

## 10. CONCLUSION

I have looked at a range of texts from both pre- and post-1989 periods, in order to explore a variety of discourses of gender in Czech culture. My hypothesis was that the discourses of gender which became more prominent in the post-1989 period were already pre-determined in the earlier period, although they may not have been so visible then. My main argument was that gender discourses were heavily influenced by the dominant state-socialist ideology: whether directly by the need to comply with that ideology, or in the sense of the ideology producing a resistance written 'between the lines'. I further argued that what would be called 'patriarchal discourse' in Western terminology became a part of the resistance to the state-socialist ideology. That was not only due to the Cold-War antagonism, but also because the patriarchal discourse was residual in Czech society from the pre-state-socialist times. These two factors combined insured not only the survival of that discourse during state socialism, but placed it in a favourable position in the post-1989 period. Then, the country and its culture opened to consumer capitalism (itself a resistant discourse before 1989) and, consequently, to the patriarchal perceptions and imagery coming with it. In terms of the interrogation of Western discourse theory in relation to this discursive situation, it is certainly true that:

As producers and interpreters [of discourse] combine discursive conventions, codes and elements in new ways in innovatory discursive events, they are of course cumulatively producing structural changes in orders of discourse: they are disarticulating existing orders of discourse, and rearticulating new orders of discourse, new discursive hegemonies. (Fairclough 1992, 97)

However, it is also true that together with the articulation of new discourses at the time of such a tumultuous social change as the dismissal of state socialism certainly was, the forms and strategies of discourses remain the same. Michel Foucault's concept of discourse includes such an eventuality:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (Foucault 1990, 101–02)

As we have seen, the patriarchal discourse changed only in intensity from pre-1989 to post-1989, not in its form. The problem with applying Western discourse theory, however, arises when we look at the mutual positioning of the patriarchal discourse and the state-socialist ideology from a feminist perspective: to determine the function of femininity in that relationship, for example, is difficult—it comes from both resistant as well as oppressive discourse. Both Fairclough and Foucault describe a more or less 'sequential' situation, but I have not found an example, in discourse theory, of one discourse having *always* and *at the same time* two opposing functions in the way (Western) femininity had in the textual samples at which I looked.

The two pre-1989 novels, *For Unknown Reasons* and *Memento*, both work with the concepts of femininity and masculinity contrasted with the state-socialist environment. Zdena Frýbová's *For Unknown Reasons* structures (Western) femininity as a vehicle of resistance to the state-socialist ideology and, at the same time, the text allows, here and there, for a feminist reading. Radek John's *Memento* is, in a way, a

search for an acceptable alternative masculinity to the essentially 'middle-class' model promoted by the state-socialist ideology for its worker-hero. The novel was written at the time when the 'new-man' masculinity was an unknown concept in the Czech Republic, and any other model (such as those described in the Western literature on masculinity) did not seem to be acceptable to the protagonist who dissociates himself from the generation of his father (the representative of the 'middle-class' masculinity). Neither does he want to belong to the 'working-class'/'macho' masculinity which the state-socialist ideology (and the text itself) relegates to the sphere of criminality and social debris. In this situation, masculinity becomes 'corporeal', that is, the body becomes its final resort, and the destruction of the body equals the destruction of both masculinity and 'humanity'. I argued that this collusion of 'masculinity' with 'humanity', together with the structuring of the male protagonist and his relation to his girlfriend excluded the woman-reader, although the novel was obviously written as issuing a 'universal' warning to young people and their parents against the dangers of drug abuse. The text, nevertheless, is structured in a way that can only speak to men-readers (and women reading from a male viewpoint), but not to women reading as women.

Both novels, *For Unknown Reasons* and *Memento* are pessimistic in their outcome: life can appear as eventful and even productive on the outside, but underneath it is all decay. The endings of both of the novels do not offer many prospects for the future. This mirrors the situation of Czech society before 1989, as it was viewed in the first post-1989 years (see Havel's New Year's Presidential Addresses): a break-down in basic relationships to the extent that it would take at least a generation to 'repair'. Paradoxically, however, the pessimistic mood of the novels can be seen as resistant to the official ideology: socialist art was supposed to be optimistic. The pessimism was manifest both through relationships between the sexes, and in the discourses of masculinity and femininity themselves. In *For Unknown Reasons*, femininity is the only value which survives, men are dead—literally or figuratively.

Interestingly, the pessimism of the novels is somewhat counterbalanced by the textbooks I looked at as samples of the discourse of genderlessness. Their 'optimism' lies in that the concept of physical culture, fostered by the state-socialist ideology, which allowed for—albeit limited—restructuring of the relation between the feminine and the masculine and, by extension, of the concept of the body. It is true that the tone of the textbooks demonstrates that they were written very obviously under the dictate of optimism, but surprisingly, they did produce a 'liberating' theory from the feminist point of view, which could have been beneficial to its audience in the otherwise sterile and clearly oppressive environment.

