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EUGENICS AND FEMALE EMBODIMENT
IN CZECHOSLOVAK PUBLIC CAMPAIGNS
DURING THE 1960S AND 1970S¹

In line with the erotic ideals of *our century*, the size of a woman's figure would be improved because of fat redistribution: breast size would increase, the waist would become slimmer and the thigh – well-rounded. We do not want to say that every single *patient* who would consume *Anti-gest* would look like Anita Ekberg; it is bombastic and *unreasonably unnatural*. Mainly, unhealthy lean women should take account of this remedial effect, which would help them dispose of the *feeling of inferiority*.²

This remarkable quote comes from an interview in the popular youth magazine *Smena* (Workshift) in 1965 with Rudolf Štěrb, a creator of *Anti-gest*, the first hormonal contraception produced in socialist Czechoslovakia. It reveals much about the intersection of social policy and public campaigns as the main domains for producing the most powerful imagined community: the nation. The consistent sexualization of women was not exceptionally relevant to the campaign in favor of *Anti-gest*, but it provides a telling example of the typical widespread message sent by socialist authorities to the public during the late 1960s and early 1970s: “Women, be attractive, sexy, and happy.” The exploitation of female attractiveness and sexuality permeated campaigns against abortions, occupational safety, and the replacement of women in the labor market, while emphasizing the mother's responsibility for children's development.

This text discusses public campaigns orchestrated by the Czechoslovak government in the late 1960s and early 1970s whose goal was to introduce women to new practices of reproductive behavior. In order to develop a more systematic approach to the socialist period, I intend to highlight the continuity of the arguments put forth by socialist authorities with the eugenic ideas and practices brought into action during previous eras of intensive nation-building in the late imperial and the interwar periods. To be precise, this study wants to trace the relationship between socialist propaganda and the eugenic discourse established by the nationalist movement during times of nation-building. I argue that the consistent adoption of eugenic tropes

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² *Kenda*, Milan: Malá encyklopédia Antigestu [Small Encyclopedia of Antigest]. In: *Smena*, 26.06.1965, 6 (author's emphasis).



Fig. 1 and 2: Cover and first page of the “Antigest, antikoncepční hormonální přípravek” [Antigest, Contraceptive Hormonal Medication], published by Spojené podniky pro zdravotnickou výrobu [United enterprise for Pharmaceutical Production, SPOFA], Odborná informační služba [Public Relation Department]. Praha 1966. This brochure was to be displayed in waiting rooms of physicians and to inform women about the new hormonal form of contraception.

ANTIGEST **STOP**

Složení: 16-Methylen-6-dehydra-17 α -acetoxyprogesteronum 5 mg, 3- β -methyl-17 α -oesthinyloestradiolum 0,1 mg v 1 tabletě.

Vlastnosti

Antigest je hormonální antikoncepční preparát; obsahuje pro daný účel optimální množství a poměr obou sexuálních steroidů a ve vhodné dávce blokuje spolehlivě ovulaci.

Mechanismus, jímž některé steroidy zabráňují ovulaci, je stále předmětem experimentálního i klinického výzkumu. Při náhodných laparotomiích během podávání tzv. antikoncepčních steroidů bylo zjištěno, že se po blokadě ovulace netvoří žlutá tělíska, což odpovídá i stavu ovarí vyvolanému experimentálně u hlodavců. Dnes se většina autorů shoduje v tom, že zábrana ovulace se děje blokadou vyplavení gonadotropních hormonů, jejichž pokles lze zjistit titrací v moči. Experimentálně byl prokázán útlum uvolňování FSH po estrogenech a LH po syntetických gestagenech, z čehož plyne, že oba ovariální steroidy mohou mít blokační vliv na tvorbu a vyplavování gonadotropinů. Protože pak estrogeny jsou řádově účinnější než gestageny, spočívá hlavní tíha antikoncepční účinnosti na estrogenech. Gestageny ovlivňují v první řadě endometrium ve smyslu přeměny do sekreční fáze a tím regulují cyklus na periférii.

Norsteroidy používané k blokačním účelům mají v organismu účinek nejen sekretorický, nýbrž i estrogení. Přes tuto skutečnost se přidává k norsteroidním látkám pro antikoncepční účely ještě určité procento estrogenů. Po několikaletých zkušenostech s norsteroidy lze říci, že mohou vyvolávat řadu vedlejších příznaků

by socialist propagandists greatly impacted social and cultural practices that objectified women, practices that remain visible to this day. This article seeks to illuminate the narratives of the public campaigns directly orchestrated by the Czechoslovak authorities in the late 1960s and early 1970s – specifically, those campaigns aimed at persuading women to use hormonal contraception (as opposed to abortion, a common practice in the 1960s).

In the first section, I discuss the historical background of eugenics as part of the nationalist movement and its role in shaping reproductive policy, as well as the public discourse regarding the female body, sexuality, and health. Bringing the case of the Czech lands into its international context highlights both the differences and the similarities that characterized the agenda developed by Czech eugenicists. In the second section, I introduce the context and reconstruct the combination of driving forces that determined the state policy regarding women during the 1960s and 1970s. The final section explores the socialist public campaigns about women in order to reveal their most relevant eugenic arguments. The main sources for this analysis are internal reports prepared for Radio Free Europe, broadcasts, and publications in central and regional newspapers and magazines.

*Eugenic Discourse and the “Woman Question”:
Between Emancipation and Submission*

As in other Central-Eastern European (CEE) and Western countries, in the Czech lands, eugenics permeated the formation of social policy and public opinion at the end of 19th century and increasingly through the first third of the 20th century. The connection between eugenics and nation-building is inextricable: “For both [...] a clearly motivating force was that of the identification and belonging, of individuals, communities, nations, and races”.³ Michael Billig noted that “There is no nationalism without theory”.⁴ In the last third of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, eugenics accompanied nation-building in CEE countries. In the Czech lands specifically, the rise of eugenics coincided with the direct struggle of the Czech people for independence from Austrian (and more generally, German) influence.

