

Women's Rights and the International Context: Some Reflections on the Post-Communist States¹

Maxine Molyneux

It is a truism that the now liberated countries of East and Central Europe have less and less in common as they forge their own destinies free from the conformity forced upon them by their membership of the former Soviet bloc. Many writers from these countries express both an understandable distaste for facile comparison and a proper concern to avoid universalising treatments of *the* transition, insisting on the need to take due account of specific histories and cultural configurations. Moreover, as Stark and others have noted, there is not one 'transition to capitalism' but a plurality of economic strategies which are being applied, albeit within some shared parameters.² If this diversity is today particularly evident in the variety of political forms and ideologies which characterise post-communist states, it is also found in the realm of women's rights, where national policies on, for example, abortion cover a broad spectrum from very restrictive (Poland) to relatively liberal (Romania, Czech Republic). Different histories, religions, national identities, internal coalitions and organised interests help to explain these particularities and shape the distinctive contexts in which the respective policies are made and the varying degrees to which new legal systems affect social and personal behaviour.

However, discussions of women's rights in post-communist states, for all their national variations, do share some commonalities and, of these, some derive from the fact that they are necessarily situated within an international context. The East and Central European countries not only shared a historical experience of state socialism which has left a common, if complex, legacy but since the collapse of their respective communist parties they have been enduring the shocks of an internationally sanctioned adjustment as they

I would like to thank Barbara Einhorn, Bob Deacon and Deborah Steinberg for their comments on earlier versions of this article and for their help in obtaining some of the information presented. I would also like to thank all those from the former communist states who gave their time to discuss these issues.

1. This paper represents interim reflections on work in progress. It forms part of a project funded by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in Geneva, on the social impact of changes in property relations in Eastern Europe.

2. See David Stark, 'Path Dependence and Privatisation Strategies in East-Central Europe', *Eastern European Politics and Societies* (Vol. 6, No. 1, 1992), pp. 17-53.

dismantle their state-centred systems and move more or less painfully towards a market economy. The result of this move has been not only to make them more responsive to international processes, both economic and social; it has also situated these states firmly within a specific international environment. Their economies are being drawn into the world market, and their peoples are being exposed to the wider world through economic linkages, the media, migration and tourism. In the Central Asian as in the European post-communist states political leaders increasingly define the futures of their nations in terms of membership of one or another of the available geopolitical alliances, with multiple implications for the economic, political and social rights of women.

Campaigns for women's rights are situated today within a seemingly paradoxical context. On the one hand, there is the welcome turn towards democratisation in those parts of the world previously dominated by military and authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, the situation of women, on a wide range of socio-economic indicators, has shown little improvement or, more disturbing still, has in many cases continued to deteriorate. Reports from a diverse range of regions are of a worsening balance of power between the sexes and a rollback of some rights which women previously enjoyed, whether within the family or in the public realms of work and welfare. The new democracies (in the South and the North) were established in a climate in which changes in gender relations and some advances for women in the previous decades were followed by what commentators have characterised as a 'backlash effect' as neoconservative forces of various kinds have produced arguments which advocate the 'reprivatisation' of the family and, as a correlate, the relocation of women within subordinate positions in the economy and family.³

Broader socio-economic trends have appeared to sustain these discursive positions and have fuelled the move towards legislative changes which some feminists see as aimed at re-ordering gender relations by 'returning' women to the private sphere. This in practice has often meant that women move into low-paid, part-time, 'flexible' work patterns. It is possible to see this new

3. The starting point for placing this phenomenon within its proper context is to question the over-optimistic expectations of the new democracies. It is necessary to understand that the 'turn to democracy' whether in the South or in the former communist states has often occurred in conditions which were not only antithetical to the realisation of durable and meaningful forms of democratic participation but were even less conducive to advancing any programme of women's rights. In part this was because many of the new democracies were born out of the failures of their predecessors and inherited a poisoned legacy of accumulated economic and political problems which would thwart them for decades to come. Moreover, the limited conceptions of democratic governance that prevail in the late 20th century are accompanied everywhere by a lack of state accountability, authoritarian and excessively bureaucratic decision-making processes and widespread public disillusion and apathy. This has been replicated in the post-communist democracies; after an initial wave of exhilaration, political participation often declined and public apathy set in.

configuration as to some extent a worldwide phenomenon—found as much in the industrialised Northern states as in the poorer countries of the South. If, as seems likely, this trend continues unchecked over the decades to come, it represents a historical shift of a significant kind and it poses major questions for feminist research and political strategy.

The policies of the new post-communist states, whether directed at solving the 'problems of the family' or the economy, are themselves not just the outcome of internal, 'national' influences, important though these are, nor are they in major respects unique. External factors are increasingly bearing upon these states, and it is worth considering how this process of international alignment could affect policy-making with respect to women's rights. In other words, what role do external factors, whether of deliberate policy or of broader influence, play in shaping the policy environment in direct or indirect ways? As far as women's rights are concerned, this integration of the former communist states—first into the international economy, and secondly into regional blocs—will exert an important, sometimes decisive influence on the policies of the new nation states.

In what follows it will be argued that the current policy environment with respect to women's rights has been affected by three major trends, all of which were nurtured in the recessive conditions of the 1980s. These three processes can be identified as: (1) The ascendancy of neoliberal models of economic management; (2) the collapse of communism and of socialism as a plausible critique of capitalism and as a policy alternative; and (3) the emergence of new currents of nationalism and religious fundamentalism. While each took different and specific forms in particular regions and countries, all could be found to greater or lesser degrees in the various regions of the world. These phenomena are international in character, they affect a considerable range of countries and they involve cross-national linkages. As far as the post-communist states are concerned these three trends have appeared in particularly sharpened forms: we have only to think of the dramatic shock treatment administered to the Polish economy in 1990; the widespread revulsion at all ideas associated with socialism including ironically, feminism; and most strikingly, the emergence of bloody national and ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union, together with the rise in many states of racism, whether against Jews, Gypsies, Hungarians, Romanians or Albanians.

These three processes are themselves interrelated in complex ways and combine to form part of a new political and economic configuration whose character is clearly gendered. They have influenced the current national and international policy environment and have played an important part in bringing about policy changes as far as women's rights and the terms of social membership or citizenship are concerned. The important point about these trends for present discussion of Eastern Europe is that in their different ways they have altered, perhaps irreversibly, the terms of critical debate, and they have left many of those committed to policy initiatives which safeguard

Millennium

women's rights disoriented and disarmed. At the same time they have posed new questions of feminist politics and practice, nowhere more acutely than in the new communist democracies of East Central Europe and the former USSR. We shall consider each in turn.