The two chapters exploring post-1989 texts consider the tendencies concerning discourses of gender in the first years following the political, social, and cultural changeover. Tereza Boučková's *Indian Run*, attempting to voice a 'female identity' in a 'void' of public discussion of the issue, is the only 'optimistic' literary text in my sample: its optimism is located in motherhood and the relationships between women, which ensures continuation, if everything else fails. Thus, although it can be seen as a rather dangerous celebration of woman's traditional role, it may also be reconsidered in the ideological/discursive framework I proposed. That is to say, if femininity was a site of resistance before 1989 and an alternative identity to that enforced by the ideology, then

motherhood clearly survives as a 'value' on which to build something new and with which to resist the developing consumerism. Also, Boučková redefines motherhood and 'female identity' in terms of moral integrity and responsibility which are both inseparable from the public as well as the private spheres.

When I read *Indian Run* after its publication in 1992, I had no particular emotional reaction to it. I understood it more as a document of 'how things were' in the past, than as a fictional rendition of a continuing gender conflict. Re-reading it in detail for the present research about a year ago, I found the text disturbing and depressing: another 'memento'. Boučková's appeal to validate women's experience and define 'female identity' outside the traditional discourse of femininity, still remains a minority voice in the overwhelming flood of traditional images of gender roles. This is despite the fact that, in recent years, 'in more and more accounts, feminism is no longer a simplistic fight of angry women against men', as the young Czech historian Věra Sokolová writes (Sokolová 2000, 31).

The analysis of femininity and masculinity in billboards in Chapter 9 is a rather depressing counter-balance to the hopeful complexity implicit in Boučková's model of an alternative 'female identity', although I showed even here the complications of a direct transfer of Western gender theory to the post-1989 Czech environment. While the structures of the patriarchal discourse are more and more obvious in the portrayal of femininity, in the case of masculinity, the 'void' of an acceptable form of masculinity seems to be filled with the 'new-man' masculinity, albeit with a certain delay compared to the spread of traditional images of femininity. The Czech-German writer Alena Wagnerová relates the new images of masculinity to the prestige of men in contemporary Czech society: 'Men's self-confidence as key social agents [...] increased, and can be observed in such marginal spheres like fashion.—To be a man, unlike during socialism, again means something' (Wagnerová 1999, 84).

My reading of *For Unknown Reasons* showed how seductive traditional patriarchal values—such as the image of a harmonious household, with a woman in its centre—could be for women when confronted with a larger enemy (in this case, the state-socialist ideology). Amongst contemporary Czech scholars, Jiřina Šiklová has repeatedly made this argument, as when she tried to explain the general rejection of feminism by Czech women: she asserted that women did not want to take up issue against men, because, under state socialism, they were united in being oppressed by their common enemy (Šiklová 1993; 1997b; and 1998b). The novel demonstrates that one possible strategy available to women for making at least a small private gesture against the oppression by the state and its apparatuses was their insistence on traditional feminine values and even their exaggeration. That this conclusion is derived from actual social realities is supported by the earlier history of state-socialist countries: images of 'bourgeois' feminine appearance became a direct target of ideological propaganda in the Czech Republic in the 1950s; and Harriet Evans documents an even more extreme tendency from China during the Cultural Revolution (1966–69), when the image of a sexually alluring and elegantly dressed woman implied evil and moral corruption (Evans 2000, 118). I, meanwhile, suggested that if these values, images, and types of behaviour were perceived as subversive during the period of state socialism, they would be more

likely to become accepted after its demise. Again, Šiklová made a similar observation in 1993:

Cultural ideas have been changing slowly; in spite of other revolutionary changes, the old myths live on. One is the myth of masculinity and femininity. As the enforced false ideology breaks down, many people welcome the freedom to return to traditions once forbidden. (Šiklová 1993, 76)

A number of women wrote letters to various newspapers against television commercials on detergents and foods in the early 1990s when advertising really spread in the Czech Republic. They expressed their dissatisfaction with being portrayed as brainless homemakers, who do not know which detergent or instant soup to buy, unless a male expert tells them (for a more analytical view see, for example, Osvaldová 1995). Yet, it was the lack of intellectual capacity to which they objected, not the role ascribed to them by advertisers. The successful mushrooming of women's magazines focusing on appearance and domestic skills further testifies to this 'hunger' for femininity.<sup>1</sup> From the feminist point of view, of course, this is an open door-way to women's disempowerment in a society with increasing patriarchal tendencies; with 'the rise of masculinism', as Peggy Watson put it (Watson 1993).