While national geography established the borders and national history selected the heroic events of the past for building national glory, eugenicists shaped the ideal of male and female citizens, focusing on their “production” from a biological (various concepts regarding heredity and breeding) as well as a social (healthy mode of life) perspective.⁵ Operating simultaneously as a science and a social movement, eugenics played a unique role in bringing together various realms of scientific knowledge, in order to create scientific metaphors interconnecting diverse differentiation according to ethnicity, gender, social capital, health, etc. A comprehensive example of science

³ *Turda, Marius: The History of East-Central European Eugenics 1900-1945: Sources and Commentaries.* London 2015, xiv.

⁴ *Billig, Michael: Banal Nationalism.* London 2010.

⁵ *Turda, Marius (ed.): Crafting Humans: From Genesis to Eugenics and Beyond.* Göttingen 2013.

focusing on innate mechanisms that govern all human behavior, eugenics mobilized multifaceted communication between scholars from different regions, epistemic communities, and areas of research.

As a way to theoretically justify the uniqueness and wholeness of their nation, Czech eugenicists promoted the potential autonomy of citizens as a result of emancipation from external influence. Stereotypes of “national” character and temperament were mobilized to tell the tale of “our” uniqueness and “our” common fate.⁶ Women’s role as symbolic border guards and cultural reproducers were indispensable to nationalist movements.⁷ The “natural” order of ruling relied on viewing the family as a core prototype of the nation; the relationship between the father as sovereign and the mother as obedient but sanctified soul was seen as the model for nation-building.⁸ Czech women were obliged to protect the Czech language and authentic educational strategies for future generations, for themselves, and for Czech men.

During the period of nation building, the myths of common origin and purity remained one of the core frames.⁹ Nevertheless, focus would later shift to the margins of nationalist discourse – mostly because of consistent opposition presented by Czech eugenicists to German racial hygiene, and its extremist understanding of the dichotomy between “impurity” and “purity”.¹⁰ While German eugenicists extolled purity as the most desirable option for Aryans and claimed that hybridization played a decisive role in degeneration, Czech eugenicists put forward hybridization as the only possible way to develop a healthy nation,¹¹ and identified biological isolation or “remaining unhealthily pure” as the main source of degeneration – for instance, among Rusyns¹² or the Roma.¹³ By setting either purity or hybridization as the scenario for healthy trajectories of building a nation, German and Czech eugenicists produced intractable borders between the fit population and those who were seen as

⁶ *Billig*: Banal Nationalism (cf. fn. 4).

⁷ *Yuval-Davis*, Nira: Gender and Nation. London 1997.

⁸ *McClintock*, Anne: Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. New York 1995.

⁹ *Shmidt*, Victoria: Child Welfare Discourses and Practices in the Czech Lands: The Segregation of Roma and Disabled Children during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Brno 2015.

¹⁰ *Turda*: The History of East-Central European Eugenics 135 (cf. fn. 3).

¹¹ For instance, in his study “Biologické základy eugeniky” [Biological Grounds of Eugenics], Praha 1923, Vladislav Růžička stressed hybridization as the core trajectory for building healthy nations. This attitude was shared by other Czech eugenicists of the first cohort (Jindřich Matiegka, František Čáda) as well as the second (Jiří Malý, Vojtěch Suk).

¹² *Suk*, Vojtěch: Antropologie Podkarpatské Rusi s některými poznámkami o lidských plemelech vůbec a o metodách antropologických: předběžná zpráva [Anthropological Notes on the Peoples of Carpathian Ruthenia with Remarks on Races in General and on Some New Methods in Anthropology: Preliminary Report]. Brno 1932.

¹³ *Štampach*, František: Sociologický výzkum cikánů v ČSR [Sociological Study of Gypsies in the Czechoslovak Republic]. Disertace k dosazení hodností doktora filosofie, 1932 [Doctoral Thesis to achieve the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1932]. Archiv Karlovy Univerzity, Praha [Archives of Charles University, Prague].

unfit. This led inevitably to making eugenics in these countries a driving force behind the consistent surveillance of those who were “unfit”. Not the same blood, but rather a common future, began to permeate ideas of national unity, and the sharing of a healthy mode of life became the platform for unifying the Czech(oslovak) people.

Revising the idea of progress that is central to modernity, eugenics emphasized the preservation of traditions, which gradually transformed into an “astonishing array of national programs for social and biological improvement against the threat of degeneration”.¹⁴ In CEE countries, degeneration (the main target of eugenicists all over the world) was directly connected with the decline of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Opposition to foreign influence stemmed from an embedded “eugenic pastoralism”, which theorized the concept of national strength. Thus, two interrelated triads – the virtuous circle “naturalness-autonomy-progress”, and the vicious circle “artificiality-dependence-decay” – framed the narratives that translated eugenic discourse for the common people. These narratives adopted eugenic discourse to express the main expectations of particular groups (e.g. professionals, youth, women) and to connect routine practices (education, parenting, marriage etc.) to the mission of building the nation. Following Paul Ricoeur’s explanation of narratives as shaping the most chaotic realms of life,¹⁵ eugenic narratives mapped desirable behavioral patterns by liberating them from the vicious circle and transferring them to the virtuous circle – even though such virtuous circles remained elusive ideals.

As Yuval-Davis put it, “gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations”.¹⁶ Eugenic narratives about women and for women intended to integrate the two main roles of women as biological and cultural reproducers. Stories about the domestication of women became a central vehicle for spreading eugenic discourse. The motive behind the domestication of women was set in opposition to the “*animalische Regression*” (animalistic regression), the threat used by many popular writers during the period when eugenics flourished.¹⁷ The narrative about domesticizing women also solved the ambivalent position of women within the national collectivity, as those who symbolized unity but somehow remained the property of “others”.¹⁸

The Czech national movement animalized the ‘unnatural’ behavior of women under foreign influence.¹⁹ This narrative emphasized women’s risky behavior and, consequently, the absolute necessity to control them. While colonial practices of

¹⁴ Turda: The History of East-Central European Eugenics xiv (cf. fn. 3).

¹⁵ Ricoeur, Paul: The Human Experience of Time and Narrative. In: Valdes, Mario (ed.): A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination. Toronto 1991, 99-116, here 115.

¹⁶ Yuval-Davis: Gender and Nation (cf. fn. 7).

