

The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism

An expropriated voice

Edited by Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-Indruchová

Introduction

1 Expropriated voice: introduction

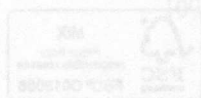
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Negotiating the identity of a 'Czech socialist woman' in women's accounts of state socialism

Kateřina Zábrodská

The existing research examining gender roles and the status of Czech women under state socialism has tended to focus on several particular issues. These include the pseudo-emancipation and the double (or triple) burden of women in a state-socialist society (Heitlinger 1996; LaFont 2001; Šmausová 2011 [2006]), conflicts between the continuation of patriarchal structures and the proclaimed equality of women and men (Heitlinger 1979, 1996; Havelková 1999; Oates-Indruchová 2005; Nečasová 2011), and shifts in state gender ideology at different stages of communist rule (LaFont 2001; Šiklová 2008). This research has brought attention to three main roles prescribed by the state as normative for women: that of worker, of politically conscious citizen and of mother (Nečasová 2011). The research on these issues has almost exclusively come from sociology, history and anthropology, disciplines that approached women's roles under state socialism either in terms of various sociopolitical factors, such as the gendered aspects of social policies, or in terms of gender representations in textual data, namely narrative fiction, political speeches and Communist Party documents (see, e.g. Oates-Indruchová 2000, 2005, 2006; Nečasová 2011).

Discursive psychology, on the other hand, did not participate in these exciting debates. Perhaps as a consequence, far less attention has been paid to a detailed analysis grounded in women's *own* accounts of their identity under state socialism. Studies that did discuss issues of women's identity have either been supported only by anecdotal evidence, often strongly influenced by the researcher's personal experience (see, e.g. Wagnerová 1995; Šiklová 1997; Šmausová 2011), or have presented unanalysed accounts of women's biographies (Frýdlová 1998). Indeed, little research based on a detailed analysis of Czech women's actual talk and its role in constructing women's identities under state socialism has been carried out to date.¹

The present chapter aims to address this void by providing an analysis of discursive strategies through which the identity of a 'Czech socialist woman' was constructed in interviews with women who had lived most of their lives in a state-socialist society. The data for this analysis were taken from archival interviews with 20 women conducted for the project 'Democratisation, Social and Political Change and Women's Movements' carried out in 1994–5. I also draw on interviews published in two volumes of biographical interviews with Czech

women titled *Všechny naše včerejšky* (*All Our Yesterdays*, Frýdlová 1998). Since no independent research interviews on gender issues were carried out during the state-socialist period, retrospective biographical interviews provide a unique opportunity to examine the ways in which women made sense of their identity while under state socialism, as reflected upon after the regime's demise.

A distinctive feature of gender regimes under state socialism was that, as an aspect of identity, gender was manipulated by the state, with 'the communist party holding monopoly over the politics of gender construction' (Johnson and Robinson 2007: 7). Yet, as numerous researchers have pointed out, the state's gender ideology was far from unified. One of the frequently discussed contradictions existed between the demand for equality between men and women, and deep-rooted beliefs in their innate sexual differences. These contradictory views were held simultaneously (LaFont 2001; Ferber and Raabe 2003). Moreover, the everyday reality of gender relations in many respects differed considerably from the official gender ideology (Wagnerová 2009). In addition, alongside the Communist Party and the power elites, there were also other actors who played a vital role in the construction of gender discourses and policies, including writers, social scientists and other representatives of Czech intelligentsia (Havelková 2010). The clashes between contradicting discourses produced by these different actors and institutions have so far been examined only in abstract terms rather than in terms of their impact on the identities of actual women. The question thus arises how these and other contradictions inherent to lives in a state-socialist society played out in women's identities. How did women themselves negotiate these contradictions and with what consequences?

To address this question, the chapter draws on the conceptual framework of *critical discursive psychology* (CDP). CDP offers a discursive approach to the study of identity that combines post-structuralist discourse analysis and a more fine-grained analysis of language use (Wetherell 1998, 2003; Wetherell and Edley 1999; see also Zábrodská 2010). CDP examines strategies of identity construction and their relations to the wider ideological context of society (Edley 2001). In contrast to more general observations about women's identity, this methodological approach provides a nuanced analysis of patterns of sense-making made available to women in particular socio-historical contexts. As I argue in this chapter, the reliance of previous research on mostly anecdotal evidence contributed to the construction of a number of overgeneralized claims on the lives of Czech women in a state-socialist society. This chapter's analytical focus on varied interpretative resources used by the women in their actual talk allows for a critical examination of these generalizing claims and for their problematization. It demonstrates that these claims do not stand up to the complexities and contradictions of women's identities as they were reflected in women's own accounts.

The analysis problematizes in particular the widely accepted claim of solidarity and harmony between Czech women and men under state socialism. This claim has been endorsed by a number of Czech gender researchers, such as Alena Wagnerová (1995, 2009) Jiřina Šiklová (1997) or Gerlinda Šmausová

(2011), and has been used to account for the lack of relevance of 'Western feminism' to Czech women both before and after 1989. In contrast with this claim, the analysis offered here reveals a strong awareness of gender issues manifested in the women's accounts as well as the women's desire to challenge the inequalities between men and women in heterosexual relationships and in the workplace. As I show in this chapter, even though the interviewed women distanced themselves from feminism, they nevertheless engaged with a range of gender issues that corresponded to the subjects regularly addressed by feminism, including a critique of male sexism, gender stereotypes, discrimination and male abuse of power. Rather than interpreting the women's abjection of feminism as evidence of its irrelevance to Czech women, I argue that the examined accounts demonstrated the women's needs to address a wide range of gender issues, albeit without the conceptual framework of feminism.

Discursive construction of identity

The chapter stems from the tradition of the discursive study of gender and identity (Wetherell and Edley 1999; Edley 2001; Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002; Reynolds and Wetherell 2003; Sunderland 2004; Speer 2005; Benwell and Stokoe 2006), which examines 'the complex and often subtle ways in which gender identities are represented, constructed and contested through language' (Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002: 1). It approaches identity as a socially constructed category that is constituted through discursive practices (Davies and Harré 2001; Benwell and Stokoe 2006). As CDP shows, identity is produced and performed through a continual negotiation of interpretative resources, storylines and subject positions that are made available to social actors through language and wider cultural codes (Edley 2001). The process of identity construction also includes a flexible use of categorization devices that are used to build contrasts between different social actors (such as contrasts between 'Czech women' and 'Czech men' or between 'Czech women' and 'Western women'). In this sense, identity refers to a social location in which the self is defined by virtue of its identification with a particular group (Benwell and Stokoe 2006) and simultaneously by virtue of its dis-identification with another group.