Neoliberalism

If the conjuncture of the 1970s was favourable to the spread of feminist movements and of initiatives to promote the internationalisation of women's rights, such as the UN Decade for Women, the 1980s presented a distinctly less conducive context. At the heart of this difference was the changed economic climate; the prolonged global recession led to a sharp diminution of the resources which made possible the advances of the 1970s. For the majority of nations, the economic crisis of 1978-82 initiated a period of slump marked by growing poverty and social problems in a context of mounting pressures on resources, exacerbated by a pattern of sometimes inept and often reactive policy responses. This deteriorating economic and social situation accelerated a number of important shifts which contributed to reshaping the policy environment in which discussion of gender issues takes place.

Neoliberalism is the shorthand term frequently used to refer to current trends within radical-right economic thinking which stress laissez-faire market oriented policies and the need to redefine and minimise the economic and welfare role of the state. Considerable emphasis is placed on privatisation and on fiscal instruments to regulate the economy, on market efficiency and on proper pricing. As a set of policies these ideas were being put into effect from the mid-1970s in a range of countries from Chile to Britain and their spread throughout the world gained momentum with the world recession of the 1980s. This economic crisis, for a variety of reasons, challenged the viability of existing development and welfare models in which the state had played a central role, and sped up their disintegration. In addition, the inability of states to manage the economic disarticulation caused by the crisis granted greater leverage to financial institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, to influence policy in a liberal direction. This combination of circumstance and power relations, together with the diminishing credibility of any alternatives to liberal capitalism contributed to the worldwide spread of neoliberal policies and, as an ironic by-product, to more vigorous forms of social conservatism which claimed to endorse its core principles.⁴

This spread of a neoliberal 'received wisdom' since the mid-1970s has had an influence, sometimes a major one, on policy priorities, both in the economic and welfare domains. Despite mixed results to date, it has been embraced with varying degrees of zeal in countries long committed to more

4. This link between neoliberalism and social conservatism is not necessary. It is contingent, dependent on a variety of mutually reinforcing factors—political, social and economic.

state-centred development policies and corporatist welfare models. While not all have embraced the tenets of libertarian extremism, of the 190 or so countries in the world there is scarcely more than a handful today that espouse the growth models so common prior to the shift. Nearly all, including communist-party ruled China, have to a greater or lesser extent, reduced the role of the state and moved towards a greater reliance on private ownership and market forces as the spur to growth.

While a significant measure of state direction has, under certain conditions, played an important role in promoting the conditions for economic growth, especially in the Far East, the post-war consensus which favoured sustaining national, statist projects for growth has, for the time being, been displaced by strategies of privatisation, laissez-faire economics, export promotion and the commodification of public provision and welfare services. Third World, semi-peripheral and post-communist countries, under the tutelage of the World Bank and IMF have almost everywhere adopted structural adjustment and stabilisation policies in order to stimulate economic efficiency and reduce the role of overdeveloped, inefficient, corrupt or authoritarian states. What worries some analysts is not so much the rejection of previous economic policies and paradigms, many of which were unsuccessful, but the reactive, sometimes doctrinaire adoption of liberal policies.⁵ In the more radical versions of the new orthodoxy, an attempt to disavow the past has gone along with unsuccessful or over-hasty privatisation in the context of a dogmatic rejection of any directive role for the state in the areas of the economy and welfare.

It is fortunate that more than a decade of experiments in extremism (and resistance to it) has, in the new climate of the 1990s, generated some positive rethinking among international organisations⁶ and a more cautious approach is evident towards issues such as privatisation and welfare. Economic liberalism of the extreme kind is on the retreat as 'neointerventionist' lobbies, including labour organisations, call for more responsible state action in the economic and social spheres⁷. The election of reformed Communist Parties in Lithuania, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria in the last two years also testifies to changing popular attitudes towards the reforms in the former communist states. But whatever results from this reaction in the longer run, what has to be confronted in the 1990s is the fact that there has occurred a decisive shift in thinking about the relationship between the state and the economy and few today, of the left or even the nationalist right, would risk calling for a return of the *status quo ante*. The market appears to have won much of the

5. See for example, G. Cornia, R. Jolly and F. Stewart *et. al.* (eds.), *Adjustment with a Human Face* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

6. For a recent evaluation see, *The Structural Adjustment of Structural Adjustment: 1980-1993*, *Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Bulletin* (Vol. 25, No. 3, July 1994).

7. See Arthur Lipow, 'Internationalism and Social Policy: Trade Unions in Central/Eastern Europe', paper presented at the Third International Prague Conference on Social Transformation in Central/Eastern Europe, 1994.

economic argument against the state, and there is widespread dissatisfaction with the record of bureaucratic centralism; these facts and the reality of this new and as yet ill-defined relationship between state and society have posed a range of problems which have to be taken on board by those wishing to advance women's rights in the new context.

In the post-communist states of East Central Europe and in the former Soviet Union, the familiar IMF package is either already in place or is in the process of being applied. There have been some successes, notably in controlling inflation, and since 1988 there is a greater awareness of the need for effective safety nets for vulnerable groups likely to fall into poverty as a result of the contraction of the economy. But in most of the post-communist states the 'miracle of the market' is still eagerly awaited and there are questions concerning the long term sustainability of growth in the region. The majority of states have experienced the new phenomena of open unemployment, struggles to control inflation, increasing indebtedness and a sharp fall in GNP.⁸ These are likely to remain features of the 'transition' for the foreseeable future.

What can be said of the process so far is that in most cases the social and human costs have been high, with growing unemployment and its most immediate social consequence, poverty.⁹ All the post-communist states report a rise in poverty and indicators point to a decline in health among some populations, while in Russia there has been an increase in maternal and infant mortality.¹⁰ Crime and prostitution have become integral features of the transition, while pressures on households are reflected in a rise in the reported instance of violence against women.¹¹ None of this is unexpected. There exists a substantial literature documenting the adverse social effects of accelerated economic restructuring whether in the Third World or in the industrialised North. There is also ample evidence to show how the accumulated effects of this process fall upon the female sex.¹² The pattern found elsewhere in the world has predictably enough appeared in the post-

8. See *Country Briefs, Vol. 1* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1992).

9. *Public Policy and Social Conditions* (Geneva: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 1993).

10. Monica Fong, 'Russia: The Role of Women in Rebuilding the Economy', unpublished report, Human Resources Division, World Bank, Washington, DC, 1993.

11. There is little published research on this, but *Helsinki Watch* (February, 1992) reports for Poland that '[a]necdotal evidence such as letters to women's magazines and informal conversations suggests that there is a high level of domestic violence against women perpetrated by their partners'. P. 3. This corresponds to what has been said to me by a number of East European and Russian social scientists although there are ongoing debates as to its causes. Violence against women is considered a major problem by many women's organisations, some of which call for legislative provision.