¹⁷ Garrard, Greg: Poodles and Curs: Eugenic Comedy in Ibsen’s An Enemy of the People. In: Beckett, Fiona/Gifford, Terry. (eds.): Culture, Creativity and Environment. New Environmentalist Criticism. Amsterdam 2007, 115-133. – Szabó, Judit: Eugenik und Domestikation. Inszenierung von Abnormitäten in „Kasimir und Karoline“. In: Maske und Kothurn 59 (2013) 3, 103-112.

¹⁸ Yuval-Davis: Gender and Nation (cf. fn. 7).

¹⁹ Schmidt: Child welfare discourses (cf. fn. 9).

control over local women in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were extremely cruel,²⁰ the Czech nationalist movement provided insulting cartoons and satirical jokes about women whose behavior was in the spirit of German romanticism or *à la française*. These women were compared to “thoughtless monkeys”, alien to Czech traditions of life.²¹ Naturalness, a core element of the “true Czech woman” discourse, reflected a sort of universalism and defined women’s emancipation. In its turn, emancipation was simultaneously reasonable and demandable after the abandonment of foreign influences, but inexpedient after achieving the status of wife and mother. The impetus towards progress was directly connected with the mission to domesticize women, by releasing them from the primitive patterns that kept them in a backward space and in an “inferior” position.

Like other newly-established nation-states in CEE, the interwar Czechoslovak authorities “began policing not only the boundaries of its polity but also the bodies of citizens and their families”.²² Due to the systematic attempts to reorganize demographic policy, special attention was paid to eugenic practices targeting women. Eugenic thinking was disseminated by different epistemic communities as well as by female activists.²³ Hynek Pelc, the Head of the Department of Social Hygiene of the State Institute of Hygiene, welcomed the initiative of female activists who organized the Union for Controlling Reproduction (Svaz pro kontrolu porodu), to disseminate contraception among the poorest women: “This initiative warrants that we must evaluate each type of available contraceptive measure and make these measures more available for those who really need it – socially weak groups”.²⁴

Focus on the mode of life of different social and ethnic groups was the distinguished characteristic of interwar eugenics in Czechoslovakia,²⁵ and directly influenced the formation of occupational strategies relevant to women’s health, along with various practices aimed at reinforcing women’s competencies.²⁶ Eugenics impacted the emancipation of women: sexual education, flourishing during the

²⁰ Rogers, Barbara: *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies*. London 1981.

²¹ Myšlenky o vyučování a vyhovování dívek [Thoughts About Educating and Upbringing of Girls]. In: *Škola a život: Pedagogický časopis 7* (1861) sešit VI, 182-186. – Úvahy o vychovávání dívek zvláště městských [Reflections on the Upbringing of Girls, Especially from Cities]. In: *Škola a život: Pedagogický časopis 4* (1858) sešit VII, 149-151. – Until the last quarter of the 19th century, some authors who published their articles in the journal “Škola a život” (School and Life) preferred to remain anonymous to protect themselves from persecution by authorities during the Bach era. Therefore, some of the articles are referred to by title instead of author.

²² Turda: *The History of East-Central European Eugenics* xiii (cf. fn. 3).

²³ Musilová, Dana: Některé aspekty politické činnosti žen v Národním shromáždění 1918-1938 [Some Aspects of Political Activities by Women in the National Parliament between 1918 and 1938]. In: Lasicová, Jana (ed.): *Sféry ženy. Právne, politické a ekonomické vědy* [Women’s Spheres. Legal, Political and Economic Sciences]. Banská Bystrica, Praha 2004, 203-212.

²⁴ Pelc, Hynek: *Sociální lékařství* [Social Medicine]. Praha 1937, 92.

²⁵ Turda: *The History of East-Central European Eugenics* 141 (cf. fn. 3).

²⁶ Shmidt: *Child Welfare Discourses* (cf. fn. 9).

interwar period in many countries, directly appealed to new generations of future mothers, not only informing them about sexually transmitted diseases but also prescribing to them the responsibility for bearing healthy children and providing future child care.²⁷ Furthermore, by insisting on the healthy and the natural, eugenics played a central role in developing practices designed to introduce young people to parenthood. It is reasonable to conclude that eugenics introduced the ideological habits that enabled an established Czech nation to reproduce. Czech nationalism was a “banal” nationalism, which embraced the habits of flagging nationhood in routine life.²⁸ Nevertheless, eugenic discourse and its various applications worked in favor of elaborating the array of identities directly linked to belonging to the Czech nation, as well as strictly prescribing the practice of such identities in daily life – in the name of the nation.

Neither the Protectorate nor the Third Republic interrupted the reproduction of eugenic discourse. The exception was the first decade of socialism (1948-1958), when public policy was totally committed to the idea of surveillance and to establishing a new socialist regime. Analysis of policy making about women during this period falls beyond the aims of this study – although it must be mentioned that during this period, women systematically resisted to both the socialist family and labor policy. On the one hand, waves of female unrest²⁹ strengthened the authorities in their fears towards women and, in turn, it strengthened their commitment to manage women’s behavior. On the other hand, authorities enforced participation in the labor market, as well as the obligation for women to place their children in kindergartens. In the early 1960s, the general liberalization of the economy and of public life provided a

²⁷ Gawin, Magdalena: The Sex Reform Movement and Eugenics in Interwar Poland. In: *Studies of History, Philosophy, Biology & Biomedical Sciences* 39 (2008) 2, 181-186.

²⁸ Billig: *Banal Nationalism* (cf. fn. 4).

²⁹ During the first decade of socialism, the efforts to mobilize women for the labor market were part of the broader surveillance over groups perceived as risky such as youth, Roma and so called “former” people (the definition *bývalí lidé* was introduced in the early 1950s to characterize those who had been connected to the pre-1948 system and were seen as “unreliable” by the Communist rulers). At that time, practices of forced labor like short-term labor camps or compulsory employment also affected women. In the late 1950s, aggravated by the change in power elites, the economic crisis provoked several waves of unrest among working women. Bad working conditions and insufficient services led to mass strikes. In the summer of 1957, 47 women of the TESLA factory were dismissed for “instigating other women to protest against the cancellation of bonuses”. To protest against low wages some female workers even stripped near the factory. Open Society Archives, Budapest, HU OSA 300-30-3. Radio Free Europe Women workers discharged for opposing premium out confidential report late May 1957 item No 4024/57 AN +AP July 17. – In the autumn of 1957, 40 female workers of the Varnsdorf factory left their workplaces to protest against the conditions in the dormitories (svobodárna). The women returned to their homes in the provinces, without informing their managers. Open Society Archives, Budapest, HU OSA 300-30-3. Radio Free Europe Item No 5250/57 Priority JU/AP Sept 10 IX 6513. – The following year, the administration of the chocolate factory Česká čokoládovna in Prague dismissed more than 20 female workers because of protests and the “instigation of other workers”. Open Society Archives, Budapest, HU OSA 300-30-3. Radio Free Europe Women dismissed because of negative influence of workmates’ morale Item No 4025/58 SI Aug. 28 IX 7300.

new context for regulating women's work behavior along with their private life, and previous regulations forcing women towards various practices of motherhood and labor were abandoned.

