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"Don't Get Pricked!"

*Representation and the Politics of Sexuality
in the Czech Republic*

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Věra Sokolová

Why Sexuality?

Many Czech social scientists know something about the changing ways male and female sexualities have been understood and represented in Czech society in the post-1989 period, but hardly anyone has written about them.¹ This is all the more striking since sexuality is embedded in and influences other social, political, and economic trends, such as changes in political rhetoric, cultural values, and lifestyle choices, and can thus be a fundamental lens through which to interpret and assess the broad processes of social change that have taken place in post-communist Central Europe. The following chapter will attempt to fill in this gap in scholarship, analyzing representations of sexuality in the Czech media, developments in traffic in women, and the new political discourse on homosexuality in the Czech Republic as both integral to and functions of the democratic and economic transition. By doing so, I show how studies of gender politics in Central Europe can incorporate sexuality to gain insight into a wide range of social problems that at first glance seems far removed from questions of gender.

It is not surprising that much of the scholarship on the economic and democratic transition after 1989 has focused on an important but restrictive set of themes—such as changes in political culture, the development of civil

society, and privatization and the transformation of state institutions—that seek to measure or account for the various degrees of “success” or “failure” of Central and Eastern European countries in their reform policies.² Though these analyses have enjoyed a certain degree of primacy, they have not gone unchallenged by feminist and other writings that highlight the sometimes negative cultural consequences of policies and reforms deemed economically and democratically beneficial. These feminist scholars from both “East” and “West” consider the central role of gender in the transition process and they use a comparative history approach to understand the differences in women’s experiences in the divided Europe.³ This scholarship has been far from uncontentious. Feminists from both sides of the Iron Curtain bring different lived experiences to their work, and they also often use different theoretical approaches and empirical data. It is no surprise that by the mid-1990s their scholarship had led to sharp differences in interpretation, fueling explosive debates and disagreements about women and feminisms “East and West.”⁴ Thus, although they demonstrate the need to include gender analysis within the broader transition literature, these debates have also proved the need to bridge the perceived “Eastern” and “Western” experiential and theoretical gaps and tensions that characterized the feminist writings of the early 1990s in order to produce mutually acceptable and enriching frameworks of interpretation and challenge the structuralist mode of thought that is still prevalent in comparative writing on gender and sexuality in post-communist East Central Europe.

Despite these differences, feminist scholarship on post-communist East Central Europe has shared common ground by making the labor market, women in the political process, and, above all, reproductive politics the center of analysis. This is in part because feminist scholars have for some time challenged the notion of separate public and private spheres and have rightly pointed out that reproduction is by no means a private domain removed from the influences of “high” politics.⁵ As Gail Kligman noted in her eye-opening study of the politics of reproduction in socialist Romania, critical inquiry into the institutionalization of social practices under communism enables us to “comprehend more fully the lived processes of social atomization and dehumanization” of totalitarian regimes and to understand “the means by which reproductive issues become embedded in social-political agendas” on both national and international levels.⁶ “The politics of reproduction” analyzed by Kligman and others includes debates about abortion, child care, the use of sterilization under communism, pronatalist policies as tools for nation-building, and other political uses of ideas of family, motherhood, and womanhood. Because gender discrimination in laws is often couched in legal language, these scholars also address the rhetoric and argumentation used to institute laws regulating family and social relations. Reproductive politics, therefore, offers a way to understand how the entire political field affects the way ordinary people plan and live their private lives.

However, reproductive politics is only one dimension of gender change in the region. Another significant issue is the changing understanding of sexuality, which scholars of reproductive politics often leave out or mention only superficially. As a category of analysis, sexuality is often misunderstood and reduced to “talking about sex,” a step that diminishes the category’s potential for exploring continuities and changes in a society.⁷ For example, new representations of sexuality in the media, causal links between prostitution and tourism, and “Western” influences on the cultural understanding of homosexuality tell us a lot about the ways economic transformation and openness to the “West” have helped redefine cultural values and models. The interactions of local practices with “global” consumer ideologies and products have dramatically altered the discourse on sexuality in the country and region.⁸

The immense growth of tabloid media, called *bulvár* in the Czech Republic, has profoundly influenced how people relate to their bodies and express their subjectivity. The sexual openness of tabloid media, which borders on outright pornography, has launched intense political and philosophical debates about professional journalistic ethics, the right to privacy, freedom of speech and expression, the social respectability and responsibilities of public figures, and so on. While these debates express the importance of ethical perspectives in the representation of sexuality, political discussions on the legalization of domestic partnerships between homosexuals show that the political imagination of homosexual behavior is still deeply embedded in biological and medical perspectives from communism that thrive due to static institutional frameworks. Thus, while some influences on the representation of sexuality, such as the consumer market and the media, have undergone rapid change, more conservative influences, such as ideas of health and biological rightness, have not. Considering the issue of sexuality from such diverse points of view, therefore, can reveal changes and continuities in post-totalitarian culture that other approaches leave hidden.