12. See for example Haleh Afshar and C. Dennis, *Women and Adjustment Policies in the Third World* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

communist states.¹³ Disaggregated statistics from Slovenia, Poland, the former USSR, former Eastern Germany and Romania, (but not Hungary¹⁴) have identified women as a significant social category among those most adversely affected by the social processes entailed in economic restructuring and the redefinition of the role of the state. They constitute a significant proportion of the poorest, most disadvantaged sectors of society; they form a majority of the unemployed and a minority of those being hired.¹⁵

What seems clear from this literature on the gendered effects of adjustment, is that although men too are suffering from the transformations¹⁶, women confront change and crisis from a position of structural disadvantage, and the policies designed to promote marketisation have had the effect of further undermining their already tenuous hold on resources. Unemployment in all the East European countries (with the exception of the Czech Republic) is higher than the OECD average.¹⁷ While women's unemployment is still low in comparison with the high-unemployment countries, and the gap between the male and female rate is on average only five percent or under, there is evidence to suggest that it will grow in the medium term.¹⁸

Even more marked, however, is the trend towards the intensification of *gender segregation* in the economy and society as a whole. This is occurring as a result of what we could call *structural discrimination*, compounded by

13. A number of useful books and collections on women in post-communist states have appeared recently. See in particular, Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market* (London: Verso, 1993); *Shifting Territories: Feminism in Europe*, special issue of *Feminist Review* (No. 39, 1991); Valentine Moghadam (ed.), *Democratic Reform and the Position of Women in Transitional Economies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (eds.), *Gender Politics and Post-Communism* (London: Routledge, 1993).

14. Hungary is the only former communist state where the female unemployment rate is significantly less than the male; women make up 40% of the unemployed, although this is almost certainly understated. The lower rate in Hungary may be attributable to the larger informal economy which provides some income generating activity for women.

15. Monica Fong and G. Paull, *The Changing Role of Women in Eastern Europe* mimeo, World Bank, Washington, DC, February 1992); and Liba Paukert, 'The Changing Economic Status of Women in the Period of Transition to a Market Economy System', in Moghadam (ed.), *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 248-79.

16. In nearly all of the former communist states the mortality rates of men have been rising steeply since 1970, while those of women have remained steadier. See Peggy Watson's exploration of this gender gap in terms of psycho-social factors and gender differentiated roles and identities in 'Explaining Rising Mortality Among Men in Eastern Europe', paper presented at the ESRC Research Seminar on Gender, Class and Nationalism in Post-Communist States, Birkbeck College, London, June 1994.

17. Tito Boeri, 'Labour Market Flows and the Persistence of Unemployment in Central and Eastern Europe', paper presented at the 'Technical Workshop organized by the Centre for the Cooperation with the Economies in Transition' (sic), Paris, September 1993.

18. See Paukert, *op. cit.*, in note 15. For the Czech Republic, the least badly affected so far, Milada Bartsová's research supports this conclusion. See Bartsová 'Women, Changing Property Relations and the Labour Market in the Czech Republic', unpublished UNRISD paper, 1993.

growing *situational* discrimination¹⁹ against women at the workplace: reports from all regions show that they are less likely to be hired, trained or promoted, and more likely to be laid off. In addition, in many cases 'men only' vacancies are reported to be widespread.²⁰ In the Slovak Republic in February 1991, there were 7,563 vacancies but only 29% were for women.²¹ If these forms of discrimination persist unchecked, as is likely, women will find it difficult to move into the newly expanding service sector or the (hoped for) high-tech industries of the future let alone find themselves equipped and financed to run their own small businesses—areas seen by policy-makers as future possibilities for women workers. Moreover, Paukert has argued that women's wages, on average already one third less than men's, will fall further still with the growth of privatisation.²²

One general trend, a consequence of deregulation, is for women to enter informal sector and part-time work. These are both activities which are as yet relatively undeveloped (Hungary excepted), and are liable, at the bottom end, to be intensely exploitative and lacking the social protection that the formal economy affords. Symptomatic of this trend is the entry of young women into prostitution, a stark indicator of a new move towards the sexualisation of women's work.²³

Meanwhile, policy-makers, political parties and media commentators have frequently expressed views which endorse discriminatory treatment of women on the grounds that men are the proper breadwinners and women's place is in the home because of the 'harmful effects on children' if mothers are out at work.²⁴ Some of the new women's organisations, especially those linked to nationalist organisations, argue that the 'truly womanly mission' is

19. Structural discrimination results from a pre-existing division of labour in which women are positioned within low paid, vulnerable sectors of employment. What I have termed situational discrimination arises at the face-to-face level of interpersonal interaction.

20. See for example, Malgorzata Fuszara, 'Women's Legal Rights in Poland in the Process of Transformation', in *Beyond Law* (Vol. 3, No. 8, December 1993), pp. 35-47, a version of which is also in Funk and Mueller, *op. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 241-52.

21. Anna Okruhlicová, 'The Influence of Social and Economic Changes in the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Position of Women', paper presented at the Vienna Centre, Vienna, 1991.

22. Paukert, *op. cit.*, in note 15.

23. Prostitution has been embraced in some quarters as a sign of progress, embodying the entrepreneurial virtues of the new liberalism. See Yudit Kiss, 'The Second "No": Women in Hungary', in *Feminist Review*, *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 49-57. The Russian press including the periodical founded by the Young Communist League, *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, regularly carries advertisements of the 'Beautiful young woman offers sexual favours to rich man' variety. See Harriet Forster, 'Russian Ads Go Personal', *The Moscow Times* (9 December 1992). However prostitution is also seen as a strategy of resistance to poverty, adopted in conditions characterised not by choice but circumstance.

24. This is a common trope in the post-communist states, but one which is particularly marked in some contexts. In Poland for example, the *Gazeta Wyborcza* has featured headlines such as 'Family Policy as a means of dealing with unemployment'. See Fuszara, *op. cit.*, in note 20.

motherhood. Along these lines, there has also been some support for the idea of the 'family wage' in the Czech and Slovak Republics and in Poland where it has received support from the Vatican. Many women appear to favour options which give them more time at home. Part-time work is most frequently cited as the optimal choice, at least while children are young, as it provides a way of balancing the dual demands of childcare and income generation. Szalai points out that Hungarian women's attitudes towards leaving full-time employment are on the whole positive—expressed as a relief from the burdens of the past.²⁵ Yet, if two or even three incomes were needed to survive in the past, present conditions with household incomes falling make a voluntary mass exit of women from economic activity unlikely. Surveys from all countries indicate that a high proportion of women want to work, not just for economic reasons.²⁶

If new and old forms of sex discrimination reveal the fledgling labour markets to be working imperfectly with respect to women's employment, then according to some policy advisers, the obstacles to perfect competition must be lifted. Interestingly, within the neoliberal policy framework feminist positions have emerged which call for liberalising the labour market by the removal of prejudicial treatment and limiting conditions on women; as an educated workforce with experience and a wide range of skills, human capital arguments suggest that these (female) resources should be fully utilised to increase efficiency. Advisers to the Women's Department of the World Bank have, for example, advocated the removal of protective legislation ('government involvement') on these grounds, while at the same time they recognise that 'incomplete markets' justify government intervention in certain specified circumstances. They call for the provision of adequate childcare services on a non-profit basis or by subsidising the private sector so that women can be 'freed for work'.²⁷

In most post-communist states the picture with regard to protective legislation and that other *bête noire* of the new liberalism, maternity entitlements, is complex; old legislation is still in place in some cases (Poland) and in others no longer applies (Russia) in a general context which has been described as 'legislative chaos'. Former rights to paid time-off for caring for sick children have been modified substantially and the right to

25. Julia Szalai, 'Women and Democratisation: Some Notes on Recent Changes in Hungary', paper presented at the ESRC Research Seminar on Gender, Class and Ethnicity, Birkbeck College, April 1994.

