it. In particular, they continue to be marginalized and restricted from the public sphere of power. In terms of representation, women have been largely moved out of the empowered public space of the new parliaments and governments.

Across Eastern Europe, women's issues represent, according to some, "luxury" issues, in the face of more pressing economic and state-building issues. When we critically examine the underlying structures and processes from a feminist perspective, it becomes problematic to describe what is occurring in the examined areas as democratization, if we mean by that, real progress toward a more equitable system of human relations.

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41. Drakulic, "In Their Own Words," 47.



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