21941cd199faf1475e40d6a1e878ab94 ebrary **Representations of Sexuality in the Media: Freedom without Limits**

After 1989, the media in countries of the former Soviet bloc underwent a rapid and far-reaching transformation. Required for decades to write news and TV programs in dull, uniform, and politically correct ways, journalists became intoxicated with new freedoms of speech and possibilities for individual expression and creativity. As media groups competed to draw in potential audiences, using images and themes previously forbidden under communism was the most successful way to grab viewers’ attention, including commercials with provocative images of women or TV programs that talked about and displayed sexual acts. In fact, almost all representations of sexuality were taken as novel and as expressions of freedom, since prior to 1989 official discussions of sexuality focused almost exclusively on reproduction and family planning

(and was thus desexualized) or viewed it in terms of the criminal, socially deviant, and “medical” aspects of sexual behavior (and was thus oversexualized). Because sex under communism was either represented through officially sanctioned channels or not represented at all, the void rapidly filled with new images of sex, just as the consumer market and politics were flooded with new imported products and ideas.

Images and ideas of sexuality previously gathered from smuggled western journals and videos suddenly took on concrete shapes and colors on Czech billboards and newsstands throughout the country. Rules of “normality” and “acceptability” disappeared, and in the first years of democratic transition, few dared to challenge these trends seriously by suggesting that restrictions should be imposed on how sexuality can be represented.⁹ Czech billboards in particular have been notable in their shocking, sometimes obscene depictions of female sexuality. For example, one popular commercial by Kozel, a beer company, showed a woman in luxurious underwear caressing a man with the text “Drink Your Goat” underneath. Other notable examples include *Esquire Magazine* ads where naked women sit on top of beer-filled glasses with their legs spread open (or on all fours, eating from a man’s palm), a Magnum ice cream ad with women eating an ice cream bar as if performing fellatio, and so on.

What is even more shocking, however, is that these ads still regularly appear over a decade after 1989, reinforcing how the freedom to create eye-catching ads can subordinate and sexualize the female body. For example, in 2001 a popular ad by Diffusil, a producer of an insect repellent, depicts a man with mosquito wings having sex with a naked woman (visible only in her spread arms and high-heeled legs) with a warning text “Don’t Let Yourself Get Pricked!”—alluding to the “naturalness” of nonconsensual sex between a suddenly appearing man and a necessarily submissive woman. Clearly, the company and presumably its targeted audience do not find depictions of female subjection (in scenarios that would be considered rape in Western countries) problematic; rather, they see them as sources of amusement and creativity.

Such ads have not been published without opposition or outcry. One of the most controversial ads of late is for Nokia’s hands-free set; it came out as the Czech Parliament was debating the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace. The ad showed a laughing, excited businessman grabbing the large breasts of his female colleague, her face frozen in a comic scream, with the text: “Nokia—Dangerously Free Hands.”¹⁰ A protest immediately arose from women (and a few men) active at the Center for Gender Studies at Charles University in Prague, at Gender in Sociology, a research team at the Institute of Sociology of Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, and a few NGOs, indicating that public reception of representations of female sexuality has been (at least on some fronts) undergoing a process of cultural reflection and criticism. The protest was addressed to the Czech Advertisement Council, the legislative body that oversees issues of commercial ethics and legislation.

The existence of the council gives the impression that advertising ethics are monitored in some ways in the Czech Republic. However, the Advertisement Council is an advisory body that can merely suggest that a company withdraw its ad; it has no legislative authority to order an ad pulled down. After the complaint was submitted to the council, the activists inquired at Nokia headquarters in Finland to see if they knew about the ad and to learn whether it was locally produced or internationally distributed. It turned out that Nokia had nothing to do with the production of this ad: it was a domestic product, created by Czechs.¹¹

This case suggests that local perceptions of sexual representation can easily be taken for “Western imports” of obscene sexuality and notions of public acceptability. Clichés about the “American hysteria” over sexual harassment add further fuel to the fire. The “West,” and the United States in particular, appear in popular culture as a place where “feminists” have spiraled sexual politics to the level of absurdity. This view has been systematically created and perpetuated by well-known intellectuals and writers such as Josef Škvorecký, Lukáš Vaculík, Iva Pekárková, and the late Milan Machovec.¹² Thus, while sexuality is used to express freedom of speech, underlining the liberal values the Czech Republic shares with Western countries, it is cited at the same time to elevate and distance Czech culture from the superficial materialism and hysterical feminism of the “West,” notably the United States.