26. Figures vary from country to country but in each case the majority of women express a preference for working; in Bulgaria only 20% of working women showed an inclination to stay at home, compared with 33% of Hungarian women and more than 40% of Polish women. The high figure for the latter needs to be set in the context of figures from the Polish Academy of Sciences which show that amongst professional Polish women 73.5% preferred to work. This only serves to demonstrate that women's attitudes to paid work are varied and most often reflect occupational differences. See Fong and Paull, *op. cit.*, in note 15 on this point.

27. See Fong, *op. cit.*, in note 10, and Fong and Paull, *op. cit.*, in note 15.

return to work after childrearing, under review in many countries, is in practice being lost in Hungary and is not part of the new legislation in the Czech Republic. Significantly, policy advisers have expressed the view that 'women's privileges' were not only obstacles to their gaining employment because they meant higher costs to industry, but that they were ineffective anyway. There may have been 90 occupations banned to women in communist Poland, and even more in the former Soviet Union, but they never prevented women from doing hard, low-paid, dirty and dangerous jobs. Many regional specialists on employment argue that protective legislation, in effect, led to indirect discrimination against women and protected higher paid jobs for men.²⁸ Yet in the new enthusiasm to dispense with the hypocritical encumbrances of the past there is a danger that the underlying issues of women's rights in particular, and of workers' health and safety in general, may be too readily displaced in favour of labour market considerations²⁹—in effect by another ideal construct that fails in reality to work as it should.

As far as childcare is concerned, even if endorsed in theory by the World Bank, it is unlikely within the present climate of fiscal constraint that resources can continue to be made available to support its provision. The trend is firmly in the opposite direction. In the former GDR, the Czech Republic and Hungary, costs have risen sharply while many crèche facilities have been closed down. Crèches previously available at the workplace have suffered as a result of firms being put on a more cost effective footing. Since private crèches are rare and costly to maintain their resultant charges can only be afforded by the few. Most working women have had to rely on their own resources and on kin networks and neighbours to help out. Popular attitudes to state provision are coloured by the experience of poor quality facilities in the past. Szalai documents the long history of public enthusiasm in Hungary for cooperative self-help solutions which were preferred not just because they provided a higher quality service, but also because they represented an increase in community control as a buffer against the all-pervasive state. These attitudes of suspicion *vis-à-vis* the state persist into the post-communist present.³⁰

This ambivalence over the role of the state is mirrored in debates over the contested question of welfare provision. While some have seen the former communist countries as reacting pragmatically to the new conditions, with policies being driven by political and fiscal considerations, others have argued that social policy is more properly seen as strongly influenced by outside forces, among which the most important are the IMF, the World Bank, the European Commission and various agencies of the United Nations. Deacon

28. See for example, Fuszara, *op. cit.*, in note 20.

29. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have repeatedly criticised the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank for their policies on this. See Lipow, *op. cit.*, in note 7.

30. Szalai, *op. cit.*, in note 25.



has documented the different recipes offered by this variety of international agencies at work in the post-communist policy arena³¹, ones which range from the liberal to the neocorporatist end of the spectrum.

However in the present climate, and within the context of existing power relations, versions of neoliberal thinking represent by far the most dominant influence. The IMF plays an important part in determining macro-level economic policy which has consequences for social provision. Both the IMF and the other important external financial actor, the World Bank, urge the withdrawal of the state from its former areas of responsibility and advocate the commodification of public services such as childcare and health with 'safety nets' for the poorest. While there are differences over details, the emphasis on privatisation has implications not only for the predominantly female labour force in the state sector, many of whom will lose their jobs, but also for the role of women in the family. Despite the labour market perspective in some quarters of the World Bank, there is a far more pro-family than pro-employment edge to the neoliberal policy package. As one recent ILO report expressed it, 'there is a renegotiation about the marketability of certain services, which might as well be provided within the family instead of being offered on the labour market...caring for children, ill or elderly family members'.³²

The move towards giving the family greater formal responsibility in the transition process also echoes and reinforces some of the older concerns of the 1980s. The changes in family structure, panic about 'the family crisis' and low birth rates have reaffirmed demographic arguments in favour of more pro-natalist policies. Neoconservative and religious coalitions, while opposed to libertarian individualism, join in the targetting of the family as the privileged place of social reconstruction. As we shall see later, the emergence of small nation-states, worried about their political clout in the international arena, only intensifies this identification of the family as a site on which a number of discrete policy objectives converge.

This in part explains the preservation of the one area where 'women's privileges' have been retained—the incentive system designed to make it more possible for mothers of small children to stay at home; various forms of this package combining generous maternity leave with a 'mother's allowance' or similar benefit system, were brought in during the 1970s and 1980s to address the 'demographic crisis'. They proved attractive to women, and in recent years they have served to take some of the pressure off unemployment

31. See Bob Deacon, 'The Impact of Supranational and Global Agencies on Central European National Social Policy', in T. P. Boje (ed.), *Welfare State and Labour Markets in a Changing Europe* (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994) forthcoming; and Deacon, 'The Council of Europe, the European Union, The OECD, the World Bank and the Shaping of East-European Social Policy', unpublished paper, 1994.

32. Sabine Hubner et. al., 'Women's Employment in Central and Eastern Europe, Status and Prospects', unpublished paper, International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 1991.

figures. Moreover, while the benefits are costly to the state they were considered less so than universally available crèches. Whether economic conditions permit their continued maintenance is still to be seen, but the policy package they represent appears attractive in the light of current concerns.