The construction of identity through the processes of (dis)identification is closely linked to the dependence of identity on the notion of difference, brought to attention particularly by post-structuralism. As post-structuralist authors argue, identity is constituted through difference, that is, through a series of identifications with, and against, other social actors (Hall 1996; Gannon and Davies 2007; Garcia and Hardy 2007). The notions of 'others' and 'ourselves' are mutually constitutive; "we" use the Other to define ourselves: "we" understand ourselves in relation to what "we" are not' (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1996: 8). Thus, one of the possible approaches to the study of the discursive construction of identity is to examine how the identity of a particular social subject is produced through differentiation from, or identification with, other social subjects. This approach proved vital for the analysis. This was because the interviewed women

did not primarily define themselves directly but provided rich descriptions of different 'Others', in opposition to whom they constructed their own identity. The 'Others' who figured most prominently in the women's accounts were Czech men.² The analysis of women's identity that I present in this chapter is therefore based on an examination of the discursive strategies through which the women differentiated themselves from, or identified with, Czech men.

More specifically, I draw on two key concepts of critical discursive psychology: *interpretative repertoires* and *subject positions*. The concept of interpretative repertoires is similar to the notion of discourse. Discourse, however, is a contested term with multiple meanings (Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002; Mills 2004), definitions of which range from language-in-use to social practice. By contrast, the concept of interpretative repertoires refers primarily to the language used in social interaction (Edley 2001). Interpretative repertoires are part of an historically and culturally specific common sense that enables social actors to co-construct and share social understandings (ibid.). They are 'relatively coherent ways of talking about objects and events in the world' and they 'offer a range of linguistic resources that can be drawn upon and utilized in the course of everyday social interaction' (Edley 2001: 198). Drawing on this concept, I examine interpretative repertoires that were available to the interviewed women under state socialism to construct their identity in relation to Czech men.

The concept of 'subject positions' (Wetherell and Edley 1999) or 'positioning' (Davies and Harré 2001; Davies 2008) is linked to the concept of interpretative repertoires. While providing linguistic resources to construct specific versions of events and actions, interpretative repertoires simultaneously construct versions of identities or selves that can be conceptualized as subject positions:

A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.

(Davies and Harré 2001: 262)

The concept of subject position reflects the ways in which different discourses and cultural practices produce different positions for subjects to take up, thus making visible the plural and situated character of identity. As CDP has extensively documented, identity is contextually salient, with social actors making salient different subject positions in different social and discursive contexts. Similar to other gender identities (see, e.g. Wetherell and Edley 1999; Reynolds and Wetherell 2003), the identity of a 'Czech socialist woman' therefore should not be expected to be unified or stable. Rather, it can be assumed that such an identity consists of multiple interpretative resources and subject positions employed differently in different contexts. For example, as the following

analysis documents, the interviewed women positioned themselves as wielding power over men in some contexts, whereas in other contexts they portrayed themselves as fundamentally lacking power. In some contexts, they declared sameness between women and men, whereas elsewhere they insisted on their radical difference. In contrast to more global analyses that tended to portray women's identity under state socialism in rather static and unitary terms, CDP makes visible the plural character of women's identities as they were constructed through the diverse interpretative resources and subject positions available to women in this context.

Materials and procedures

The materials for this analysis were generated between 1994 and 1995 from tape-recorded and transcribed interviews conducted with 20 women for the project 'Democratisation, Social and Political Change and Women's Movements' by the editors of this book (Havelková and Oates-Indruchová).³ The interviewed women were a highly diverse group in terms of age, education, occupational and social background, marital status and other social categories. They ranged in age from 29 to 72. Some had a university degree, others had only elementary education. Some lived in the Czech capital of Prague, while others lived in regional towns and villages. Despite this diversity, the opinions expressed by the interviewed women were remarkably similar. This can be perhaps attributed to 'the limited personal agency for citizens under state socialism to negotiate gender' (Johnson and Robinson 2007: 8) and the consequently restricted 'social imaging of gender' (ibid.: 9), which continued to have its effects after the demise of the state-socialist regime.⁴

Lasting on average about 90 minutes each, the interviews followed an identical structure while also leaving space for improvisation (Šmejkalová *et al.*, n.d.). In the first part of the interview the women were asked to describe their biographical history with attention paid to gender relations. The women discussed the lives of their parents and grandparents, then moved on to talk about their childhood, youth, heterosexual relationships, education and occupational history, and finally the situation in which they found themselves at the time of the interviews. The second part of the interviews sought to clarify the women's views on a number of gender-relevant issues, such as the status and position of women in Czech society (both before and after 1989), attitudes towards abortion, homosexuality, feminism and the political representation of women. (For the purposes of the present analysis, questions specifically addressing the post-1989 period were not included.)

Based on the theoretical approach to identity discussed above, the aim of the analysis presented here was to identify the interpretative repertoires that the interviewed women used to construct their identity in relation to Czech men. The analytical procedures followed the methodological principles of discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Potter 2003). The first steps of the analysis involved repeated readings of the transcribed interviews and coding of sequences in which the interviewed women defined their identity in relation to

Czech men. The repeated reading and coding resulted in the identification of four recurrently used interpretative resources on which the women drew to construct their identity, and that form the basis of the following analysis. To label the repertoires, I used *in vivo* codes to reflect the main content of each repertoire. For example, I named the first repertoire 'Men are No Heroes'. This title, a quotation from one of the women, reflects the main topic of the repertoire, namely an absence of heroism, morality and competence in Czech men. A similar procedure was used in relation to other repertoires.