Wagnerová's quotation above about the increasing social status of 'being a man' echoes this phenomenon. At the same time, the 'again' in her statement implies a return to some previous, temporarily lost, state—perhaps 'to [the] traditions once forbidden' mentioned by Šiklová. Considering that the Czech Republic belonged to 'regular' Western capitalist societies before the Communist take-over in 1948, that previous state can only mean re-connecting with the Western world—and, preferably, as if at the point in time when the Czech Republic had 'disconnected' from it, that is, not including any of the discussions and changes generated by the Women's Movement in the West since the 1960s. Indeed, the current Czech situation seems to resemble a 'regular' Western society more and more in many aspects, while it also keeps puzzling visitors and scholars from the West where issues of gender relations are concerned, as the debates between feminist scholars from the 'East' and 'West' document. The proximity of the Czech society to Western ones can be observed not only from the progress in discussions over the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU, but as I have shown in my analysis of masculinity in billboards, the tendency is present also in cultural patterns.

The latest research by the Czech feminist linguist Jana Valdřová considers a large media sample and shows an increasing prevalence of traditional gender stereotypes in the Czech media (Valdřová 2001). She shows the uncontested spread of patriarchal values and images which afford women the roles of secondary citizens, while consigning them to limited environments thought suitable for them. In her sample of television programming and articles about women, there are neither 'superwomen' in Anka's mould nor a proliferation of successful and not necessarily traditionally 'feminine' women. Her research points to the disturbing conclusion that a conservative patriarchal discourse is gaining currency. Her example of the mocking 'translation' of 'sexual harassment' into

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<sup>1</sup> There seem to be some differences among the former state-socialist countries, which may suggest that femininity played a different role in the various countries. For example, Myra M. Ferree argues for rejection of Western-style femininity by GDR women as an issue of identity: 'the West German firm that bought the largest existing women's magazine in the GDR and tried to use it to market 'glamour' to women in eastern Germany largely failed to attract an audience. Within a year the magazine ceased publication' (Ferree 2001, 513).

Czech as *sexuální harašení* seems to confirm the conclusions of my textual analysis: a potential women-friendly discourse outside the traditional structures is *a priori* discredited, because the residual patriarchal discourse still carried the staple of resistance in the first years after the fall of state socialism.<sup>2</sup> Claiming allegiance to it, therefore, meant being on the 'victorious' side against state socialism; whilst insisting on women's emancipation meant being on the 'outmoded' side of state socialism (Valdrová lists several examples when the word 'emancipation' is used in a clearly negative sense). Valdrová's examples of media discourse also look forward to what appears to be the even more disturbing 'next stage' in this discursive evolution: the sadly 'inevitable' return of the residual patriarchal discourse to a newly 'emergent' dominance.<sup>3</sup>

Even though Valdrová's analysis paints a pessimistic picture of gender relations in contemporary Czech society—or at least the way the media are perceiving them—the controversial and challenging elements I found in the analyses of pre-1989 and early post-1989 examples should not be brushed aside as irrelevant: in particular, the findings in the concept of the body in physical culture and in the attempt at the construction of 'female identity' in Boučková's *Indian Run*. It is important not to forget the period of transition, not only because of its significance in Czech history, but also because of the implications it has for the Western theoretical models with which I was working.

On the whole, the models proved productive and helped to explain the complexities of the texts in my sample. However, the interrogation of the theories against the concrete background of state-socialist / early post-1989 Czech cultural products also pried open important gaps in these theoretical models. The main difficulty emerged with unquestioned application of either 'ideology' or 'discourse' in the state-socialist environment, a problem hinted at already by Eagleton (1991). My solution to employ both concepts within one framework, while emphasising the institutional nature

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<sup>2</sup> The word *harašení* has two meanings: a) a rattling noise, and b) 'rattling' in the head, that is, having crazy ideas.

The author of the 'translation' seems to be the Czech émigré writer Ota Ulč who used it to warn the Czech public against the excesses of North-American feminism (Ulč 1993; 1994). Because the articles came from a respected Czech exile, his term and approach to feminism and sexual harassment took hold in the society where this problem was not a part of public discussion. Ulč, however, is not ever connected with the 'invention' of the slighting term in feminist discussions. Instead, the authorship is ascribed to Josef Škvorecký, another émigré writer, who contributed a series of three articles 'Dobrodružství amerického feminizmu' (The Adventure of American Feminism) to the Czech magazine *Respekt*, widely read by Czech intellectuals including President Havel (Škvorecký 1992a; 1992b; 1992c). Škvorecký is certainly a more famous writer than Ulč, but he is also highly respected because of his and his wife's, Zdena Salivarová's, publishing house Sixty-Eight Publishers located in Toronto, publishing Czech émigré and dissident writers until the political changeover. His potential to influence public consciousness was thus even more substantial. In his articles, he took such an insensitive approach to sexual harassment that it provoked a massive readers' response (n.a. 1992a; Chuchma 1992b). Sexual harassment became negative even before a discussion of it could begin. Valdrová records an example from a recent television show, in which the female host uses repeatedly the term *sexuální harašení* when questioning her expert guests on the issue (Valdrová 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Hana Havelková tentatively forecasted this situation in 1993: 'The new reality apparently will tend to turn elements that were marginal and irrelevant under communism—such as patriarchal traits—into central and relevant ones' (Havelková 1993b, 95).