The emphasis on the family retains something of the symbolic meaning it acquired under communist party rule. Then it was described as the only place of freedom, one where 'real life' occurred, in contrast to the meaningless artificiality of the public domain.³³ Moreover, the family and 'family solidarity' could be perceived as 'instruments of self-protection and of resistance to the state'.³⁴ Within the current context where the state is still viewed in largely negative terms by neoliberals and radical democrats alike, the devolution of its former responsibilities to 'the family' (i.e., women) and 'voluntary associations', is seen in positive terms, sometimes celebrated as a victory for civil society over the state. The feminist critique of these positions for failing to consider the ways in which this can deepen gender divisions and exploit women's unpaid labour does not cut much ice with policy-makers; in the present climate, returning women to the home seems to offer solutions to several problems at once, including that of nourishing and protecting the new national 'lifeworld'.³⁵

The international critique of neoliberal extremism, and of its social and human costs, has as yet, had little meaningful influence in most of the countries of Eastern Europe. More importantly, the problem of how those most adversely affected by these costs can creatively respond to the new context still remains unsolved. Women's organisations stress how difficult it is to formulate demands in the context of resource scarcity and, while the impact of the new policies has hit women hard, to argue against adjustment *per se* (which is the implication of many of the critiques) carries little weight. Most commentators, however critical, are forced to concede that the objectives of adjustment may be reasonable enough and surveys have shown substantial popular support at least for the principle of economic reform and reduced state activity. But there are important issues of principle and practice concerning the pace and scope of policy implementation. Given these parameters, and with neoliberal agendas currently in place, how should women's rights supporters respond? Some reject the idea of making

33. György Konrád's book, *Antipolitics* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co, 1984) was influential in the dissemination of this discourse. Also see Václav Havel's 'Anti-Political Politics', in John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 381-98.

34. Smaranda Mezei is here referring to Romania, but articulates a widespread position on the family under communism. Oral presentation at the 'Women, Gender and the Transition Conference', Italy, 1993.

35. See Václav Havel's appropriation of Habermas' argument in *Lifeworld and System: a Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1987). Both are strikingly gender-blind, but it is noteworthy that Habermas in the preface to the second edition of his book has acknowledged the force of the feminist critique.

maximalist claims on the state, pressing instead for it to have a merely regulatory role within more market-oriented strategies. Others fear that this would lead to a general failure to meet social needs in areas such as childcare, health and employment.³⁶

In general the question that has been forced on women's organisations everywhere is whether there are any aspects of the 'rollback of the state' that can lead to positive outcomes. There are at least three areas where feminist positions have diverged—that of decentralisation, marketisation and of what agents and institutions are going to replace the state as the provider of services. It is perhaps too early in the process for debates to have become very sharply defined and the empirical evidence is as yet too sparse for some questions to be settled. Certainly feminists have been most enthusiastic about the implications for women of greater devolution of responsibility for local administration. This is something which has gained widespread support in reaction to the over-centralised and authoritarian structures of the past, and it has potential for greater democratic accountability and participation in the political system. Feminists stress that if women are to be active at all they tend to be more involved politically at the local level; to some extent this has occurred in Hungary and in the Czech Republic, where formal institutionalised politics continues to largely exclude women. In Hungary women now occupy a third of the non-elected posts in local commissions. There has also been an efflorescence of various kinds of local level self-help caring associations in which women predominate. Szalai notes that, in Hungary, '[w]elfare assistance reaches more of the needy and gives them more efficient support in those settlements where women are in charge of forming the orientation of local politics'.³⁷

Yet, while these are undoubtedly important developments, some feminists fear that this concentration on local initiatives might be at the expense of women's greater involvement in and influence over central government. There is certainly a danger that the gendered public-private division which has always characterised political life is reproduced in different but parallel terms, mapped onto a national-local split with the latter being feminised. Moreover, as far as local, grass-roots activities are concerned, Polish feminists have stressed that it is not just democratic forces which are unleashed in this domain; so too are agencies and institutions which are radically opposed to conceptions of women's interests which diverge too far from conservative religious belief. The campaign of harassment waged by conservative religious forces in Poland against the sale of contraceptives can be most potent at the local level. In the broader picture too, decentralisation, while laudible in its democratic objectives, can be captured and used as a vehicle for conservative ethno-nationalist forces, with negative consequences for women's rights. In

36. The following draws on discussions with women's rights organisations and activists from Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia and former Yugoslavia.

37. Szalai, *op. cit.*, in note 25, p. 25.

other words, there are strategic considerations which necessarily play into the field of feminist debates on these questions.

Marketisation, while evidently holding many dangers for women, is also viewed in a more positive light. If the threat is that many services which women depend upon may not become available at affordable prices through the market, optimists see some hope here, one naturally contingent on rising incomes and demand. Issues such as reproductive rights for example have been caught up in the debate over state provision—in religio-nationalist settings, some have argued that market forces might be better providers of advice, clinics and contraception than inefficient, reluctant and/or misogynist states. But again, as the Polish case shows, organised political opposition can be effective in destroying the 'freedom of the market'.

Szalai has also put a strong case for the benefits to women of some aspects of economic liberalisation. While much feminist writing on Eastern Europe stresses the negative effects on women's work of economic restructuring, in her view 'open marketisation has not led to a dramatic worsening of women's conditions in Hungary. One could even state the opposite'.³⁸ In Hungary, exceptionally, the reform policies of Kadarism had allowed some early growth of informal sector activities which continued apace after 1989. Women were quick to take advantage of the opportunities for greater flexibility afforded by the informal 'family economy': 'the otherwise patriarchal gender-division of roles turned into a source of relative freedom; women gained somewhat more space and an acceptable "excuse" to withdraw from time to time from the formal sector....'³⁹ It is precisely this officially unacknowledged experience of administering several responsibilities, that Szalai sees as 'easily mobilisable and adjustable nowadays'⁴⁰ to meet the new needs of the economy. Thus what many women apparently prefer is compatible with what the market can currently deliver. However, the fragmentation of women's work may suit certain women but not others. Overall it could have the effect of undermining women's claims on formal waged employment and, as Dölling and others point out, it could increase women's dependency on their partners or the state.⁴¹ Alena Valterova, founder of the then Czechoslovak Political Party of Women and Mothers, is sceptical of the claims made on behalf of the market because 'what prevails is the right of the strongest and best placed'.⁴²

It is the issue of devolution of responsibility from the state to independent agencies that, as noted before, has ambiguous implications. It is quite possible that NGOs for instance, could work to defend the extension of women's rights or act as support organisations on a range of issues. Examples from Poland of

38. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

41. Irene Dölling, 'Between Hope and Helplessness: Women in the GDR after the "Turning Point"', in *Feminist Review*, *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 3-15.

42. Cited in Mita Castle-Kanerová 'Interview with Alena Valterova', in *Feminist Review*, *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 161-6.

independent organisations working on behalf of women include the International Foundation of the Women of Lodz and the Warsaw Centre for the Advancement of Women; both help jobless women to train, find jobs or become self-employed. But NGOs are of many types and among the most effective are those with religious affiliations. If these are conservative in character, they can have agendas which in certain contexts seek to meet very restrictive conceptions of women's needs. In general then, the enthusiasm for a greater role for NGOs and independent associations needs to be tempered by shrewd calculations as to the gender implications of their particular interventions.