Given the fact that the interviews were carried out in the period of transformation, one might argue that the identities analysed in this chapter were not specific to state socialism but reflected the new post-1989 era. Yet, it would be a mistake to assume that such a political milestone instantly and radically transformed gender discourses and practices constitutive of women's identities. When asked about the significance of 1989, the majority of the women said that nothing significant had changed in terms of gender relations or in their lives *as women* (in contrast to their lives *as citizens*). In other words, the political milestone of 1989 did not necessarily incite an immediate change in the ways in which Czech women understood and performed themselves as gendered beings. Rather, the interviews suggested that gender discourses and ideologies that had shaped women's lives under state socialism continued to do so for years after 1989.⁵ As I show throughout the analysis, some of the interpretative resources employed by the women were explicitly linked to state socialism – to its ideologies and social conditions. Others seemed to be more universal and may well be employed by today's generation of Czech women.⁶ In this sense, the identity analysed in this chapter does not strictly refer to that of a 'Czech socialist woman' as opposed to the identity of a 'Czech post-socialist woman', as if these were two ontologically different beings or as if there was any clear-cut boundary between the two. Rather, the chapter examines women's identity constituted through discourses available to women under state socialism that nevertheless continued to constitute women's identities long after the regime's demise.

Czech men as the 'others'

In what follows, I introduce four interpretative repertoires on which the interviewed women drew to construct their identities in relation to Czech men:

- The 'Men are No Heroes' repertoire
- The 'Equality is Impossible' repertoire
- The 'Lost Chivalry' repertoire
- The 'Loyal Masculinity' repertoire

The 'Men are No Heroes' repertoire

The ironic expression 'Men are No Heroes' refers to a widely used repertoire that implied that men were indeed anything but heroes. This repertoire associated men

with a multitude of highly negative attributes emphasizing their moral weakness, insignificance, incapacity and lack of intelligence. Men were portrayed as generally contemptible individuals, more specifically as 'cowards', 'little hurt Joes' and 'incompetent and irresponsible idiots'. They were described as 'lazy as bugs', as well as suffering from 'inferiority complexes', 'incapacity' and 'stupidity'. The relationship of Czech women towards Czech men was characterized by 'detachment', 'contempt', 'disdain' or, in more positive cases, by 'amusement'. This repertoire was typically employed in the women's descriptions of men as husbands and sexual partners, that is, in the context of family and heterosexual relationships.

Extract 1

Unfortunately, I think that women here [in CR] look at men somehow with disdain. And this is not even women's fault, men brought this on themselves. I once looked up to men because they had a higher IQ, they were more educated or cleverer [than me], I don't know. But after all my life experience men fell somewhere far down. And this is a terrible feeling when you begin to look down on a bloke with subtle detachment and amusement and you're thinking: 'Well, what now then?' And then you find out that men are these little hurt Joes...

(Dana, born in 1944)⁷

Extract 2

Overall I think that women here [in CR] stand higher than men. A woman with a child, whether she likes it or not, she learns something and doesn't go nuts. Whereas a man, the average Czech man, or even a village man [...], well, it's even worse in the case of the village man. He spends his whole day sitting on a tractor, then goes to a pub, empties five beers with five snifters, or however they call it, and goes nuts. Look at our village population: it's a bunch of idiotic blokes. And among them are very clever women who learn with their children, on whom everything depends. And they all work.

(Denisa, born in 1941)

This first repertoire is notable for its explicit disrespect of men and for the recognizable habitualness of this deprecatory representation. Among the many negative characteristics attributed to men within this repertoire, lack of achievement and moral weakness were most prominent. These characteristics were visible, for instance, in Extract 2, in which men were portrayed as incompetent and unintelligent. In both extracts, men were also defined as morally weak, more specifically as irresponsible and immature. In Extract 1, Dana described men as clever and educated, yet commented upon the irrelevance of these qualities when compared with men's overall lack of character. The moral asymmetry between women and men was further apparent in the frequent use of expressions that positioned women 'above' men (e.g. 'women look down at men', 'men fell far

down', 'women stand higher than men') as well as in the negative attributes associated with men as a social group (e.g. 'He was a coward like every man').

So how was the marked moral asymmetry between women and men accounted for by the interviewed women? As the extracts above show, the women explained the asymmetry by the absence of 'real responsibilities' in men and by men's self-centeredness. In Extract 2, for instance, Dana portrayed men as having no other responsibilities than insignificant, puerile jobs ('sitting on a tractor') and their own entertainment ('drinking in a pub'). By contrast, women had an important mission to fulfil, namely to take care of their children and to work. Women were the ones 'on whom everything depends'. Dana, in Extract 1, made a similar point when she described men as 'little hurt Joes' and continued her account by comparing men to little boys wasting their time in petty battles and worrying about their little egos. In Western democracies, achievement and moral strength have long represented the defining features of traditional, 'heroic' masculinity (Connell 1995; Wetherell and Edley 1999). In contrast, the Czech man was constructed as profoundly lacking in both masculinity and heroism. Indeed, he was portrayed as an anti-hero; as a pitiful figure who pursued only his own petty interests and who was easily outperformed and manipulated by women, as the next extract shows.

Extract 3

In many families, I'd say, men are generally looked at with contempt. [...] Women skillfully manipulate their husbands, depending on how good each of them is at being a diplomat. In the end, the husband will do what the woman wants, so this is how the patriarchy manifests itself in this.

(Anna, born in 1922)

The 'Men are No Heroes' repertoire corresponds to one of the well-researched aspects of gender relations under state socialism, namely to the representation of women as superior in terms of their strength and vigour. It corresponds to the commentaries that describe Czech men as 'big children' (Vodochodský 2007) and Czech women as 'brave victims' (Gál and Kligman 2000) or as 'super-women' (Vodochodský 2007). The repertoire further rehearses the binary between women as bearers of moral integrity and men as failing to stand up to moral standards that has been explored in some major pieces of narrative fiction reflecting the late period of state socialism (Oates-Indruchová 2003).

The loss of men's status under state socialism has been explained, among other things, by the paternalistic state that superseded men's previously held roles (particularly their role as main breadwinners), thus depriving them of key aspects of traditional masculinity (Wagnerová 1995; Havelková 1999). As Wagnerová (1995) explains, due to the nationalization of private property and the low wages that made women's incomes indispensable for the family's economic survival, men's power and status (traditionally linked to their roles as breadwinners and property owners) significantly diminished. At the same time, the

radical redistribution of property lessened economic differences between men and women and undermined what had been the normative character of masculine attributes and behaviour (Wagnerová 1995). The loss of value of traditional masculine roles seemed to be reflected in the interviewed women's negative perceptions of men as lacking responsibility and, in consequence, as incompetent and inferior.