One striking example of the representation of sexuality in the media comes not from private enterprise but from the Czech public TV station, which is required by law and mandated by the Czech Parliament to produce “objective, verified, comprehensive and balanced information so that viewers can freely form their opinions and attitudes.”¹³ Recently the station ran an hour-long documentary entitled “Sex Is Ours . . . So Harass!” about the problem of sexual harassment in the country. Intentionally or not, the program’s strong antifeminist biases mirrored stereotypes of female sexuality in society. The documentary took the form of a for-and-against debate, presenting only two people who defended the view that sexual harassment is a real problem but more than fourteen male “experts” and “scientists” who challenged, ridiculed, and denied the idea that cases of sexual harassment in the Czech Republic could be substantiated. Arguments about “incidental” cases of harassment involving passersby overwhelmingly supported the male challengers against the defendants, who were mostly young women who were unlikely to have had experiences of sexual harassment at work yet. While the majority of the men were introduced as having postgraduate degrees, giving the impression that they were mature critical thinkers, most of the women presented were nude models, artists, or friends of the men, each of whom in some way exhibited her nudity as a part of her career and rejected the notion that sexual harassment is a problem. The choice of these young women served to reaffirm the belief that nudity and sexuality are merely expressive aspects of women’s desires and thus cannot be forced upon them. In a shocking move, the docu-

ment showed more than forty-two depictions of naked breasts, a revealing suggestion that only women, not men, can be used as sexual objects in this way. The program's dialogue drove home the idea that female sexuality invites men's advances and that sexual interaction is an innocent, free expression of human desire.¹⁴

Media images of sexuality are one of the most important ways gender inequality is produced and reproduced in the Czech Republic. Many accounts, both academic and popular, still underestimate the power of language and visual representation to cause or influence cultural trends and values over the last decade. They thus tend to ignore the fact that representation and symbolism used in popular Czech commercials and ads makes contemporary power hierarchies appear "natural" and "true."¹⁵ In fact, the apparent "naturalness" of understanding female identity in purely sexualized terms is a consequence of the postsocialist environment, in which market forces and global images dictate trends of representation, and of liberal reactions to decades of suppression of visual images of male and female desire.

Prostitution, Traffic in Women, and Political Mobilization

The media have been able to extend significantly the limits of what can be represented sexually because they can reconcile shocking (but taken as humorous) depictions of female sexual subordination while also interpreting "the Czech woman" as someone sexually free and inviting who takes pride in her body and prowess. As these images and the concrete conditions of women's sexual lives influence each other, the question remains: Have Czech women experienced greater sexual freedom and mobility under current democratic conditions? Although such a question cannot be answered fully here, the marked rise of traffic in women and prostitution in the Czech Republic since 1989 casts a dark shadow over the consequences of democratic and economic transition for male and female sexual behavior. On the other hand, the same conditions have made political mobilization possible, a key objective for the growing number of women activists.

Freedom of movement between the perceived East and West, supported by the fact that the Czech Republic borders Germany and Austria, "gates to the West," has exacerbated the problems of trafficking and prostitution. Although in the communist period prostitution blossomed on a mostly individual basis, mainly through West German or Austrian tourists in border areas, during the 1990s prostitution became a lucrative and organized business throughout the country. Because prostitution is legal in the Czech Republic, signs announcing "Night Clubs," "Erotic Clubs," "Beautiful Girls," "Nude Girls," and "Escort Services" gleam in most Czech cities and are advertised in phone books, printed media, and on nighttime TV. Until 1989, prostitution was considered "parasitic" and was punishable according to the law, not as a sexual crime but as a crime against the socialist work ethic. In 1989, the law on the obligation to

work was removed from the Czech Criminal Code, and no analogous law has replaced it.¹⁶

After 1989, prostitution disappeared in Czech law because it was considered neither a crime nor a “job,” leaving it in the ironic position of a morally despicable but legally acceptable economic pursuit. In practice, this ambiguous legal situation has had two consequences, both of which force prostitutes into situations of economic, psychological, and physical disempowerment, vulnerability, and abuse: they are scorned by the majority of society, and their profession is not legally recognized, meaning that it lacks social provision. The absence of legal oversight of prostitution has enforced the helplessness of prostitutes in relations with their employers, where gender and coercive power dimensions are especially prominent. At the opposite extreme from social and legal misrecognition, *Peříčko*, a popular talk show about sex, celebrates and romanticizes prostitution by interviewing and presenting the “performances” of young and “sexually liberated” escorts who say that they “love” their work.¹⁷ Situated between these social perceptions, the reality of prostitution remains one of the least understood and least regulated, as well as the most problematic, spheres of gender inequality in the Czech Republic.

As opposed to prostitution, trafficking in women is a crime in Czech Criminal Law. Paragraph §246 states that a person who “decoys, recruits or carries a woman abroad for the purpose of sexual intercourse with someone else shall be sentenced to 1–5 years of imprisonment” (or 3–8 years if committed by an organized group, if the victim is under 18 years of age, or if the crime was committed for the purpose of prostitution).¹⁸ However, this is the only legal norm that mentions trafficking in women per se, because Czech legislation does not use the terminology of forced labor or slavery to describe or punish the subjugation of women who have already been trafficked.