of ideology, still does not provide an ideal theoretical approach, for discourse also has the institutional dimension. Nevertheless, I hope to have shown the necessity of distinguishing between the state- and post-state-socialist ideological/discursive environment on the one side, and the late capitalist one on the other. I have demonstrated how that distinction is important if we are to account for certain differences between 'East' and 'West', such as the initial rejection of feminist thought by 'Eastern' scholars and the general public.

My analysis of the concept of physical culture then showed another dimension of ideology: its capability to disrupt long-established binary oppositions, such as, in this case, the dichotomies of male/female, mind/body. In this particular example, the effect of ideology was productive in terms of the approach to the body. The body as understood by the Czech physical culture allows one to live one's body, without the restrictive criteria of appearance, of feminine and masculine norms. Apart from the examples I gave in Chapter 7, this phenomenon was reported to me recently by an American woman-academic participating in a basketball team of women in their forties in Budapest in Hungary: she related how these women's relationship to their bodies was much more joyous and liberated than hers, that their literally 'lived their bodies', without much concern about their external shapes.

The treatment of gender (genderlessness) in the ideal of physical culture, and also Boučková's attempt at constructing a 'female identity' shows there was a potential for a different structuring of gender relationships, and perhaps even for a very different feminism from the standard Western models in the early years of transition. The discouraging conclusions concerning the media presentations of gender seem to be suggesting that that potential was not realised. Nevertheless, if these theoretical possibilities are not entirely forgotten they can at least find their way into thinking about the body and/or femaleness at an academic level and, hopefully, return to a more 'practical' level at some later stage.

Boučková's rewriting of women's identity presents a challenge to feminism with her emphasis on female biology. However, the biological is inseparable from the social and the moral, that is, from parental (as opposed to motherly) responsibility, and the responsibility for the world. In, what I called 'female identity', she refused to split the public and the private spheres, as well as to define femaleness in an opposition to maleness. In Boučková's work, the public and the private are one; just as a man's and a women's role in / responsibility for them are also one. In its rejection of established binaries, this identity is similar to the concept of physical culture.

As much as my findings show theoretical possibilities, recent research, such as Valdrová (2001) and the other examples I gave earlier in this Conclusion, seem to suggest a conservative turn in the presentation of gender relationship and roles toward a more traditionally patriarchal pattern. Nevertheless, this tendency also seems to be generating a fresh response. Quite in agreement with Foucault's concept of discourse, the 'oppression' perpetuated by the patriarchal discourse is likely to produce resistance: a formation of a feminist discourse. This seems to be happening, although so far in the margins: over the last two or three years small publishing houses began to publish translations of Western feminist works, whose publication was usually aided by a grant

from a Western non-governmental organisation, and even first book-long original works.<sup>4</sup> Also, women's issues are beginning to appear more regularly in the 'serious' press and the number of university courses in the area of gender studies is increasing and accompanied by an increasing student interest.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Among the translations are Ann Oakley's *Sex, Gender and Society* (Oakleyová 2000); Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (Gilliganová 2001), Pierre Bourdieu's *La domination masculine* (Bourdieu 2000), and my own anthology of the 1970s and 1980s Anglo-American feminist texts *Dívčí válka s ideologií* (*Girls' War against Ideology*; Oates-Indruchová 1998). Original work includes, three studies of nineteenth-century Czech women—(Horská 1999; Lenderová 1999; Neudorfllová 1999), a collection of views on feminism by Czech women and men—Chřibková et al. 1999), or a collection of interviews with American feminist visual artists and scholars *Věrnost v pohybu* (*Fidelity in Movement*; Pachmanová 2001).

<sup>5</sup> It is largely thanks to the Czech sociologist, Marie Čermáková, who has been 'feeding' the media with statistical data about women's inequality (unequal pay, the 'glass ceiling') since the early 1990s that these issues have finally become a more regular subject of discussion on the pages of the 'serious' press. That is, of course, also in connection with the requirement of non-discrimination associated with the European Union accession.

At University level, the first autonomous academic programme in gender studies opened at the Charles University in Prague in 1998; another, smaller, unit was established at the Masaryk University in Brno; and I was approached by the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the Pardubice University, where I teach, to work on the development of a certificate-type gender-studies programme once I complete my research degree.