An alternative explanation of the diminished value of masculinity can be found in Libora Oates-Indruchová's analyses of narrative fiction (2006, 2012), in which she introduces the notion of the 'the void of acceptable masculinity' under state socialism (Oates-Indruchová 2006: 434). As she argues, the void was caused by the domination of state ideology over the representation of men as defenders of socialism, which contributed to the loss of the reputation of masculinity. Men were not free to choose their identity, but were forced into uniformity by identification with the labour force, socialist citizenship, and with their mission as 'soldiers and defenders of the country' (Oates-Indruchová 2006: 429). In fact, the 'Men are No Heroes' repertoire represented the reverse of the masculinity promoted by state-socialist ideology. Instead of the official representation of masculinity 'conceived in terms of work, discipline, and work initiative' (Oates-Indruchová 2006: 429), this repertoire associated masculinity with incompetency, egoism and aversion to work or to taking on any initiative.

The 'Equality is Impossible' repertoire

'Equality is Impossible' was a repertoire that portrayed women as desiring equality with men but failing to achieve it. The repertoire included descriptions of women's capacities and longings for equal relationships that had nevertheless proved to be impossible to achieve. The failure was attributed to men's character, namely to men's denigrating attitudes towards women and their preference for domination over equality, as illustrated in the following extracts.

Extract 4

I think that women's relationship towards men is not healthy here [in CR] because a healthy relationship is an entirely equal relationship. I mean if I don't like something about a man, or if he doesn't like something about me, we must be able to talk about it with each other. But this unfortunately doesn't happen here [in CR] because most men have this attitude toward women: 'They're only women.'

(Dana, born in 1944)

Extract 5

My partner has this feeling that I'm just a woman, so what more would I want? And this is an agonizing barrier I've been constantly fighting with. [...] I wish I had an entirely equal partner, a partner with equal rights, with

whom I wouldn't need to make gimmickry just to go to the cinema. I wish I had a partner with whom I could talk quite frankly about my problems, and from whom I'd expect the same. A partner with whom I could solve my problems without throwing dishes, or similar rubbish, with whom I wouldn't need to play tricks with sexual blackmail. I really resent these tricks, they are such rubbish. But I've found that men let us [women] play these games on them with a feeling of a victory. Regrettably, equality in the household is something I've absolutely failed to achieve. I must admit, he is the winner.

(Sara, born in 1965)

In these extracts, the interviewed women contrasted their preference for openness, reciprocity and authenticity with the reality of gender relations defined by the exact opposite: by fighting, pretence, power struggles and generally by an unbridgeable difference between men and women. This repertoire typically included a short narrative beginning with the women's past efforts to achieve equality in relationships with men. Nevertheless, as they gained more experience with men they recognized the unviability of their efforts. The narrative concluded with the women's acceptance of the fact that equality in gender relationships was a mission that was indeed impossible. In contrast to the 'Men are No Heroes' repertoire, the 'Equality is Impossible' repertoire sharply inverted men and women's status. Men were not positioned here as incompetent dummies but as powerful figures capable of securing their domination over women. The repertoire portrayed men as forcing women to use 'tricks', 'pretence' and 'gimmickry' just to accomplish everyday tasks, despite women's disgust with such behaviour. Far from praising their own position as 'clever manipulators', as in the first repertoire, the women expressed their resentment over the manipulative tricks they were forced to employ as a part of their 'women's role'.

Notably, within this repertoire, gender relations were constructed through the metaphor of 'war' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). References to war or struggle were prominent in many of the accounts: women engaged in 'constant fighting' and 'enormous struggles', they encountered 'agonizing barriers', fought 'enormous obstacles' and 'failed' in their efforts to achieve more equality. The relations between women and men were described in terms of 'winning/losing', and the men, although being 'smashed' by women's claims for equality, finally won the game. This sense of struggle was also visible in the following extract, which emerged in the context of a discussion of gender relations in the workplace.

Extract 6

I think that women are terribly undervalued here [in CR]; if a woman sets a goal for herself, she meets with enormous obstacles, with enormous problems. Men often underestimate women. When a woman decides something, it's definitely not easy for her. Men treat her as if she was in [an] inferior position. They don't trust her, they diminish her, they make things complicated for her.

So I think that if she wants to achieve something in this society, it costs her an enormous effort and enormous struggles. I think it'll take some time before it changes.

(Simona, born in 1963)

This way of constructing gender relations poses a serious challenge to the common description of the relations between Czech men and women (both before and after 1989) as unusually harmonious compared to Western standards. The popular 'theory of one enemy' (Šiklová 1997, 2008) suggested that throughout Czech history, relationships between men and women have been defined by cohesion rather than by conflict because men and women were united by their fight against the same enemy, such as the state-socialist regime. Patriarchal discourse was more difficult to challenge as it was less of an enemy than socialist ideology (Oates-Indruchová 2002). Šiklová (1997: 267), for example, claims that 'relationships at workplaces between men and women were good, without rivalry and competition'.

The legacy of 'gender harmony' has been repeatedly used to explain the rejection of feminism by Czech women after 1989 (see Wagnerová 1995; Šiklová 1997; Šmausová 2011). Yet, this theory clearly contrasts with the explicit critique of discrimination and sexist behaviour by Czech men articulated in the examined extracts. The interviewed women were far from identifying with men or describing their relationships as 'good' or 'without rivalry and competition'. On the contrary, they reflected upon and strongly contested their unequal position in both heterosexual relationships and workplaces. As I discuss in more detail below, the 'Equality is Impossible' repertoire shows that the theory of solidarity between the genders under state socialism, as Havelková (1999: 77) has claimed, 'should be regarded, from the cultural point of view, as a myth'.

The 'Lost Chivalry' repertoire

The 'Lost Chivalry' repertoire portrayed gender relations as deteriorating due to a loss of chivalry in men, which was attributed to the state-socialist project of women's emancipation. Within this repertoire the women articulated their desire to accentuate the gender differences wiped away by state socialism and to occupy 'the position of a woman' again. The repertoire usually emerged in response to a question about the relationship between Czech men and Czech women.