According to Czech police reports, the majority of girls rescued by police from international traffickers in the Czech Republic are not Czech but come from countries of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. Interviews carried out by the international NGO LaStrada reveal that economic factors prevail in the decisions of these women to journey westward. The Czech Republic is also considered an ideal place for trafficking in women, as a country with a high concentration of mafia gangs from Russia, Ukraine, and the Balkans and a transit country for drug-smuggling from Southeastern Europe and the Middle East. Data on trafficking in women over the last decade suggest that for traffickers, the Czech Republic combines “Western” economic opportunities and liberal values, such as freedom of movement, presumption of innocence, and the rule of law, with “Eastern” post-totalitarian cracks in the legal system, such as bribery, low manpower and finances, a confusing criminal code, and legislation that tends to follow rather than precede certain crimes.¹⁹

Worrisome as these trends are, they have also stimulated mobilization and grassroots activism among women. Legal challenges to prevent organized violence against women have been ineffective, so increased numbers of women

have decided to create and volunteer for NGOs that help women in distress. The most visible and successful have been LaStrada, which works in the field of traffic in women; Rozkoš bez rizika (Pleasure without Risk), which covers a wide range of issues and services for prostitutes; project "Jana" in Western Bohemia, which offers women free AIDS tests and medical examinations; and Bílý kruh bezpečí (White Circle of Safety), which provides legal and psychological services for victims of rape and others. These organizations gained their understanding of prostitution and traffic in women from institutions based in the West, which provide most of their financial support.²⁰

Elsewhere throughout the region of East Central Europe, abortion became the most explosive issue in gender politics following the collapse of communism. After decades of relatively easy and accessible abortion, Central European countries adopted new more restrictive laws; in Poland, for example, abortion has been illegal since the Abortion Law passed in 1994.²¹ Abortion has occupied center stage in political debates which articulate claims about national and cultural morality and justice through ideas of health and national well-being. At the same time, the issue of abortion has provoked women activists to organize and learn to articulate their concerns in politically salient ways.²² In Czechoslovakia, however, the situation was quite different, as neither the Czech Republic nor Slovakia enacted new legislation restricting access to abortion. The one significant difference was a higher fee for "non-medical" abortions, which certainly did limit access to abortions for some women but did not restrict the practice from a legal perspective. Even though topics and opinions in the media have occasionally stirred public debate, on the whole, Czech women have not had to mobilize and fight for their reproductive rights.²³

Instead, following the pattern of West European and North American societies, Czech women's organizations and networks have centered predominantly on issues of sexual violence against women, such as rape, domestic violence, prostitution, traffic in women, and pornography. In addition to concrete assistance and counseling for victims of sexual violence, these centers engage in consciousness-raising, research, and political activities to educate the public about institutions and structures that perpetuate this kind of violence. This NGO work can be seen as an attempt to counter the influences of the media industry, such as pornography on late-night TV and in the tabloid media, which then disseminate within popular culture.²⁴ Unfortunately, many Czechs view prostitution and traffic in women in terms of female promiscuity and the opportunity to get foreign cash and so often blame the victims rather than seeing these phenomena in terms of the coercive practices and grave social and economic conditions that produce them.

LaStrada, for example, succeeded in making the traffic in women visible by organizing a large media-education campaign as well as ads in several major cities in East and Central Europe. The ads and commercials warn women of

the frequent cases of trafficking disguised as au-pair and educational programs, ventures that are immensely popular in post-communist countries because they offer ways for young people to travel, learn new languages, and encounter new cultures. The ad campaign of LaStrada points out how these “opportunities” target young women in vulnerable situations. Given current anti-feminist sentiments in the country, such campaigns might risk backlashes against “naïve” and “adventurous” women, blaming them for walking into dangerous situations without caution. Paradoxically, then, greater freedom and mobility to travel internationally combined with increased awareness of violence against women could result in stronger pressure on women to remain dependent, fearful, and tied to home; in other words, to act according to patriarchal norms predominant in society.

Though Czech women on the whole resist attempts to organize officially for causes considered to be overly “feminist,” the mutual cooperation and interconnection between these nongovernmental organizations demonstrate that women organize around issues affecting them in fundamentally different ways than men. In fact, these organizations developed alongside and because of increasing gender inequalities after communism, indicating that women’s groups have been quick to perceive and respond to the changing conditions of a democratic society. However, while these activities—in content, structure, goals, and so forth—differ little from similar activities in so-called Western countries, such work is rarely understood in feminist terms in the Czech Republic. Many of the activists themselves resist that identification, revealing once more the absence of a meaningful discourse about feminist issues either under communism or today. Moreover, even though women activists could draw on a lot of support and power from joining their efforts together with homosexuals, such alliances have so far been nonexistent. Women and homosexuals (same-sex organizations and discourse are dominated by gay men) organize themselves differently in order to fight for their specific rights and to initiate serious debate in public discourse because of a mutual belief that they have little (if anything) to offer to and gain from each other. Thus, there is an absence of a meaningful discourse about homosexuality (and many Czechs still hold stereotypes and conceptions of homosexuality based on the ideological and scientific frameworks of the former regime), and feminists have been unable to connect the politics of gender with the politics of sexuality into a coherent, powerful, and productive political critique.