In sum, the broader question of whether the new context is as negative as it detractors proclaim or as positive as its proponents suggests remains one of ongoing political debate. The older question which used to be posed within feminism was that of how much of the state and how much of the market is the desirable goal as far as women's interests are concerned. Today that question itself needs to be reformulated within the new terms of debate which have required nuanced, realistic and innovative responses from women's rights campaigners, not just in Eastern Europe but also in Western Europe and the Third World.

The End of Communism and 'Feminism as Totalitarianism'

If women constitute a substantial proportion, and in some cases the majority of those most adversely affected by the 'retreat' of the state, they have not on the whole been organised as effective pressure groups actively participating in policy formulation. In East Central Europe there are in practice significant variations between governmental responses to women's organisations and some differences between countries in terms of the strength, character and effectiveness of women's movements.⁴³ But national women's organisations, while beginning to find a voice in some regions, tend to be weak and in some cases are non-existent.⁴⁴ Moreover, the presence of those in governments prepared to speak up for women's rights is minimal. When conflict arises, as in the case of the abortion law in Poland, the response has been to sack troublesome dissenters and weight decision-making bodies in such a way as to

43. Earlier this year in the Russian Federation, the Women of Russia Party won 23 seats in the Duma. This notable result however was described to me as a protest vote, and the organisation has yet to define its programme. It remains to be seen what influence it has on policy matters given its very heterodox character. The Czech Women's Union participates in government discussion on 'issues of social policy and employment' but Valterova considers their role as largely one of 'rubber-stamping' official policy. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

44. For an elaborated discussion of the role of women's movements see Einhorn, *op. cit.*, in note 13, Chapter 6.

achieve the desired policy result—in this case a marked tightening of the restrictions on abortion.⁴⁵

The collapse of communist party rule and of socialism as a credible set of ideas has gone some way to compounding the difficulties faced by women's organisations in mobilising a response to the new trends, whether in the post-communist states or elsewhere in the world.⁴⁶ It is as if feminist goals have been discredited through their association, real or imaginary, with the policies of socialist states.⁴⁷ There is at least some basis to this assertion in the fraught and conditional alliance made between socialism and feminism at various points in their histories. The socialist tradition was always associated with a programme of women's rights; it promoted a particular vision of socialist womanhood, and was identified with a specific conception of socialist citizenship. Women were to be treated as workers entitled to the same rights as men, and were to be given a few more as mothers. Central to this conception was support for women's right to occupancy of the public realm on equal terms to men.

Communist states, less for idealistic than for instrumental reasons, gave women rights to employment and welfare, as well as formal (if virtually meaningless) political representation. While hostile to feminism itself, communist parties absorbed some of the demands of the movement and incorporated them into their social programmes. It is an ironic if plausible outcome that, in present day terms, feminist positions in the post-communist states are often identified negatively with the old party programmes. Discourses of gender equality, of women's participation in the public sphere, critiques of romanticised motherhood, of pornography, sexism and patriarchal practices, can be identified either with feminist positions or with the prejudices and puritanism of the former ruling party. In any event they find little sympathetic response within the population at large. This has, in effect, created a space within which essentialising discourses, and a variety of politics of difference have flourished, ones which reject the old 'androgenous' models of social life.

Beyond the widespread anti-communist sentiments that now prevail in Eastern Europe, there is an element of straightforward anti-feminism in much of this. The word feminist is now, as it was in communist rhetoric, almost universally derided in the former communist countries. Women who by any definition would qualify as feminists, avoid identifying themselves as such in order to maintain their credibility. Even such scions of the new democracy as

45. See *Helsinki Watch*, *op.cit.*, in note 11, and Jacqueline Heinen, 'La Démocratie en Pologne est du genre masculin', in Diane Lamoureux (ed.), *Avortement: Pratiques, Enjeux, Contrôle Social* (Paris: Les Editions du Remue-Ménage, 1993).

46. What is meant by socialism is open to dispute. Arguably some of the core ideas of socialism—including that of social justice—may re-emerge to animate political debate in the future.

47. Barbara Einhorn, *op. cit.*, in note 13, and Maria Adamik, 'Hungary: A Loss of Rights?', in *Feminist Review*, *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 166-70.

Vaclav Havel has gained a certain notoriety for dismissing feminism as trivial and as a refuge 'for bored housewives and dissatisfied mistresses'.⁴⁸ Feminism bears many negative and some contradictory meanings in the post-communist states. As well as the usual stereotypes of the man-hating lesbian variety, it is also associated with the foreign communist-imposed, unnatural world of 'forced emancipation', and at the same time is identified in some nationalist quarters with undesirable western values. The terms of this anti-feminist discourse are often incoherent and usually crude, reflecting widespread ignorance of feminism's history, diversity and current concerns. To appreciate the timbre one has only to recall that the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* in an article on contraception stated that 'half the feminists want to be raped, but there is no-one who wants to do it'.⁴⁹ Meanwhile the head of the Hungarian People's Party has articulated a common view that 'feminism', i.e., Communist Party policies, are responsible for the ills of modern society. By turning women into 'false men' while robbing men of their potency, feminism has much to answer for. It is seen as having destroyed the proper values of the family, and its pernicious influence must be opposed. It is hardly surprising that self-declared feminist movements have found it difficult to win support in such a context.

There are certainly problems with what the Russian feminist Anastasya Posadskaya has called 'terminological corruption'⁵⁰ or the way in which phrases, even principles and policies (women's emancipation, the right to work) are seen as saturated with 'oldthink'. But there remain deeper problems for those concerned with women's rights: those of how to reformulate their demands in a context influenced by the automatic dismissal of all things associated with the communist period, receptive to the ideological gains made by the free marketeers and constrained by the conditions of economic scarcity, even crisis, which prevail.

In the present climate much of the debate over social welfare, and of such vital services as crèches seems to be lost to feminism. The state is no longer to be seen as the provider of services; rather, it is redefined at most, as facilitator. Yet many feminists are unwilling to surrender this terrain altogether, and this is not surprising since it is one of special significance within the history of the movement. From its inception there has been a core element within feminism (both liberal and socialist) which has made demands on the state and seen public provision as an essential part of the struggle to

48. Cited in Mary Kaldor, 'After the Cold War', in *Feminist Review*, loc. cit., in note 13, pp. 109-14. However this was said in the mid-eighties. His greater familiarity with feminism and contact with the outside world since then might have led him to nuance his statements, if not change his views.