Extract 7

Chivalry has been lost here [in CR]. Since everything had to be the same, men's and women's characteristics began to intertwine. Whereas I think that the most beautiful thing about it [the relationship between men and women] is to appreciate the fact that I'm completely different from him [a man]. That this is the basic: to retain what makes me a woman.

(Denisa, born in 1941)

Extract 8

Men have absorbed too much of these emancipation strands which claimed that a woman doesn't need any help, that she can take care of herself, arrange her own living, finances, that she'll do everything by herself. I've got used to it but I'd be glad if I didn't have to. It'd be good if someone took this off me, if women had more time for their position as a woman.

(Jitka, born in 1938)

Extract 9

I think that there always should be a distance [between men and women], that a man should be courteous to a woman, even if he thinks that they are equals. That this is his role. But on the other hand, when women have equal rights, men think that they don't need to be gallant anymore. So a man doesn't hold the door for a woman, he doesn't help her to put on her coat. Gallantry shouldn't get lost, but it does with equality.

(Anna, born in 1922)

Within this repertoire Czech men were portrayed as compliant with the negative influences of the state-socialist ideology of women's emancipation. As the extracts show, men were said to misuse state ideology for their own benefits, namely to absolve themselves from any responsibilities and to shift these responsibilities onto women. Against this negative portrait of Czech men, the women posited the ideal of a chivalrous man who respects women and their difference. Chivalry, however, was portrayed as an act that requires the recognition of women's specificity, and was therefore described as contradictory to gender equality. This was explicitly expressed by Anna in Extract 9: 'Gallantry shouldn't get lost, but it does with equality'. Emancipation was also viewed as distinctly detrimental to women since it brought about men's indifference toward women, including the men's lack of participation in everyday household chores. As Extract 8 showed, instead of improving women's lives, women's emancipation was experienced as an increasing absence of support for women and an additional burden (see also Šmausová 2011).

The paradoxical nature of state-socialist emancipation has been repeatedly discussed by Czech gender researchers, many of whom also pointed to its beneficial impact on Czech women's social and economic status (Havelková 1999; Wagnerová 2009). On the other hand, Havelková (1999) has observed that state-socialist emancipation can hardly be considered emancipation because of its fundamental suppression of women's individual autonomy. What the examined accounts showed is that, for the interviewed women, the refusal of state-socialist emancipation was linked not only to the double burden and 'ideological manipulation' (Šmausová 2011) by the state, but also to the women's profound fears of losing their femininity. In other words, emancipation was viewed as a force that neutralized gender differences and was responsible for women's inability to

maintain their femininity. In this context, men's chivalry acquired a crucial significance because it made visible the women's specificity *as women*. Opening the door for women or helping them to put on a coat were portrayed as highly significant acts that reconstructed women's 'natural dignity' and 'women's value' that had been lost under state socialism.

Together with mourning the disappearance of chivalrous men, this repertoire articulated the ideal of a 'natural', dignified femininity that had vanished together with a chivalrous masculinity. In the extract below, Denisa expressed a sentiment widely shared by the interviewed women, namely a nostalgia for bygone times in which women were still 'real women'.

Extract 10

It's a terrible mistake that so called flirting has been lost. A woman who can flirt with grace always stays within the limits. She says: 'You shall do only what I allow you'. That's what women have lost here [in CR]. Worn out women carrying heavy shopping bags, children waiting at home, with a bloke who's never learned to help, who's never washed dishes in his life. This is the normal prototype of our [Czech] family. What can a woman find in this for herself?

(Denisa, born in 1941)

Oates-Indruchová (2012 and in this volume) suggests that the imagery of bourgeois femininity, together with its nostalgic connotations, can be conceptualized as a residual discourse from the pre-state-socialist era. Instead of vanishing under state socialism, this discourse was transformed into a resistant discourse that opposed the state's authoritative project of emancipation. Indeed, Denisa seemed to be drawing on the pre-state-socialist discourse of a 'bourgeois' woman that idealized traditional gender roles. Her account revived the romanticizing imagery of a graceful woman of the pre-state-socialist era who could 'flirt with grace' and set boundaries on men's desires. Such a figure functioned as a source of identification against the 'masculine', 'coarse', and 'worn out' socialist woman. Importantly, however, the women's desires to occupy the position of 'real woman' did not necessarily mean a desire to return to traditional gender arrangements, in which men's and women's roles were strictly separated. Rather, such a position implied a desire for men's greater involvement in women's everyday life as well as for women's autonomy (see Extracts 8 and 10). As I discuss below, the desire to promote gender differences implied a desire for more equal relationships between women and men, rather than a return to the traditional roles of housewives and breadwinners.

The 'Loyal Masculinity' repertoire

'Loyal Masculinity' was the only identified repertoire that employed a positive representation of men and masculinity. This repertoire regularly emerged in

women's descriptions of relationships among women or in response to the question of whether there should be more solidarity among women. In these specific contexts, women were portrayed as lacking solidarity in some fundamental way.

Extract 11

I'd say there is rather rivalry among women. I've never felt any solidarity from a woman. To be honest, whenever I felt bad, men were the ones who helped me. Friends of masculine gender. With one or two exceptions, whenever I got into some troubles either at work, or at home, men were the ones who helped me.

(Sara, born in 1965)

Extract 12

I've always wished, whenever I chose my colleagues or whenever I had my say in their selection, my biggest wish was to have men as colleagues, quite categorically. [...] Men are not gossipmongers, they are not petty, they are not quarrelsome, they are fun to work with, and they do not bring their personal problems to work, as women do. Male colleagues are appealing to me in these respects. When women are together, it very often brings the opposite. It brings quarrels, petty envies, gossips, exaggeration of petty problems.