*Between Control and Care:
Challenges to Women's Policy in Socialist Czechoslovakia*

Policy making that centered on women intended to involve them in activities seen as advantageous or even essential for the socialist authorities and to minimize behavioral patterns perceived as dangerous.³⁰ Socialist Czechoslovakia was no exception in searching for efficient strategies to transform women into desirable objects for what the socialist authorities considered to be appropriate behavioral patterns, as well as to prevent uncontrolled behavior. It is reasonable to assume a significant rupture in the policy towards women during the first decade of socialism and during the last years of socialism. One of the most remarkable peculiarities of the latter period was the consistent application of nationalist narratives and the translation of eugenic discourse into different levels of policy making.

The significant turn of socialist authorities towards the reproduction of nationalist rhetoric after the late 1950s can be explained by a combination of various driving forces. I differentiate these forces into those which made this turn possible and those which made it demandable.

The reproduction of eugenic ideas in public policies was made possible by the political changes in the country after 1956. The change of political elites and the careful questioning of Stalinist ideology and practices in the Eastern bloc after Stalin's death led to a revival of interwar period public discourses, among others on women and ethnic minorities.³¹ One can conclude that the public policy of the Czechoslovak government was elaborated and posed as a form of consistent negotiation of previous approaches and discourses regarding different issues; for example, the policy concerning Roma people aligned with strategies elaborated during the interwar period. The revival of nationalist narratives regarding women went hand in hand with the general trend to practice several elements of pre-socialist public policy, in order to reestablish the trust of citizens. In addition to attempts by socialist authorities to achieve legitimization, the reinforced role of nationalist narratives echoed changes in international relations.

The intensity of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s had provoked an increase in nationalist movements, due to a number of wars for national liberation encouraged by both the (democratic) West and the (communist) East, as well as the incremental

³⁰ Bock, Gisela: *Women in European History*. New York 2001.

³¹ Since Antonín Zápotocký (1884-1957) had been a very popular president, his death marked a break. Thus, Antonín Novotný, his successor in office, fostered the reproduction of popular national discourses to improve the public image of the new authorities. On the internal struggle among the communist elites: Eyal, Gil: *The Origin of Post-Communist Elites. From Prague Spring to the Breakup of Czechoslovakia*. Minneapolis 2003. – Stolarik, Mark: *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968*. Forty years later. Mundelein/Ill. 2010.

prioritization of global security.³² The practices of banal nationalism permeated the negotiations between both camps and united the states within each of them. Not the same blood but the same spirit became the ground for unifying communities of nations into a world of nations. In the 1960s, experts linked the obvious heteropatriarchy dominating the public discourse and politics about gender issues in the Western bloc with the Cold War.³³ Comparable trends can be recognized in the Eastern bloc, especially in countries where the sensitivity to nationalist rhetoric was high in order to maintain the balance of loyalty towards the USSR and to preserve national identity.

Furthermore, international bodies worked in favor of the reproduction of nationalist rhetoric, supplemented by universal codes for nationalist consciousness as part of a more general outlook on the world.³⁴ As Yuval-Davis argued, “Control of marriage, procreation and therefore sexuality would thus tend to be high on the nationalist agenda”.³⁵ For instance, this scenario was mirrored in the initiatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) to raise standards of women’s health, midwifery and nursing, and motherhood.³⁶ The report by Bowlby, published in 1962 by the WHO, attributed an important role to maternal bonds and endorsed a policy that would move women from public life into private realms in the name of future generations.³⁷ Czech physicians and psychologists played a prominent role in developing and disseminating new international standards regarding reproductive health in the Eastern bloc;³⁸ undoubtedly, they resonated with domestic trends to reorient policy towards motherhood and child care.

The main driving force that made application of a nationalist narrative demandable for Czechoslovak authorities was the demographic crisis and the insufficient attempts to reverse it. In line with the three-part taxonomy of nationalist policies of population control,³⁹ demographic policy in Czechoslovakia between 1950 and 1957 can be defined as a simplistic version of a “People as Power” strategy, designed to increase the quantity of people. The abortion ban was the core element of putting pressure on women to bear children. After issuing the “Law on Abortion” in 1957,

³² Corber, Robert: *Cold War Femme: Lesbianism, National Identity, and Hollywood Cinema*. Durham 2011.

³³ On Gender and the Cold War in Western discourse: Corber: *Cold War Femme* (cf. fn. 32). – Curdiolone, Kyle: *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. New York 2005. – Nittel, Jana: *Polarising Masculinities in the Cold War Discourse: Violence and the Male Body in Jan Flemming’s James Bond Series*. In: Starck, Kathleen (ed.): *Between Fear and Freedom: Cultural Representation of the Cold War*. Cambridge 2010, 165-178.

³⁴ Billig: *Banal Nationalism* (cf. fn. 4).

³⁵ Yuval-Davis: *Gender and Nation* (cf. fn. 7).

³⁶ *Maternal Deprivation: A Reassessment*. In: W.H.O. *Chronicle* 16 (1962) 321-332.

³⁷ Cleary, Rose: *Bowlby’s Theory of Attachment and Loss: A Feminist Reconsideration*. In: *Feminism & Psychology* 9 (1999) 1, 32-42. – Duniec, Eduardo / Raz, Mical: *Vitamins for the Soul: John Bowlby’s Thesis of Maternal Deprivation, Biomedical Metaphors and the Deficiency Model of Disease*. In: *History of Psychiatry* 22 (2011) 1, 93-107.