49. Cited in Peggy Watson, 'The Rise of Masculinism in Eastern Europe', *New Left Review* (No. 198, 1993), pp. 71-82.

50. Author's interview, a version of which was published as 'Interview with Anastasya Posadskaya', in *Feminist Review*, loc. cit., in note 13, pp. 133-42.

attain equality.⁵¹ If this seems an outdated and inappropriate perspective to many women in the post-communist states—especially as seen from the vantage point of today's economic realities—it must nonetheless be remembered that there is an issue of principle at stake here which is in danger of being buried in the current concern with market solutions. For beyond the general question of welfare provision there is that of the terms of women's social participation, or citizenship, in the new republics. What underlying premisses will inform the rights that women can expect from the state and how will these rights be guaranteed?⁵²

Here a number of issues are sometimes conflated which are not reducible to a simple polarity between liberalism and state socialism with feminism being tagged onto the latter. First, there are reasons to question the validity of assimilating the entire socialist tradition to communist party policies. Second, those who today equate feminist claims with socialism are usually ignorant of the important differences and long standing antagonisms both within and between feminism and socialism from their inception. However, despite an often mutual hostility, they did share some basic principles; both socialism and feminism advanced a conception of citizenship as entailing social and economic as well as political rights. Women were to acquire more than mere juridical equality with men; the state was to secure the conditions under which their equal participation in social and economic life could be realised. The fact that the former communist states realised their programme of social entitlements at enormous and unacceptable social and political cost does not prevent many (both inside and outside the post-communist world) from seeing the general principle of some measure of state involvement as necessary to secure the conditions under which greater social equality can be achieved.

Commentators writing about the policy environment in former communist states note that many policy-makers are 'allergic' to ideas of state provision simply because they are reminiscent of the previous oppressive conditions of communism.⁵³ In many countries opposition activists had placed their hopes of change in a faith in Hayek and Friedman.⁵⁴ Yet other models of social provisioning which eschew both extremes exist, such as those which have their place within the welfare liberalism of Scandinavian social democracy;

51. See Lynn Segal's introduction to the second edition of, *Is the Future Female?* (London: Virago, 1994) on this point.

52. For a discussion of the meanings of citizenship for women (within the British context), see Ruth Lister, 'Tracing the Contours of Women's Citizenship', *Policy and Politics* (Vol. 21, No. 1, 1993), pp. 3-16.

53. This applies more generally. Wainwright quotes a Czech junior minister as saying 'I'm attacked for being a Communist, just for suggesting that the government should have an industrial policy'. See Hilary Wainwright, *Arguments for a New Left* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 145. *Helsinki Watch*, *op. cit.*, in note 11, p. 2, states that, in the case of Poland, 'Many laws are often ignored on the grounds that they are a legacy of the Communists, so it is considered almost patriotic to violate them. Even Prime Minister Olszewski has said that Polish law does not deserve to be respected because of its internal contradictions, and above all its communist roots.'

54. Wainwright, *op. cit.*, in note 53.

expanded concepts of citizenship and of entitlement have also been formulated by liberal theorists. T. H. Marshall, the theorist and advocate of social rights was, after all, no communist.⁵⁵ In the debates over social policy taking place today the neoliberal position on welfare is being challenged by the more corporatist approaches developed within the European Union and prevalent within some of the agencies of the United Nations such as the ILO.⁵⁶

In the new post-communist democracies, the role of the state and of state-society relations is still in the process of being defined. Some on the left and some labour organisations still look forward to the creation of yet another 'third way'—combining state and market in novel ways. Women's organisations too have occasionally spelt out a clear role for the state in welfare provision. The Feminist Network of Hungary calls for free health and childcare, and ZEST, the Women's Party of Belgrade, has put forward proposals for a mixed economy, free and high quality health care and a decentralised non-authoritarian democratic state form.⁵⁷ But current trends seem to point in a less sanguine direction. Government is almost everywhere seen as an obstacle to market efficiency and there is clearly a danger that the combined effects of economic policies and low growth could together result in a shrinking and redefinition of citizenship rights as conceived in these broader terms. While most countries have maintained some welfare net and added new provisions such as income support for the unemployed, important changes are occurring in the way in which these provisions are conceptualised as well as in their scope.

As social entitlements have been reduced and redefined, and as the market, in theory, becomes the provider of services previously in the domain of the state, debate about the gender implications of these changes and over what other forms of provision might best meet women's needs has been muted. The nearest thing to public consultation is the opinion polls which consistently show, for most countries, that more women than men favour some form of state welfarism. Yet in the policy literature many, including among them women, argue in terms similar to the new right (yet coming from a different historical experience) that the old communist welfare system created an unhealthy dependency culture, one which, in the East German feminist Irene Dölling's words, was both paternalistic and patriarchal.⁵⁸ How then could women's organisations be seen to be associated with demands to restore such a system?

55. Marshall's concept of citizenship defined full membership of a community as being dependent on civil, political and social rights and responsibilities. See Marshall, *Social Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Hutchinson, 1975).

56. See Deacon, *op. cit.*, in note 31, and G. Thompson, 'The Evolution of the Managed Economy in Europe', *Economy and Society* (Vol. 21, No. 2, May 1992), pp. 129-51.

57. See the 'Serbian Feminist Manifesto', in *Feminist Review*, *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 157-60, and the Feminist Network's 'Declaration of Intent', in *Feminist Review*, *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 171-3.

58. Dölling, *op. cit.*, in note 41.

Meanwhile, in many of the new states, the legislative climate as far as gender issues are concerned has a distinctly regressive character, whether with regard to the failure to mention sexual equality in some of the new constitutions, or with regard to reproductive or employment rights.⁵⁹ Former East Germans have been subjected to new restrictions on abortion, and in the Czech Republic proposals are on the table to introduce a steep rise in the cost of terminations. In the case of employment in the former USSR, despite what one Russian lawyer called 'a tidal wave of prejudice against women at work' there are no mechanisms in place to help women resist such practices. The old pan-Soviet legislation has been abolished ostensibly to create a 'freer labour market' and since economic efficiency is the rationale for enduring the present agonies how can it be resisted? Moreover, women who want to oppose discrimination on principle find themselves at risk of being dismissed as old communist sympathisers operating with outdated ideologies and expectations. The new 'masculine democracies', as they are referred to in the post-communist feminist literature,⁶⁰ have given strikingly little space to women's needs, interests, civil rights and organisations in the policy process.

At issue here is the task of redefining the role of the state and advancing a concept of rights which allows for their satisfaction in ways which do not recreate the problems of overcentralised and bureaucratic states. The new states, while wishing to avoid replicating the problems of the past, and recognising the need to 'retreat', must at the same time recognise that they need to retain some role as regulator and facilitator of the conditions under which adequate provision can be made on the basis of an agreed set of social rights. In the organisational space thus vacated by such a state, a range of co-operative, self-help, associational forms of public service provision could be developed in such a way as to give women themselves power to ensure that the quality and type of service meets their needs.⁶¹ At the very least, some of this involves taking liberal policy-makers at their word and translating their verbal support for such measures into real developments which could tangibly benefit and empower women. At the same time, the feminist critiques of liberalism, and the debates on citizenship and democracy which were so much a feature of the 1980s have barely begun to find a resonance in the former communist states. Tragically, in the conditions of post-communist reconstruction, debate about state forms has receded into the background; the widespread loathing of communism and 'old' solutions is, in effect,

59. An interesting contrast is provided by the liberalisation of laws regarding homosexuality. In the former Soviet Union, consensual sex between adult males, formerly banned, has now been taken off the statute books in Russia, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

60. This term was coined by a member of the Belgrade Women's Lobby, Sonja Licht, and has since been used extensively elsewhere in the post-communist states. Einhorn, *op. cit.*, in note 13, p. 148.