(Jitka, born in 1938)

In these extracts, relationships among women were described as marked by rivalry and an absence of solidarity. For instance, in Extract 12, Jitka drew an unflattering portrait of women as petty and envious colleagues. In other examples of this repertoire, women were referred to as 'hens', with the most common attributes ascribed to them being 'envy', 'jealousy' and 'rivalry'. By contrast, men were characterized as sympathetic, generous and loyal companions. Sara, in Extract 11, described men as real friends who were willing to help when needed. This repertoire rehearsed the stereotypical, sexist binaries that associated women with boredom, treachery, envy, and men with wit, loyalty and generosity. These binaries were constructed in essentialist terms as embedded in women's and men's natures, particularly in their 'genes'.⁸

The 'Loyal Masculinity' repertoire was used by the women to justify their lack of support for gender equality in workplaces and in politics. More specifically, the repertoire was employed to warrant the women's refusal to support women's equal participation in the political arena. Sara, for example, drew on the image of a 'henhouse' to describe women's political gatherings. She labelled women's style of communication as a 'terrible natter' and thus by implication as dull, annoying and irrelevant. As Extract 12 shows, the repertoire was further used to undermine the ideal of equal opportunities by associating women with highly negative characteristics that justified a preference for men

in the workplace. The 'Loyal Masculinity' repertoire was used to justify the women's lack of support for other women as well as their distance from women as a social group. By employing this repertoire, the women uncritically reproduced sexist discourse and enacted the stigmatization and exclusion of women that they themselves criticized in other contexts.

Empowering, or injuring identities? Dilemmas of femininity and feminism

The four repertoires represented the recurrent interpretative resources that the interviewed women employed to make sense of gender relations as formed under state socialism and to simultaneously construct their own identity. The majority of the women drew on all four repertoires. This is not surprising. As CDP has documented, social actors regularly draw on multiple patterns of sense-making that they employ differently to achieve different communicative acts at different points in a social interaction (Wetherell and Edley 1999; Reynolds and Wetherell 2003). It was thus not uncommon for the women to critique gender stereotypes at one point in the interview and to reconfirm the validity of those stereotypes at another point. Sara, for example, when asked about her views on Czech men expressed indignation at their denigration of women through the widespread denotation of women as 'hens'. Later in the interview, however, she herself described women as 'hens' and used this description to delegitimize efforts to increase women's political representation.

So what are the implications of this analysis? How can we explain the women's simultaneous use of these diverse interpretative resources? In the remaining part of this chapter, I propose four interrelated propositions concerning the implications of the analysis for the women's subjectivity and their relationship with feminism.

First, I suggest that the subject positions taken up by the interviewed women can be best understood in terms of the women's search for *empowering identities* within the limits set by the discourses and practices available in a state-socialist society. The women employed the four interpretative resources to articulate empowering identities for themselves, that is, identities that provided them with a sense of agency and power by accentuating their value and specificity as women and their irreplaceable role in society. The construction of these highly positive identities can be documented by examples from each of the four interpretative repertoires. By employing the 'Men are No Heroes' repertoire, the women took up the positions of competent, responsible and morally superior social actors who had an irreplaceable role in the society. Through the 'Lost Chivalry' repertoire, the women expressed their desire for a women-centred world, in which women's specificity and central role in society would be recognized and respected. The 'Equality is Impossible' repertoire also positioned women positively – as striving for a better, more equal society, despite the obstacles posed by men's sexism. Finally, by drawing on the 'Loyal Masculinity' repertoire, the women constructed a positive identity for themselves through

dis-identification with other women who were represented as inferior to men. Through this repertoire, the interviewed women allied with men and with the power that men represented in a particular context.

From the perspective of a critical gender analysis, and this is the second proposition, the subject positions taken up by the women can be at the same time viewed as conventional, reductive and potentially disadvantaging. More specifically, these subject positions can be described as ideological interpellations that ultimately undermined women's autonomy and power, that is, as *injuring* (Matonoha 2010, and in this volume) rather than empowering identities. Injuring identities – positive interpellations with negative effects – are idealized, seductive models of women's subjectivity that interpellate women by offering them certain forms of viability and recognition (related, for example, to women's self-sacrifice or to women's erotic power). Yet, despite their seemingly positive character, these identities are ultimately disadvantageous because they subvert women's agency and reproduce stereotypical, patriarchal discursive patterns (*ibid.*).

The subject positions produced by the four interpretative repertoires thus provided women with a strong sense of self-respect and even superiority; however, they did so by means that were highly problematic and that potentially reproduced and consolidated patriarchal discourses and practices. This was most visible in the case of the 'Loyal Masculinity' repertoire, which interpellated women to accentuate their own self-worth by reproducing sexist images of other women and by discrediting women's collective identity. Through identifying with this repertoire, the women undermined both their own position as women and the legitimacy of political efforts to improve women's status in Czech society. The 'Men are No Heroes' repertoire was another example of an *injuring* discursive interpellation that offered self-respect to women and at the same time undermined women by linking their self-worth to the capacity to bear the double burden and by celebrating the strategies of the weak, such as the covert manipulation of husbands. The same is true of the 'Lost Chivalry' repertoire that – through an idealization of chivalry and bourgeois femininity – made invisible that the respect paid to the bourgeois woman was conditioned by her subjection to male authority. By contrast, the 'Equality is Impossible' repertoire provided discursive resources allowing the women to explicitly challenge gender inequality. Yet, it also undermined the women's positions by attributing men's sexism to their nature and thus constructing any efforts to challenge the status quo as bound to fail.

This brings us to my third proposition, namely, that the appropriation of *injuring* identities by the women must be considered in relation to the absence of a viable feminist discourse and debate in Czech state-socialist society. More specifically, I would argue that the women's appropriation of the *injuring* identities illustrates the negative effects of the absence of feminist discourse on how gender issues could be understood and addressed. The analysis demonstrates the women's desires to improve their position in the society by engaging with a range of gender issues regularly addressed by feminism: issues of power asymmetry in

heterosexual relationships, discrimination in the workplace, lack of respect for women, the continuation of the women's double burden and the unequal gender distribution of work. Yet, in the absence of a viable feminist discourse, the women attempted to address these issues through identifications with subject positions that were potentially counter-productive and injuring; these subject positions drew them back to biologism and essentialism, and to conventional women's roles based on a 'natural' or 'genetically encoded' capacity for caring and mothering.