Homosexuality: The Issue of the 1990s

The most visible issue in the Czech Republic in the 1990s concerning gender, sexuality, and reproductive politics has been the issue of homosexuality and “homosexual marriage,” better known under the term registered partnership. Immediately after 1989, the issue of homosexuality shot into

public view, and it has remained a major political and cultural question ever since. The views of politicians toward homosexuality and registered partnership created unlikely alliances in Parliament and during TV debates. Homosexuality has been such a popular topic of debate that some politicians have used it to promote themselves and their programs rather than contributing to the issue itself. Through discussions in the media, the public has often learned about the sexual orientations and perspectives of political representatives and candidates; this type of information is now an integral aspect of political discourse.²⁵

The way both homosexuals and heterosexuals understand homosexuality was strongly affected by the repressive apparatus of sexuality under communism. After the collapse of communism, homosexuals were among the first suppressed minorities to organize into a strong political force to fight for their rights. The categories of freedom, identity, and agency offered rhetorical tools that resonated with the concerns of the society at large. Moreover, panic about the spread of AIDS prompted government support throughout the 1990s. Given pressures from the European Union to pay attention to the treatment of all minorities, including sexual ones, and the fact that the Czech Republic is not a religiously identified country with moral prejudices against homosexuality built into its national culture, it is not surprising that the issue has attracted such a spotlight.²⁶

According to a recent study by the Sexological Institute of the Czech Republic, more than half the country's population claims that they have not personally met a homosexual.²⁷ Though statistics suggest that Czech society is fairly open and tolerant (in fact, 70 percent of respondents replied that they would not mind if their political representative was a homosexual), other studies show that many Czechs consider homosexuality to be something "alien" that does not concern them personally. That is, Czech society tends to see homosexuality not as a natural component of society but as a problem that arose after the fall of communism and thus as a consequence of the rise of liberal democracy.²⁸

During the communist regime, homosexuality was presented as a crime, a perversion, and an illness. The medicalization and criminalization of homosexuality was rightfully denounced by many writers on totalitarian regimes.²⁹ Until 1961, homosexuality in Czechoslovakia, as in many other East and Central European countries, was criminalized: until 1950, homosexual acts were "crimes against nature," and from 1950 to 1961, they were crimes against society that were "incompatible with the morality of a socialist society."³⁰ In 1961, homosexuality was decriminalized by a new law (§244 Tr.Z.) which legalized homosexual acts under specific conditions.³¹ Only after the collapse of communism, in July 1990, was §241 in its entirety removed from the Criminal Code of Czechoslovakia. In 1993, when the World Health Organization officially removed homosexuality from its list of illnesses, SOHO³² managed to

ratify the removal of this item (which had been included in the Czechoslovak Medical List of Illnesses as the infamous Diagnosis 302.1) in Czechoslovakia as well.³³

Even though charges of homosexuality as a criminal act disappeared during the last decades of communism and during the 1990s accounts of homosexuality as “unnaturalness” slowly shifted to a discourse of “difference but equality,” these shifts have not transformed the understanding of sexuality from a biological and medical issue to a socially constructed and gendered category. Today, physicians no longer want to “cure” homosexuality and generally accept it as a viable alternative to heterosexuality. The medicalization of sexuality, however, especially the view that it is biologically determined, has influenced all levels of sexual and gender discourses. Most accounts, including those in periodicals, mention that “in current conceptions, homosexuality is not understood as an illness,”³⁴ but few authors reflect on the implications of the persistent use of medical and biological categories (rather than cultural ones) to imagine homosexuality in political and social debate.

The persistent monopoly of psychologists, psychiatrists, and sexologists on issues of sexuality to this very day, at the expense of qualified gender analysis by sociologists and historians, results in many ways from repressive communist social practices. Definitions and listed causes of homosexuality from the communist era have not changed much in the last ten years; they indicate that in the 1990s, the bases for argumentation had not progressed beyond medical discourse.³⁵ In 1992, experts argued that “homosexuality is a life-long, unchangeable state which is neither caused nor chosen by its carrier who, therefore, cannot be blamed for it.”³⁶ Three years later, another influential sexologist insisted that “biological factors play the decisive role for determining sexual orientation from the prenatal stage of individual development, whether those are genetic or hormonal factors.”³⁷ And in 2000, the author of the first original gay history written in Czech exclaimed, “Let’s understand each other! This book is by no means a promotion of homosexuality. To promote homosexuality or heterosexuality is nonsense. They are simply facts.”³⁸

Paradoxically, however, the etiological approach—the search for the origins of homosexual desire³⁹—which has characterized the medical sexological sciences and helped essentialize the biological foundations of gender and sexuality has also laid the groundwork for gay and lesbian political movements. The way scientific studies define homosexuality has clearly affected how gay and lesbian leaders articulate political claims and concerns. Many Czech homosexuals, who were represented in the early 1990s by SOHO and its president Jiří Hromada, have eagerly embraced the widespread essentialist definition of homosexuality as a “lasting and unchangeable characteristic of every individual,”⁴⁰ basing their political strategies on this view. Led by the goal of legalizing registered partnership, they have stood firmly behind sexological “experts,” agreeing that “homosexuals do not choose their sexual orienta-

tion.”⁴¹ Even though some original research studies include clauses about free will and choice in their definitions of homosexuality, homosexual political representatives have so far ignored them and concentrate on arguments that “prove” biological predisposition.⁴² Since 1990, Hromada (and Gay Iniciativa without and G-liga after him) has consistently argued that homosexuality is biologically determined and has gradually succeeded in convincing the public that homosexuality is an innate biological tendency. As early as 1995, on the political TV show *Aréna*, Hromada won a phone-in vote of viewers on the need to institutionally legalize registered partnership. Two-thirds of those who called said that Hromada had convinced them.⁴³ However, few people pause over the latent homophobia built into these debates. Why exactly do we need to know whether homosexuality is innate or a matter of choice? One of the primary ways to challenge debates on the origins of homosexuality is to question the political utility of potential answers. So far, however, most activists and academics still focus on explaining and providing answers rather than on analyzing the questions and their motivations.