³⁸ Ovseiko, Pavel: *The Politics of Health Care Reform in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of the Czech Republic*. PhD. Thesis, Oxford 2008.

³⁹ Yuval-Davis: *Gender and Nation* (cf. fn. 7).

special abortion boards started regulating access to abortion. The wide range of criteria for obtaining permission for an abortion indicated the intention of authorities to implement the other two strategies of population control, labelled by Yuval-Davis as *eugenicist* (aimed at improving the quality of the nation) and *Malthusian* (focused on limiting the number of children). The list of conditions for permitting abortion included such characteristics as age (if the woman was over 40), some chronic diseases, the number of children (three or more), illegitimate pregnancy, and social vulnerability. Nevertheless, regulating abortion was not enough to revise the demographic policy.

In the mid-1960s, each second pregnancy in Prague ended in abortion; the total number of abortions was approximately 90,000 annually. Remarkably, seven percent of women who had an abortion were underage.⁴⁰ While permission for abortion required approval from the abortion boards, the practice of illegal abortion flourished. Socialist experts noted that they were unable to register more than one-quarter of the total number of “backstreet” abortions, and in this case, the share of illegal abortions was much higher than the number of officially-permitted pregnancy terminations. The pregnancy-termination situation was described as a social disaster beyond public control: “[F]or seven years, the number of abortions has increased by more than half a million, [and] in the majority of cases, the consequences for mental and physical female health are irretrievable”.⁴¹ Such an alarmist approach described the women who made the decision to end their pregnancy as victims of circumstances, unable to accept the solemn responsibility “to reproduce the human race”.⁴²

Moreover, various sociological surveys suggested that women generally did not want to have more than two children, a decision explained by “the pressure of insufficient living and working conditions”.⁴³ An additional argument stemmed from the increased number of children placed into residential care units with the consent of their parents: in 1962, more than 170,000 children were placed in state care as a result of their mothers’ decision. The increasing number of divorces substantiated the concept of “the pressure of circumstances”: approximately 40 percent of all divorces were among those who married due to the impeding birth of a baby.⁴⁴ The successful experience of neighboring countries like Poland, Hungary, and the German Democratic Republic, which had already started to adopt reproductive policies in line with the new trends, became the benchmark for planned demographic reforms in Czechoslovakia.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Bělohávek*, Arno: 90 000 potratů a nadnormativní zásoby antigestu [90,000 Abortions and Reserves of Antigest above Standard]. In: *Kulturní tvorba*, 20.07.1967, 3.

⁴¹ Jak vypadá s populací a zdravím vůbec: populace a zdraví [What it Looks Like with Population and Health in General: Population and Health]. In: *Lidová demokracie*, 14.10.1966, 1.

⁴² Porodnost opět klesá [Natality Decreases Again]. In: *Svobodné slovo*, 14.10.1966, 1.

⁴³ Žena našich dnů [Women of Our Days]. In: *Zemědělské noviny*, 25.11.1969, 3.

⁴⁴ Porodnost opět klesá (cf. fn. 42).

⁴⁵ *Drezgič*, Rada: Policies and Practices of Fertility Control Under the State Socialism. In: *The History of the Family* 15 (2010) 2, 191-205.



Havránek, František: Antikoncepce pro mladé ženy [Contraception for young women]. In: Půvab, zdraví, krása – pro moderní ženu [Gracefulness, Health, Beauty – for the Modern Woman]. Praha, 1972, 28-29.

Issuing hormonal contraception began to be discussed in 1963 at the regular meetings of the Professional Collegium of the Minister of Health, whose purpose was to improve strategies concerning public health. The market nature of health care⁴⁶ determined the campaign directed at convincing women to embrace new reproductive patterns. It was argued that abortion should become less accessible than hormonal contraception. In 1964, for instance, the decision was made to increase the price for an abortion from 500 crowns to 800, and only for women in a difficult social situation would it remain at the minimum 200 crowns (only Roma women could obtain permission for a free-of-charge termination of pregnancy). The special task was to convince gynecologists to recommend hormonal contraception instead of pregnancy termination; since women had to pay for abortions, the practice was profitable for many physicians.⁴⁷

In 1964, a major campaign was launched to disseminate information about the hormonal contraceptive Anti-gest, but until the end of 1965, it was inaccessible for the majority of women, due to the strict system of medical prescription (according to the rules, the woman should visit her gynecologist every 3-4 months), the limited production, and the inability to purchase it outside of large cities. The centers for reproductive health and family planning gradually became operational, and soon the

⁴⁶ Socialist Czechoslovakia revamped the health insurance system as well as the system of general practitioners in the middle of the 1950s.

⁴⁷ Úprava některých zdravotnických služeb [The Reform of Some Health Care Services]. In: Rudé právo, 27.06.1964, 2.

demand for Anti-gest was outgrowing the supply. Less than 40 percent of all women who were interested were able to obtain hormonal contraception. As a result, the Department of Child and Maternal Health made several interconnected decisions targeted at improving access to hormonal contraception. Women with the lowest incomes were not charged, and a lower price was established for several target groups, including women with low incomes, the Roma, and women with disabilities. Gynecologists received payments from the company producing Anti-gest for each recommendation for hormonal contraception. The physicians, especially those who worked within occupational health care, were obliged to participate in special training to improve their knowledge about hormonal contraception.

Disseminating contraception was not commensurate with an intention to reduce natality; on the contrary, Czechoslovak authorities encouraged women (at least those who were neither at risk to give birth to a “defective” child nor at risk to bring up the child in “defective” conditions)⁴⁸ to give birth to their second and third children as soon as possible.⁴⁹ New family policies extended maternity leave and guaranteed women the right to return to their job afterwards. Nevertheless, the chronic lack of kindergartens limited the employment of young mothers. The new policy allowed women to spend a minimum of two years with their newborn child, thus providing the opportunity to give birth to a second child during their maternity leave. This scenario had remained one of the basic obstacles for reintegrating women into labor market.