The link between the absence of feminist discourse and the appropriation of injuring identities can be documented by an example from the 'Lost Chivalry' repertoire. By drawing on this repertoire, the women expressed their desire to enhance gender differences and to accentuate the femininity lost due to the state-socialist ideology of women's emancipation. The women's desire for femininity, however, should not be interpreted as a wish to return to traditional women's roles as housewives. On the contrary, the examined extracts drew attention to the women's beliefs that the accentuation of their femininity would result in more equal relationships with men. The women assumed that if they reclaimed their femininity, men would become considerate towards them and consequently share more responsibility for the women's everyday duties, including household chores. By employing this interpretative repertoire, the women sought to address the problems of the unequal distribution of work and the lack of respect for women. In the absence of feminist discourse, though, their solution to these problems was regressive and potentially counterproductive; it relied on the reproduction of gender differences and a return to 'women's roles', which more likely increased gender inequality.

Therefore, and this is the fourth and final proposition, I suggest that the repertoires provide evidence of the vital relevance of 'Western feminism' for the problems faced by Czech women, despite the fact that this relevance remained unrecognized and unarticulated. Alena Heitlinger (1996) has identified a number of reasons why 'Western feminism' did not resonate with Czech women after 1989, including their mistrust of emancipatory ideas, the impaired reputation of concepts such as 'women's emancipation', and an uncritical acceptance of 'the stereotype of feminists as men-haters' (ibid.: 81). What the interviews make clear is that Czech women above all lacked a conceptual apparatus that would allow them to link feminism to their own lives. Indeed, the women never made the link between feminism and the gender-related problems that they encountered on a daily basis and of which they were well aware. When asked about their views on feminism, the women portrayed feminism as an inherently Western phenomenon linked exclusively to Western 'extremism' and to the lives of Western women. In addition, Western women as representatives of feminism were also positioned negatively, as lacking 'real life experience' and thus not in a position to give advice to Czech women. Western women were typically described as spending life in superficial pleasures and consequently as idle, spoilt and self-centred. By contrast, state socialism was portrayed as having positive effects on Czech women in terms of their strength, competence and

resourcefulness.⁹ Western women therefore did not represent a desirable model to be followed. In most contexts, they functioned as the negative 'Other' against whom the interviewed women defined their own positive qualities born of the hardships of state socialism (see also Šmausová 2011). Thus, the association of feminism exclusively with the West, the lack of knowledge of feminism, and the negative stereotypes of Western women hindered the women's capacity to relate feminism to their own lives.

Concluding thoughts: on women's identities and their construction in expert discourse

This chapter has explored the constructions of women's identity manifested in the women's retrospective accounts of their experience of femininity and masculinity in a state-socialist society. By examining the four diverse interpretative resources employed by the women to construct their identity, the analysis made visible the plural and situated character of women's identities formed under state socialism. Above all, the analysis showed that the dominant representation of Czech women under state socialism that portrayed Czech women as 'strong women rather than victims' (Heitlinger 1996: 77) or 'the better one in the relationship of the two sexes' (Šiklová 1997: 270) does not fully capture the complexity of women's identity in a state socialist society. The identity of a 'Czech socialist woman' included other, so far neglected aspects, namely the unfulfilled desire for gender equality, the fear of losing femininity, and the women's identification with sexist discourse.

The analysis also problematized the popular thesis that suggests that relationships between women and men under state socialism are defined by cohesion, harmony and solidarity rather than antagonism (Šiklová 2008; Šmausová 2011). Although the idea of gender solidarity under state socialism has been widely accepted and may correspond to the narratives of *some* women, the present analysis did not support this thesis. In arguing for this thesis, Šmausová (2011), for example, suggests that the resistance to the state's official emancipatory rhetoric was one of the causes of the alliance between Czech men and women. Yet, the accounts examined in this chapter showed that the women perceived men not as allies in a joint resistance to state ideology but rather as compliant with the ideology and using it for their own benefit. In this respect, the analysis presented here corresponds more strongly with the commentary provided by Ivo Možný (1990) who has argued that Czech women were aware of the discrimination against them and attributed this discrimination to structural patriarchy as well as to patriarchy within the family.¹⁰

Instead of harmony, gender relations as depicted in the women's accounts were defined by disillusionment, conflicts and a marked lack of respect between men and women. For example, the 'Equality is Impossible' repertoire reflected the women's frustration with both the unviability of equal partnerships and the men's attempts to dominate. As this repertoire was most commonly used by the younger women, it might be argued that it was not typical of Czech women

under state socialism.¹¹ Nevertheless, the repertoires that were explicitly linked to state socialism also did not reflect harmony between genders, but revealed the women's frustration at their loss of status under state socialism or their general contempt for men. In addition, the thesis on gender harmony is difficult to reconcile with the widespread experience of abuse (including sexual and domestic violence) reported by the interviewed women.¹² Overall, the analysis indicates that the thesis on gender solidarity among Czech women and men made invisible their numerous gender conflicts and power struggles and, in this way, presented an overly idealized picture of the gender order under state socialism.

This opens up a question about the role of expert discourse on gender relations in state-socialist society, disseminated by prominent Czech gender researchers such as Šiklová or Wagnerová after 1989, and the ways in which this discourse constructed what counted as the 'correct' knowledge about gender in state socialism. The role of these Czech researchers was particularly marked in the 1990s during the 'East–West feminism' debate, in which they translated the experience of Czech women to Western audiences, often in an attempt to explain the widespread refusal of feminism by Czech women (Vodochodský 2007). To support their explanations, however, these researchers only rarely used systematic research of other women's accounts (Oates-Indruchová 2005). Instead, they often relied on their own personal experiences to formulate hypotheses that aimed to speak for *all* Czech women, as if Czech women were a homogenous group with identical experiences. For instance, both Wagnerová and Šmausová drew heavily on their experiences of emigrating to West Germany where they felt less emancipated as women (Šmausová 2011: 199–202; Wagnerová 2011: 15) than in state-socialist Czechoslovakia. However, the incongruences between women's own accounts and the accounts of gender researchers identified in this chapter illustrate the limits of generalizing one's experience in order to speak for other women.

