

## REZENSIONEN

*Lauder, Silvie: V pasti pohlaví. O politice, péči, sexu, násilí a postavení žen v Česku [Trapped by Gender. On Politics, Care, Sex, Violence, and the Status of Women in the Czech Republic].*

Host, Brno 2023, 400 pp., ISBN 978-80-275-1590-5.

Over the past years, women in East Central Europe and beyond have been facing backlash against progress in the field of gender equality and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. The protection of girls and women from gender violence has become highly politicized, and as of February 2024, the Czech Republic along with Hungary, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Slovakia are the only EU countries refusing to ratify the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe's human rights treaty opposing violence against women and domestic violence. In connection with islamophobia, racism, and conspiracy theories, the position of women in society and their obligation to fulfil their "natural" roles has gradually become one of the most sensitive topics.

Among the efforts to participate in the debate on the importance of feminism and gender equality from a historical and societal perspective is the most recent publication by Silvie Lauder. Her book "V pasti pohlaví" (Trapped by Gender) offers a comprehensive overview of the roots of antifeminism and misogyny in Czech society as well as of the past and present of women's experiences in the Czech Republic. Right from the start, Lauder emphasizes her professional background as a journalist, advising her readers not to expect an academic book. Nevertheless, the author is well-versed in recent works by sociologists, historians and experts on gender studies, referring to a large body of existing literature from Czech academia and abroad as well as to works by other journalists. Her book thus represents a valuable contribution to discussions on the social status of women in the Czech lands. By incorporating recent academic works, she encourages her readers to continue to satisfy their own curiosity on the different topics she touches upon.

In the book – which contains an introduction, ten chapters and a conclusion – Lauder uses numerous examples to show that women remain systematically disadvantaged in Czechia. The introduction contextualizes the Czech situation within a broader picture as well as offering a history of feminism and antifeminism in Czech society. Crucial figures in the country's history are discussed in terms of their views and activism relating to women's rights. Lauder's book takes the reader from Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and female politicians of the First Czechoslovak Republic such as Františka Plamínková or Milada Horáková through the period of state socialist Czechoslovakia and its "solution" for the "woman question" along with its dissidents to the marginalization of feminism by Václav Havel and its rejection as a Western import, and on to the most recent trivializing of women's experiences. A particular focus of the book is women's unpaid work: child rearing, caring for eld-

erly family members, and managing the household, which have historically been considered women's responsibilities – and more importantly, their “natural” dedication. Lauder considers this to be an essential pillar of patriarchal structures, and thus a key factor for understanding inequality. Considering that this type of work performed by women is indispensable for many countries, Lauder states: “It compensates for a dysfunctional social and health system – women thereby substitute the state, and for free.” (p. 15)

While focusing on feminism, the book discusses how toxic masculinity harms men's health and lives as well. In the chapter entitled “Emancipated Man”, Lauder argues that feminism can be useful for men, too, since their lives have likewise been negatively impacted by patriarchy. Referring to the lack of knowledge about female anatomy in medicine and beyond, Lauder shows the wealth of misconceptions about female sexuality and discusses the myths of full sexual liberation of women. In doing so, she points out how the idea of women's bodily autonomy is not only met with opposition but also fuels hate crimes from verbal abuse to femicide. She reports female journalists' experiences with stalking, rape, and murder threats, and also discusses one of the most recent phenomena: incels. The most tragic and difficult to read, yet important chapters deal with the #metoo movement and gender violence, including child sexual abuse. Avoiding simplified descriptions of crimes committed in Czechia, Lauder instead explains the history and societal acceptance of the notion of male ownership of female bodies, as well as the near impunity of male crimes against women and children. At the same time, she elucidates how gender violence has been politicized to promote xenophobia, islamophobia and racism.

Lauder interweaves historical facts with current public debates. Despite discussing a wide range of public figures from Czech contexts, she also manages to briefly introduce each one, ensuring that her readers are familiarized with them and able to follow without previous knowledge of all actors, facts and connections. The special value of the book lies in its intertwining of research from abroad with contextualizations of the Czech conditions and the author's personal experience with verbal attacks. Lauder's description of her own background and familiarity with assaults, threats and aggressive behaviour by readers of her articles, politicians, authors, scientists, commentators and online trolls is well-contextualized and shows the layers of inequality, discrimination, ignorance, unwillingness to understand, antifeminism and misogyny.

The main objective of “V pasti pohlaví” is not to provide new knowledge but rather to recapitulate phenomena from the Czech environment in a broader context. Its size allows the author to explain what is repeatedly misinterpreted and mythologized in the public space, as well as to demonstrate the complexity of feminism. Lauder offers a fascinating overview of numerous issues related to feminism and antifeminism. Obviously, it would be impossible for any book to deal with *all* topics and issues to do with the inequality of women in the Czech lands, and Lauder clearly says so. However, she limits herself to predominantly offering the views of liberal feminism, which have had a direct impact in terms of overlooking queer people – not to mention trans women – along with other culturally, ethnically and economically disadvantaged groups. The book therefore neglects the opportunity to

broadly include marginalized minority groups of non-Czech or non-white women such as Roma, Vietnamese, Ukrainians, or even Slovaks. Undoubtedly, her journalistic work proves that Lauder has ample knowledge and expertise concerning the experiences of marginalized women. An additional gaze at the intersection of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background might have offered a further important layer to her analysis, however.

In summary, the book is well-researched, shows the Czech specifics, and offers an appealing style of journalistic writing, making it extremely readable. This seems to be a recipe for successfully disseminating knowledge on the often complex past and present of antifeminism, misogyny, and the prospects of feminism. Silvie Lauder argues objectively, constructively, and moderately, while at the same time making it clear that this is a topic that touches her personally.