Such arguments contain some contradictions that in the long run may suit various political interests. For example, Gay Iniciativa vehemently argues that homosexuality is innate, yet the crux of the conflict over legalization of registered partnership is fear of potential danger to children from inappropriate role models or the absence of “correct ones.”⁴⁴ Gay Iniciativa and most studies on gay issues available in the Czech Republic argue that homosexuals and heterosexuals are “the same” with the exception of sexual preference, yet Hromada has tirelessly assured the public and Parliament that homosexuals do not want the law on registered partnership to include a clause about their ability to bear, adopt, and raise children. However, no one has provided any reasons why homosexuals should not possess the same innate desire to have children as heterosexuals. This inconsistency is especially striking given the arguments usually made by conservative Christian Democrat MPs, such as Tomáš Kvapil or Cyril Svoboda, who see the naturalness of a “maternal destiny” in all women, on the one hand, and the unnaturalness of lesbian motherhood, on the other. They have not explained who should and should not be included in their definition of “woman.”⁴⁵

So far, most analyses of gender and sexuality have been blind to a fundamentally gendered and controversial premise: that the Czech homosexual movement espouses patriarchal values and has a male orientation and Czech feminist and gender scholarship is heterosexist. Feminist analyses of gender, which focus on social relations between men and women, and analyses of sexuality, which in the Czech Republic are premised on biological difference, have not effectively critiqued or supported each other.⁴⁶ Instead, gender analysts have excluded sexuality from discussions of social relations, and analysts of sexuality have not seriously entertained the claim that sexuality is habituated through gender norms and practices. Gay representatives often reinforce

gender stereotypes in their work, while feminist scholars exclude homosexuality in order to narrow gender politics to the range of their specific interests. As a result, a full account of the experiences of gays and lesbians and the politics and representations of homosexuality in the Czech Republic has yet to be written.

The contemporary history of sexuality in the Czech Republic is very much shaped by the confrontation and contestation of the ideas, institutions, and economic conditions of the socialist past and the democratic present. This confrontation produces conflicting and problematic ideas about male and female sexuality in Czech society while at the same time slowly patterning these ideas along lines common in the “West.” However, whether Czech activists will also manage to instill in Czech society respect for the female body or tolerance of homosexuality is still an open question.

NOTES

1. An exception to this trend is scholarship on homosexuality, which will be discussed and cited later in the essay.

2. For example, Jiří Musil, ed., *The End of Czechoslovakia* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995). “Western” texts include Anders Aslund, *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995); Jon Elster, Claus Offe, and Ulrich K. Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Laszlo Andor and Martin Summers, *Market Failure: Eastern Europe’s “Economic Miracle”* (London: Pluto Press, 1998).

3. See, for example, Renata Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Jiřina Šmejkalová, “Gender as an Analytical Category of Post-Communist Studies,” in *Gender in Transition in Eastern and Central Europe Proceedings*, ed. Gabriele Jahnert, Jana Gohrisch, Daphne Hahn, Hildegard Maria Nickel, Iris Peinl, and Katrin Schafgen (Berlin: Trafo Verlag, 2001); Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, eds., *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women’s Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993). Another classic on gender and women in Eastern Europe, published before the collapse of communism, is Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer, eds., *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985).

4. The best analyses of the context of Czech gender discourse and the East-West differences include, for example, Hana Havelková, “Transitory and Persistent Differences: Feminism East and West,” in *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminisms in International Politics*, ed. Joan Scott, Cora Kaplan, and Debra Keates (New York: Routledge, 1997), 56–64; Jiřina Šmejkalová, “Strašidlo feminismu v ženském ‘por-evolučním’ tisku: úvaha, doufejme, historická,” in *Žena a muž v médiích*, ed. Hana Havelková and Mirek Vodráčka (Praha: Nadace Gender Studies, 1998), 16–19; Hana Havelková, “Abstract Citizenship? Women and Power in the Czech Republic,” *Social*

Politics (Summer/Fall 1996): 243–260; Jitka Malečková, “Gender, Nation and Scholarship: Reflections on Gender/Women’s Studies in the Czech Republic,” in *New Frontiers in Women’s Studies: Knowledge, Identity and Nationalism*, ed. Mary Maynard and June Purvis (London: Taylor and Francis, 1995), 96–112.

5. The most comprehensive and up-to-date collection on the politics of reproduction in Eastern Europe is Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, eds., *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), or Hana Havelková, “Women in and after a ‘Classless’ Society,” in *Women and Social Class: International Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Christine Zmroczek and Pat Mahony (London: UCL Press, 1999), 69–84.

6. Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2.

7. For classic and introductory texts to the theories and politics of sexuality see, for example, Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993); and Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Summer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

8. See, for example, Gabriele Jahnert, Jana Gohrlich, Daphne Hahn, Hildegard Maria Nickel, Iris Peinl, and Katrin Schafgen, eds., *Gender in Transition in Eastern and Central Europe Proceedings* (Berlin: Trafo Verlag, 2001); Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); *Women 2000: An Investigation into the Status of Women’s Rights on Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States* (Vienna: International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, 2000).

9. For most informative and critical analyses, see, for example, Hana Havelková and Mirek Vodráčka, eds., *Žena a muž v médiích* (Praha: Nadace Gender Studies, 1998); Libora Oates-Indruchová, “Gender v médiích: nástin žiže problematiky,” in *Společnost mužů a žen z aspektu gender*, ed. Eva Věšíňová-Kalivodová and Hana Maříková (Prague: Open Society Fund, 1999), 131–153.

10. All Czech commercials and billboards that appeared in the 1990s are catalogued in the archive of the Czech Advertisement Council (Rada pro reklamu České republiky) in Prague.

11. This correspondence, sent in April 2001, has been filed at the archive of the NGO Gender Studies, ops, and at the archive of the Gender in Sociology, a research team of the Institute of Sociology of Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, both in Prague.

12. For example, Iva Pekárková, “Americké lesbičky si pěstují bradku,” *Rudé právo*, January 15, 1998; Milan Machovec, “Nezhloupnout pseudoaktivitou,” in *Feminismus devadesátých let českěma očima*, ed. Maria Chříbková, Eva Klimentová and Josef Chuchma (Prague: One Woman Press, 1999), 234–241.

13. *Kodex české televize*. For an insightful and informative analysis of Czech TV after 1989 see, for example, Petr Pavlík and Peter Shields, “Toward an Explanation of Television Broadcast Restructuring in the Czech Republic,” *European Journal of Communication* 14, no. 4 (1999): 487–524.

14. “Sex je náš, tak haraš!” Dokumentární pořad, Česká Televize 2001. I am

indebted to my colleague Petr Pavlik, with whom I co-teach gender studies courses at the Center for Gender Studies, for our endless discussions about gender and sexuality leading to these points.

15. See, for example, Milan Machovec, “Feminismus není problém jazykový,” *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, November 23, 2000. For development and discussion of these ideas from a theoretical point of view in the context of various feminist schools of thought see, for example, Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism* (London: Blackwell, 1993).

16. *Women 2000*, 150–152, §204, Trestního zákona České republiky: See also Gender in Sociology, eds., *Relations and Changes of Gender Differences in the Czech Society in the 1990s* (Prague: Institute of Sociology of Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2000).

17. *Peříčko* (*Little Feather*) is a weekly sex-talk show on the most-watched Czech TV channel, the private TV Nova.

18. §246, Trestního zákona České republiky.

19. Statistics of the Police Presidium, 1998, and Internal documents of the NGO LaStrada CR, ops. Both cited in *Women 2000*, 151 and 153.

20. *Regionální zpráva o institucionálních mechanismech pro zlepšení postavení žen v zemích střední a východní Evropy—Národní zpráva České republiky* (Praha: Centrum pro Gender Studies, 1998).

21. For a survey of reproductive policies in post-communist Europe, see *Women of the World: Laws and Policies Affecting Their Reproductive Lives—East Central Europe* (New York: Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, 2000).

22. See, for example, Eva Maleck-Lewy and Myra Marx Ferree, “Talking about Women and Wombs: The Discourse of Abortion and Reproductive Rights in the G.D.R. during and after the Wende,” 92–118; Krassimira Daskalova, “Women’s Problems, Women’s Discourses in Bulgaria,” 307–337; Eleonora Zielinska, “Between Ideology, Politics and Common Sense: The Discourse of Reproductive Rights in Poland,” 23–58, all in Gal and Kligman, *Reproducing Gender*.

23. Sharon L. Wolchik, “Reproductive Policies in the Czech and Slovak Republics,” in Gal and Kligman, *Reproducing Gender*, 58–92.

24. Already discussed earlier, these are mainly TV talk shows *Peříčko*, *Sauna*, *Trní*, and *Ážko* and tabloids such as *Blesk*, *Spy*, *Leo*, *Super*, etc.

25. For example, “Hlas sexuální menšiny” *Práce*, January 10, 1991; “Homosexuální chtějí změnu zákona,” *Lidové noviny*, October 20, 1994; “Názor na partnerství homosexuálů rozdělil sněmovnu,” *Lidové noviny*, March 23, 1998. Marek Benda, “Nutíte nás k nebezpečným krokům,” *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, March 24, 1998. “Tollnerův věrok o homosexuálech zaskočil i lidovce,” *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, April 3, 1999. Also, in one TV debate, the leader of KDU-ČSL and the vice-chairman of ODS, two oppositional parliamentary parties, laughed about their common rejection of the need for registered partnership: “See, there are some issues we fully agree on” (*Sedmička*, TV Nova, June 2001).