There is another reason why the thesis on gender solidarity did not necessarily correspond to the accounts examined in this chapter. This is the fact that this thesis was formulated almost exclusively through economic and political explanations. Wagnerová (1995, 2009), for example, relies on the economic aspects of state socialism to argue for the solidarity of Czech women and men under state socialism. According to Wagnerová, because of the egalitarianism of state-socialist society, the minimization of differences in salaries, and the property owned by both women and men, '[i]t is obvious that women had no reason to feel oppressed by men. The state of the society and the governance created rather a sense of solidarity between them' (Wagnerová 1995: 82). In contrast to Wagnerová's account, the present analysis makes clear that on a more interpersonal level, many of the sources of inequality between men and women prevailed. Notwithstanding the growing economic egalitarianism, women still had to face inequality in everyday interactions, ranging from marginalization, sexism and discrimination to psychological or sexual violence. As Havelková (1999: 77) remarks, '[s]exist anti-women jokes never ceased to be liked by men'. This interpersonal, less visible level of inequality has for the most part been ignored by researchers adopting the gender solidarity thesis.

Another issue that may launch a wider discussion relates to the debate on the relevance of 'Western feminism' to Czech women after the demise of state socialism. On one hand, authors adopting the gender solidarity thesis attributed a certain legitimacy to the state-socialist form of emancipation and emphasized its positive impact on Czech women (Wagnerová 2009; Šmausová 2011). At the same time they seemed to be critical of feminism (conceptualized by them as a Western import, see Šmausová 2011) and of its applicability to the problems of Czech women. Other authors, on the other hand, resisted the conceptualization of feminism as a Western import and stressed the long tradition of feminist thought and activism in Czech civil society (Věšínová-Kalivodová 2005; Havelková 2010). Havelková (2010) has also observed that elements of feminist critique emerged repeatedly even in the state-socialist era and uses this argument to propose that there was a certain latent or unarticulated form of feminist consciousness among Czech women.

Consistent with this latter position, and in regard to the problems of Czech women, I have tried to demonstrate that feminism was relevant by: (1) showing that on the interpersonal level the women struggled with the same issues of discrimination and inequality as are regularly addressed by 'Western feminism'; (2) making links between the absence of a viable feminist discourse and the appropriation of injuring identities by the interviewed women. I argued that in the absence of feminism, the women addressed gender issues by identifying with subject positions that were potentially injuring as well as counterproductive to their aspirations for equality and recognition. This opens up a question whether the theories of the 1990s – while providing a useful translation of the specificity of Czech gender patterns to Western audiences – also made invisible those aspects of gender relations that corresponded to Western gender regimes. Did these theories present an idealized picture of gender relations under state socialism and, consequently, underestimate the potential relevance of 'Western' feminism to Czech women in the transformation period?

Given the relatively small number of accounts analysed in this chapter, the analysis presented here is too limited to formulate any conclusive statements on women's identities in a state-socialist society. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the analysis clearly indicates a need to re-examine women's (and men's) self-perceptions under state socialism. The almost 25 years since the demise of state socialism provides a sufficient distance to allow for more critical, nuanced and empirically based research. In addition, the analysis presented here suggests a need to begin to examine the role of Czech gender researchers in constructing gender sensibility and gender knowledge in the post-1989 period. In this period, these researchers used their own experiences to speak on behalf of Czech women to both Western and Czech audiences. The researchers' personal experiences – both highly relevant and partial – came to define what was considered to be the truth about gender under state socialism. The impact of this knowledge-production on the perception of gender relations and the position of feminism in Czech society remains to be properly addressed.

Notes

- 1 An exception in the Slovak context is the project entitled *Pamät' žien: O skúsenosti sebauvárania v biografických rozhovoroch* [*Women's Memory: on the experience of the formation of the Self in biographical interviews*] (Kiczková et al. 2006). Kiczková and her colleagues used oral history to examine a number of important aspects of women's lives in state-socialist Slovakia, including the issues of women's identities and self-perceptions. Their analysis nevertheless differs significantly from the discursive approach presented in this chapter.
- 2 The interviewed women also constructed their identity through dis-identification with 'Western women' and 'Western feminism'. Because of space limits, however, I discuss these two 'Others' only briefly in the second part of the chapter.
- 3 The interview extracts were translated into English by Kateřina Zábrodská.
- 4 For a discussion on the homogenization of women's lives under state socialism, see Havelková (1999).
- 5 This hypothesis can also be supported by the interviews published in the two volumes of *Všechny naše včerejšky: Pamět žen* [*All Our Yesterdays: women's memory*] (Frýdlová 1998). When asked if anything had changed in their lives after 1989, many of the interviewed women said that nothing significant had changed in their personal lives, and, if so, the changes were not related to their role as women, but to the political regime (e.g. study opportunities for their children, free expression of religious faith) or economic position (e.g. increasing fear of poverty).
- 6 Many of the quotations presented in this chapter use present tense rather than past tense. This does not mean, however, that the interviewed women limited the validity of their claims to the post-1989 period. Instead, they presented gender relations as universal, as not specifically linked to any historical period. The women's accounts were mostly grounded in an essentialist discourse that constructed gender relations as given and unchangeable, notwithstanding the changes in the political system. As I show in my analysis of gender identity discourses among young Czech women and men (Zábrodská 2009), gender essentialism is still commonly employed to make sense of gender relations. Yet, in contrast to women living under state socialism, the analysis suggests that the current generation of young Czechs draws predominantly on the notion of gender as a product of socialization and accentuates the individual's right to resist normative gender expectations (see Zábrodská 2009).
- 7 All names are pseudonyms.
- 8 The recourse to genetic explanations was widespread among the interviewed women. One of them, for example, even attributed to women 'a genetically encoded envy of clothes'.
- 9 In this respect, the women seemed to identify strongly with the state-socialist ideology that claimed that Czech socialist women were far superior to women living in capitalist societies.
- 10 For an extended discussion of this issue, see Vodochodský (2008).
- 11 Yet, the biographical interviews published in *All Our Yesterdays* (Frýdlová 1998) support the argument that some women clearly recognized and explicitly criticized the lack of equality between women and men in a state-socialist society. For example, when asked about gender equality under state socialism, one of the women interviewed in the book commented: 'I really disliked the fact that women's value or her status as an equal partner in the workplace did not correspond to how it was publicly presented [...] I felt this was an injustice to women' (Frýdlová 1998: 163). Another woman participating in the research described how she had felt discriminated against at work. She concluded her account by saying emphatically: 'There had never been equality. My life proves it' (ibid.: 123).
- 12 Eight of the 20 interviewed women referred to having personal experience with some form of sexual abuse.

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