In order to address the priority of family, the Czechoslovak state made major changes to the labor law, mainly oriented towards banning the employment of women in positions requiring night shifts and heavy labor.⁵⁰ The New Labor Code (1965) explained these changes by referring to motherhood, adding: “The mission of women as mothers and their physiological distinctiveness do not allow us to put

⁴⁸ For those who were at such risk sterilization was seen als the most desirable method. In 1973, two special resolutions established the framework for sterilization as one more tool of contraception. In January, the Ministry of Health issued the “Resolution on sterilization”, which established the following key criteria: high risk of giving birth to a “defective” child or high risk that the child would live in “defective” conditions (bad housing conditions, an enormous number of children in the family, a long history of criminal activity). The target groups of this new policy were the Roma population and people with disabilities. In October, the supplementary resolution introduced the regulations for repayment for those who decided to be sterilized. Remarkably, the amount was not fixed but was to be agreed upon according to “the number of children in the family and number of days spent by the individual in hospital in order to compensate the absence of the parent”. Národní Archiv Praha [National Archive, Prague] signatura [signature] MZD1, číslo jednoty [file number] IV/1-8750. Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí. Zásady pro poskytování příspěvku při sterilizaci (zneplodnění) ze dne 30. září 1973 [Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The prerequisites and rules for providing benefits after sterilization (infertilization). 30th September 1973].

⁴⁹ Open Society Archives, Budapest, Radio Bratislava 10.2.1971 HU OSA 300-30-3, box 8, Sociálne pomery [Social conditions]. *Beleš*, Jozef: Dobré ráno: Hudobno-slovno pásmo [Good Morning: Entertainment Radio Channel].

⁵⁰ *Pokorný*, Pavel: V noci má žena spát a co má dělat ve dne? [During the Night a Woman Should Sleep, But What Should She Do during the Day?] In: *Pracovní síla* (1968) 4, 24-31.

them to work in the same positions as men without undesirable consequences.”⁵¹ It was thus assumed that, in terms of health, those working conditions acceptable for men would be totally inappropriate for women.

Women, especially those who were single mothers and employees, consistently protested against the new regulations and the expected lower remuneration, which became one more challenge to public policy.⁵² For instance, in the Moravian-Silesian region, where the chemical industry required more female labor force, many factories demanded a two-year prolongation in the introduction of the new regulations, due to the problem to find or create new workplaces in accordance with the new code and the problem to find a sufficient number of male employees because of the low wage. By the early 1970s, all these issues were aggravated by the moral panic surrounding those young women who did not want to work, who dreamed about a wealthy marriage, and prostituted themselves in order to find a foreign husband.⁵³

Top-priority tasks regarding policy concerning women – namely, the decrease in the number of abortions, the increase in the birth rate, the regulation of birth rates among those who were seen as risk groups, and the limitation of participation in the labor market and the reform of child care to reinforce the role of maternal participation – all required sophisticated public policy. Such policy would be able to build the patterns of behavior desired by authorities into desirable social images for women. At this point, the eugenic discourses that had appeared during the Czech nation’s struggle for independence began to frame the main public campaigns in favor of the new policies regarding reproduction under socialism. Bringing together three main values – naturalness, progress, and autonomy – the socialist revival of eugenic discourse connected it with a new vision of woman’s body and sexuality.

Women in the Public Sphere: The Revival of Eugenic Discourse

The 1960s and 1970s in Czechoslovakia were distinguished by the intensive and meaningful formation of a public discourse centered on female embodiment and sexuality. This process responded to the general modernization of public policy that was typical of other socialist countries such as Yugoslavia, Hungary, and the German Democratic Republic. In these countries, the propaganda machine began to mold public opinion by using sociological surveys. There is much evidence that sociology played the very same role for socialist authorities that eugenics did for the Czechoslovakian leaders of nationalist movements: both theorized taken-for-granted suggestions about women and their destiny. The surveys’ outcomes were embedded into broadcast discussions (with the radio being the most popular mass media at the time) and were used by political and entertainment public figures.

Analyzing the approaches to constructing discourses about women indicates how the reproduction of eugenic discourse became incorporated into the socialist rheto-

⁵¹ Zákoník práce 1965 [Code of Laws on Work 1965]. Chapter 7, 149-189.

⁵² Polašek, Jan: K převádění žen na jiná pracoviště [On the Issue of Transferring Women to Different Workplaces]. In: *Bezpečnost a hygiena práce* 18 (1968) 4, 65.

⁵³ Kánský, Juraj: Intimita pokrytectvo, otázniky [Intimacy and Hypocrisy: The Surveys]. In: *Předvoj*, 25.02.1965, 10-11.

ric of the New Man of the communist future. Sociological studies advanced new arguments along the lines of the eugenic triad “naturalness-autonomy-progress”, applying it to the issue of women’s behavior and its regulation. The eugenic origin of socialist public campaigns aimed to legitimize one type of behavioral pattern (using hormonal contraception, wearing safety caps) and to de-legitimize others (abortion, placing children under three years of age into public care). This may explain the unusual form of liberalism regarding sexual behavior, which was not part of the common notions about socialist ideology. Together with the partial role of emancipation in the nationalistic movement, the liberalization of sexual life (especially for women) was framed by utilitarian interests, transforming values of autonomy and privacy into instruments of propaganda.

While the alleged values (centered on “naturalness-autonomy-progress” and their counterparts “artificiality-dependence-backwardness”) continued to permeate public campaigns, these values were gradually linked with the behavioral realms of sexuality and embodiment. Applying eugenics, public campaigns categorized women according to two interrelated dichotomies. The first dichotomy opposed employment as unnatural to the more authentic family and sexual life. The consistent opposition of employment to a fulfilling sexual life dominated the debates around a new vision of motherhood, women’s labor, and women’s health. The second dichotomy contrasted the deprived sexuality of women dependent on men with the celebration of female sexuality as a result of practicing hormonal contraception.

Naturalness was directly connected with the uniqueness of the female body, primarily as different from the male body. As Libuše Háková put it: “Contemporary policy is distinguished by the focus on maternity and the intention to differentiate the approach to women, more sensitive and respectful because of the obvious difference between women’s bodies and men’s”.⁵⁴ Even scientific knowledge was seen as “limited in its capacities to recognize female embodiment”, and this was directly used as an argument in favor of a holistic approach to women’s embodiment.⁵⁵ Mixing admiration and apprehension, public campaigns encouraged sacralizing the female body through worship of those women who lived in accordance with nature. The blame for a wide range of inappropriate behavior – from prostitution to a child-free life – was placed on the idea of unnaturalness, because of the inappropriate application of the idea of progress: “Actually, we forced women to reject their role as homemaker when we had offered them all these various services and described housekeeping as slavery for contemporary women”.⁵⁶

One of the first campaigns aspiring to revive the spirit of womanhood pointed them towards “responsible” motherhood. Journalists rushed to share the results of

⁵⁴ Háková, Libuše: Úvaha a podněty k chápání společenských funkcí ženy [Reflections and Suggestions to Understanding the Social Role of Women]. In: Sociologický časopis 70 (1970) 5, 436-44.