26. See, for example, Pavlína Janošová, *Homosexualita v názorech současné společnosti* (Praha: Karolinum, 2000); Dřamila Stehlíková, Ivo Procházka, Jiří Hromada, *Homosexualita, společnost a AIDS v ČR* (Praha: Orbis 1995); Jaroslava Talandová, *Sociální postavení lesbických žen: alternativní rodinné modely v kontextu heterosexuální společnosti* (Praha: Alia, 1998).

27. Cited in Vladimír Ževela, Alena Plavcová, and Eva Hlinovská, "Ve světě českých gayů," *Lidové Noviny—Pátek*, April 4, 2001, 14. Janošová claims similar results in her own research; *Homosexualita v názorech současné společnosti*, 126.

28. *Homosexualita v názorech současné společnosti*, and, for example, Jana Holíková and Gabriel Sedlák, "Homosexuálové v politice nevdí dvěma třetinám občanů," *Lidové noviny*, June 6, 1999, 7. For the best treatment so far of the struggle to legalize registered partnership, see Andrea Baršová, "Partnerství gayů a lesbiček: kdy dozraje čas pro změnu?" *Sociální studia: Sborník prací Fakulty sociálních studií brněnské univerzity* 7 (2002): 173–185.

29. For example, Antonín Brzek and Jaroslava Pondžlíčková-Mašlová, *Třetí pohlaví?* (Praha: Scientia Medica, 1992); Ivo Procházka, *Coming Out: převodce období nejistoty, kdy kluci a holky hledají sami sebe* (Praha: SAP and SOHO, 1994); Jiří Fanel, *Gay historie* (Praha: Dauphin, 2000).

30. Karel Matys a kol., *Trestní zákon—komentář*, I. část, zvláštní 2. vydání (Prague: Ministerstvo spravedlnosti ČSSR, 1980), 734. Cited in Jan Kočela, "Homosexualita a její trestnost" (M.A. thesis, Universita Jana Evangelisty Purkyně, Právnická fakulta, Brno, 1981), 31.

31. Fanel, *Gay historie*, 434.

32. SOHO = Sdružení organizací homosexuálních občanů (Association of Organizations of Homosexual Citizens), the first contemporary official organization of gays and lesbians in Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic) which was formed in 1990. In January 2001 SOHO changed its name to Gay Iniciativa.

33. See interview with the president of SOHO Jiří Hromada about SOHO's accomplishments in the first half of the 1990s, "Pacient s diagnózou 302.1 je zdravý," *Nedělní Lidové Noviny*, August 12, 1995, 2–3.

34. For example, Talandová, *Sociální postavení lesbických žen*, 9.

35. Arguably, this is caused mainly by the absence of meaningful gender and feminist discourse in the country that would supply the analytical and theoretical tools to argue efficiently against biological essentialism. As the emancipatory politics of homosexuality developed in the context of Czech antifeminism that has characterized the 1990s, so far they have not been able to use feminist arguments to their advantage.

36. Brzek and Pondžlíčková-Mašlová, *Třetí pohlaví*, 19.

37. Procházka, *Coming Out*, 8.

38. Fanel, *Gay historie*, 1.

39. For comprehensive discussion of the gay gene theory see, for example, Dean Hamer and Peter Copeland, *The Science of Desire: The Search for the Gay Gene and the Biology of Behavior* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

40. Brzek and Pondžlíčková-Mašlová, *Třetí pohlaví*, 4.

41. Procházka, *Coming Out*, 5.

42. For example Štefan Dubaj, "O postoji bratislavskej verejnosti k problematike homosexuality" (M.A. Thesis, Universita Komenského, Bratislava, 1994), 82–83.

43. "Aréna pro gaye," *Lidové noviny*, November 23, 1995, 5.

44. Tomáš Kvapil, "Zákon o partnerském soužití může ohrozit rodinu," *Lidové noviny*, March 20, 1999, 3.

45. See, for example, Marek Benda, "Když jde o gaye, nezná bratr bratra—a Marek Benda zase Jana Zahradila," *Mladá fronta Dnes*, March 20, 1999, 14; or Pavel Tollner, "Zákon počkozující rodinu," *Mladá fronta Dnes*, March 3, 2001, 7.

46. Of course, there are exceptions. See, for example, Mirek Vodráčka’s *Esej o politickém harémismu: kritická zpráva o stavu feminismu v Čechách* (Brno: Nakladatelství Čestmír Kocar, 1999) and “Život mezi,” *Gender, rovné příležitosti, vězkum* 2, no. 3 (2001): 3–6; Marcela Linková, “Je gender transsexuální?” paper presented at the Transgender Week conference, Institute of Sociology of Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague, March 20, 2001, unpublished; Věra Sokolová, “Representations of Homosexuality and the Separation of Gender and Sexuality in the Czech Republic before and after 1989,” in *Political Systems and Definitions of Gender Roles*, ed. Ann Katherine Isaacs (Pisa, Italy: Edizione Plus, Università di Pisa, 2001), 273–290.