⁵⁵ Open Society Archives, Budapest, HU OSA 300-30-3, box 8, Sociálne pomery. Kulatý stůl 27. února 1968 Československo II-VKV přepis pořadu [Round Table, 27.02.1968 Transcript of the Agenda] z 26. února 1968.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

studies exploring the essential role of mothers in the early development of the child. Stressing the role of the first stages of a child's life, campaigns stipulated that women postpone their return to work and devote their time to their children. It was typical for nationalist movements to argue in favor of the mother as the indispensable figure in teaching culture and language; these messages were replaced by evidence from the theory of attachment and its prominent role in a child's growth.⁵⁷ The uniqueness of the tie between a mother and her child was directly linked with the naturalness of appropriate motherhood as a source of healthy child development.

While mothers' care stemmed from their "magical" attachment and was considered the natural way of a child's upbringing, the placement of children into kindergartens began to be seen as an enforced, unnatural measure that had negative consequences. Preschool education did not have a good reputation, mainly because the placement of children into kindergarten was obligatory during early socialism.⁵⁸ By the end of the 1950s, people thought that public preschool care would be the last resort to help vulnerable poor families. Any attempt to improve the standards of public care were viewed as useless and unsafe:

even though many kindergartens are equipped with games and other facilities, children only catch infections; every morning at the opening of the kindergarten we see the mothers who run together with their child, and every evening we see the same race – for taking the child back...⁵⁹

Contrasting natural, healthy family care with artificial, unsafe public care pushed women to take personal responsibility for the "proper way" to raise a child. Remarkably, "healthy" attachment, which would ensure the appropriate development of the child, was directly determined by the quality of one's sexual life: a pregnancy was seen as the inevitable precondition for promoting the maternal instinct and further developing attachment. Mutual sexual desire would only guarantee this outcome.⁶⁰

The concept of artificiality was consistently used by those who substantiated various risks regarding the employment of women. The feminization of physically demanding labor was considered a crime against the interests of the socialist state, and first of all against the mission of motherhood. Any professional labor grew to be seen as demanding and was viewed within the new concept of the harmful feminization of labor (*škodlivá feminizace práce*), introduced during the debates about women's labor in the daily newspaper of the Communist party *Rudé právo* in autumn 1966 and spring 1967. Physicians in Ostrava conducted a survey on miscarriages among those women who were teachers, accountants, health nurses, and

⁵⁷ *Háková*: Úvaha a podněty (cf. fn. 54).

⁵⁸ Open Society Archives, Budapest, HU OSA 300-30-3, Box 13216.06. Radio Free Europe. 1956. Price for Kindergartens. Letter dated 1956 item No. 4639/56 May 4.

⁵⁹ Open Society Archives, Budapest HU OSA 300-30-3, box 27 folder 3400 "Women general 1967-1971". Živá Praha [Livestream Prague] Praha 1 25.06.1967 broadcast Karel Mácha in conversation with Karel Huska.

⁶⁰ *Vondráček*, Vladimír: Vědy psychologicko-psychiatrické, sexuologie a psychiatrické sexuologie [The Sciences of Psychological Psychiatry, Sexology and Psychiatric Sexology]. In: *Časopis českých lékařů* 108 (1969) 9-11, here 10.

postal officers.⁶¹ This survey highlighted the general lack of attention for such jobs, which only appeared safe. Unsurprisingly, the general negative attitude towards female employment encouraged the idea that regular professional activity would aggravate a woman's temperament – which was naturally good, but could worsen due to stress at the workplace: “[It is] no surprise that working women in shops, post offices or hospitals are not friendly at all – their body starts to defend itself”.⁶² Even getting more money began to be viewed negatively, because money was an “additional stress for women's fragile mentality”.⁶³ In short, working women were seen more and more as an obstacle to socialist progress.

While professional life began to be viewed as untenable due to its artificiality, sexual life provided to be an outstanding option for women to claim their autonomy and personal responsibility alongside motherhood: “easy virtue and immoral behavior blocks what is natural for women – the connection between sexual desire and the aspiration to become a mother”.⁶⁴ The termination of a pregnancy was seen as a consequence of sexual relationships beyond the woman's control, stipulated by her unhealthy mental patterns: complexes and the intention to increase self-esteem or find a husband.

This deterring message was also conveyed in newspaper articles whose authors staged authenticity by giving the word to women who were waiting for the abortion commission. In one text, an abandoned pregnant girl was complaining that her parents did not teach her how to conquer a man and then hold him and defend the relationship against other women's advances.⁶⁵ What she lacks, she reports to the journalist, is the central female ability to make herself up nicely. So she had to watch helplessly how her boyfriend flirted with her rival, who was dressed like a movie star, while she was wearing a stuffy dress and felt like a girl from the children's chorus.⁶⁶ Even the behavior of young men abandoning their pregnant partners was defined as backward: “When he found out about the baby, he [the partner; V.S.] told me in my father's manner that I am a pea-goose.”⁶⁷

Publications against abortion formed a particular image of those who had to ask for the permission to terminate a pregnancy:

On the long wood benches, women are sitting, in simple headscarves; those who are younger are bare-headed. Nobody has a hat unsuitable to an old bag and a shabby coat, which all have taken. They are thinking that the usual workwear and old coats suit them better.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Cibula, Igor: Ako sa javí zamestnanost žien lekárom [How Doctors See the Employment of Women]. In: Večerník, 13.04.1967, 2.

⁶² Kulatý stůl 1967 (cf. fn. 55).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Tkačik, Josef: Konflikt fyziologie a ekonomiky [Conflict between Physiology and Economics]. In: Nové slovo 71 (1971) 9, 4.

⁶⁵ Reitmannov, Jaroslav: Nenarození [The Unborn]. In: Kultura, 01.03.1962, 10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* The Czech original uses a strong metaphor for the author's immaturity, who writes that she felt like a member of Kühns Kinderchor, a children's ensemble very popular since the 1950s: “ona byla tak nádherná a já vedle ní stale jako z Kühnová dětského sboru”.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Using hormonal contraception was presented in the opposite way, as making women more sexually attractive, corresponding to contemporary ideals.

The campaigns in favor of hormonal contraception and against abortion did not miss the opportunity to delegitimize practices that the socialist authorities wished to eliminate. For instance, sexual freedom was contrasted with the artificial practices of abstinence and the preservation of virginity.⁶⁹ Consistently, mass media shaped the connection between a backward, often religiously-based upbringing and repressed natural sexual desire and undesired pregnancy.⁷⁰ Moreover, by attacking religious practices regarding marriage and sex, socialist propaganda emphasized the role of sexual emancipation for a better future. The pressure from churches was compared to the cult of personality and other forms of authoritarian regimes.

Such historical reminiscence set up a scenario that contrasted a dark past with a promising future, a typical motive of the nationalist movement and the nation-building process. The topic of the awful past was consistently developed to criticize the undesired politicization of the private realms, including intimate relationships, typical of the Gottwald era. According to some sociological surveys, the obvious lack of political ambitions among young people was interpreted as “the understandable escape from the exhausting pressure of authoritarian regimes such as the Protectorate and the pro-Stalinist purges of the 1950s”.⁷¹ While participation in the public realm was seen as opposite to healthy trends, sexual freedom started being posed as the result of coinciding morality and naturalness. “If we agree that ethical norms should align with natural rules, first of all, it makes sense for sexual morality”,⁷² wrote Josef Hynie,⁷³ director of the Sexological Institute at the Faculty of Medicine of Prague Charles University in the editorial of a special volume on sexuality of *Časopis českých lékařů* (Journal of Czech Physicians), the journal of Czech Medical Association.

Focusing on women, various public campaigns communicated the same concept of the “true woman” – who was natural, independent enough to plan her sexual life, and involved in progressive practices, all of which would prevent her from losing her attractiveness.

Conclusions

In 1937, commenting on the obvious failure of the eugenics project in Czechoslovakia (neither forced sterilization nor pre-marital exams were introduced, despite hot debates between the different camps of eugenics scholars),⁷⁴ Hynek Pelc stressed

⁶⁹ Heitlinger, Alena: *Reproduction, Medicine and the Socialist State*. London 1987, 128-129.

⁷⁰ Panenstvím k ideovosti? [Moving to Ideological Purity through Innocence?]. In: *Host do domu* 13 (1966) 8, 85-86.

⁷¹ The outcome of a large-scale survey among young people (more than 20,000 participants) were discussed in several publications both strictly academic as well as popular: *Moja představa o manželství* [My Concept of Marriage]. In: *Smena* 20.06.1965, 4. – *Intimní pohledy* [Intimate Views]. In: *Sociální poměry* (1965) 5, 61-63.

⁷² Hynie, Josef: *Principy sexuálního chování a sexuální morálky* [The Principles of Sexual Behavior and Sexual Morality]. In: *Časopis českých lékařů* 108 (1969) 553-557.

⁷³ Josef Hynie (1900-1989) played an outstanding role in developing sexology in Czechoslovakia. He was also an active eugenicist between 1931 and 1945.

⁷⁴ Šimůnek, Michal: *Pro et contra: debaty o zavedení tzv. eugenické sterilizace v Česko-*

two main arguments that favored postponing the introduction of eugenic implications: “the overweight of external factors against heredity and the lack of knowledge about the role of heredity in diseases”.⁷⁵ Pelc highlighted the role of public health and social hygiene as the services “aimed at improving living conditions and the national economy as the indispensable pre-requisites for elaborating selective eugenic procedures in the future”.⁷⁶ The intensive development of health care, particularly targeting reproductive health in socialist Czechoslovakia, met the expectations of interwar experts regarding a more systematic application of those measures that we call now “eugenic”.

Between 1957 and 1973, Czechoslovak authorities drew on a wide range of tools for population control, such as regulating access to abortion (1957-1964), disseminating hormonal contraception (1964-1966), and sterilizing those who were seen as “unfit” for reproducing the nation (1973). Looking at these processes through the lens of nationalism and eugenics sharpens our focus on the contexts that supplement the obvious liberalization of reproductive rights policies in the late 1950s and 1960s in Czechoslovakia. Even the official discourses operating in favor of sexual emancipation for women did so in terms of policies that treated them not as individuals, but as members of specific national groups. The diverse population control strategies did not provide access to reproductive rights for women, but rather divided them into target groups for different strategies of population control.

Accompanying the wide range of surveillance policies directed at the reproductive/sexual behavior of women from different social groups, eugenics acted as a universal source for producing identities for women. During the socialist period, reproducing eugenic discourse in various types of media messages created a set of narratives that determined the identity of women with regard to their sexuality and physical embodiment. Being equally built in ideological clichés and historical frames, the socialist narratives reproduced not reality but a hyperreality within which the tension between ideological prescriptions of identity on the one hand and the critical attitude towards them on the other, would be minimized:

One day, socialist society should flourish and make men happy because of the possibility to learn from the really developed Woman – not from the deformed, disfigured, and simplified entities who pass as contemporary women now, and who are not women in the proper way.⁷⁷

Nira Yuval-Davis noted, “Women affect and are affected by national process [...] in several different ways”.⁷⁸ Historicizing the socialist narratives that affected and continue to affect women provides new understanding, which leads to improved ways to encourage women’s influence and independence.

slovensku, 1933-1938 [Pro et Contra: Debates on so called Eugenic Sterilization in Czechoslovakia, 1933-1938]. In: *Speciální pedagogika* 22 (2012) 3, 224-240.

⁷⁵ Pelc: *Sociální lékařství* 92-93 (cf. fn. 24).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Open Society Archives, Budapest, HU OSA 300-30-3 box 8, *Sociální pomery. Rozhlas „Setkání se sociology“* [Meeting with Sociologists] 27.02.1968, Československo II-VKV.

⁷⁸ *Yuval-Davis: Gender and Nation* (cf. fn. 7).