61. Paul Hirst has developed the idea of 'associationalism' in these terms. See his *Associational Democracy* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994).

obstructing the potential for debate about vital questions of democracy, citizenship and state forms. Meanwhile the policy agendas are being set elsewhere, in the boardrooms of the banks and international financial institutions, whose prescriptions for economic recovery contain few reassurances for those most adversely affected by the transition.

Ethnonationalism, Racism and Religious Fundamentalism.

The third element in the new ideological climate, which has begun to influence the policy environment is the increased prominence of nationalist and religious thinking in political life. This is by no means specific to the post-communist European states, but for this very reason it may be helpful to consider what is happening here in some comparative perspective. The combined effects of prolonged world recession, political disillusionment, the failure of the 'promise of modernity', and the lack of a credible voice from the left, have all, in their different ways, contributed to the rise of religious, ethnic and nationalist mobilisation in many societies and regions, in the Middle East, South Asia, and now Eastern Europe.

Feminist analyses of religio-nationalist political phenomena have shown a tendency for them to be strongly gendered and in many of their recent manifestations, to have assumed a more or less patriarchal character.⁶² These new conservative nationalisms, whether religious or secular in character, are more often than not expressly concerned to relocate women within the family; they advocate versions of the 'separate spheres' argument, and allot considerable importance to redefining women's identities and to their active mobilisation. A common feature of such discourses, and one to which many women respond, is the claim that (their definition of) nationalism is the vehicle through which women can find themselves and their 'special qualities' properly valued. This usually means investing the domestic sphere with symbolic value and idealising women's place within it as mothers. These themes are as present in the new religio-nationalisms of the Islamic and Hindu worlds, as they were in the earlier fascist movements of Europe.

In Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union strong nationalist sentiments have emerged accompanying the rejection of the 'internationalist' communist past. The forms in which this is expressed are varied in character both within and between nations, and modern secular national identities coexist with other more backward-looking variants. But a dominant theme running through many of them is an expressed desire to heal the 'wounds of communism' by asserting the need to retrieve an authentic national culture and to purge the remnants of the alien Soviet and/or communist influence. There is often an emphasis on the idea of 'naturalising' social life, by cleansing the artificial

62. See for example, Nira Yuval Davis and F. Anthias (eds.), *Women, Nation, State* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

elements imposed on it by an alien totalitarianism.⁶³ The appeal of this rhetoric which operates with dichotomous categories of the natural and the unnatural is, according to Kowalski, that 'it seem[s] capable of providing the foundations for an absolute rejection of the Communist system' laying the basis for a new natural organic order in which religion and nationalism are the markers of authenticity.⁶⁴ Within this discourse, authenticity is often defined as a return to some imaginary past, a natural order when 'real men' and 'real women' occupied their proper place in the social order: women in the home, men in the public realm. In the press and in literature, repeated reference to the need to 'restore manhood to men, and femininity to women' can be found.⁶⁵ A Latvian activist in the nationalist party expressed it in terms reminiscent of the domestic labour debate when she said that 'women's work in the home is the pillar of society. Communism despised this work, we will glorify it'.⁶⁶

The desire for healing wounds, 'living the truth' (Havel's term), reaching within to the very heart of what is authentic, therefore shares with some variants of New Right thinking a vision of social order as dependent on women's place in the family. This forms part of many of the new discourses which disarm and demobilise those who resist these essentialising discourses and struggle to preserve women's rights against the cloying uniformity of a reimposed patriarchal community. The struggle over abortion laws in Poland, Slovenia and other countries where Christian nationalism is a significant force has been played out in these terms.

The wave of nationalist upsurges in the ex-Soviet Union and in some East Central European countries has also been identified with new demands upon and dangers for women's rights in both the dominant and subordinate ethnic groupings. Among these dangers are exhortations by states and religious bodies alarmed by low birthrates to populate the new micro-nations in order to stiffen their claims for nationhood. This spells at the very least, a renewed emphasis on women's reproductive functions. The Christian Democrats of Slovenia have proposed to reward women who bear three or more children with 'wages' and special pension rights in recognition of their contribution to the nation—terms reminiscent of the old Soviet Mother-heroines.⁶⁷

Low fertility rates have given rise to a widespread concern about 'the death of the nation', sometimes referred to as the 'white plague'. Central to this discourse is the idea that women should be made responsible for the nation's

63. Sergiusz Kowalski, 'Poland's New Political Culture', *Economy and Society* (Vol. 22, No. 1, 1993), pp. 233-42.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

65. Joanna Goven has made a detailed study of these discourses in 'Gender Politics in Hungary', in Funk and Mueller, *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 224-40.

66. For Russian variants see Francine du Plessix Gray, *Walking the Tightrope* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990).

67. See M. Antić, 'Democracy Between Tyranny and Liberty', in *Feminist Review*, *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 149-54.

survival. The nationalist Ukrainian Women's Union had as one of its aims the encouragement of women to preserve the ethnically Ukrainian population 'from extinction as a nation'. In Bulgaria, where birthrates were down to 1.07 for 1991, and the press refers to the 'biological collapse of the Bulgarian nation', this particular fear was heightened by another consideration—that 'the nation' would be threatened by the five times higher birthrates of the Turkish and Gypsy minorities.⁶⁸ Similar concerns are expressed in Serbia in relation to the ethnic Albanians. The irony of making women responsible for rectifying this state of affairs is particularly striking in those states where armies are wreaking untold destruction and death in the name of 'the nation'.

Feminist organisations fear that these concerns will fuel the drive to restrict if not eliminate women's realm of reproductive choice in the name of the higher good of the organic community. Women are not only being made responsible for the nation's survival, but they are also being blamed for the low birthrates. It is their 'rush to satisfy modish and narcissistic ambitions' which leads them to 'disregard motherhood'.⁶⁹ They need instead to 'return to the morals of their mothers...the traditional ornament of our women is sacrifice without limits for her family, her existence'.⁷⁰ In the civil war conditions of former Yugoslavia, women are being called upon to do their duty and produce sons for the army. In the words of a member of the Presidency of the Kosovo Serb organisation: 'For every Serbian soldier dead in battle in Slovenia, Serbian mothers must bear 100 more soldiers'.⁷¹ More modestly, a Serbian demographer asserts that women should have at least three children 'in order for the nation to survive'.⁷² Meanwhile the Bishop of Tuzla, one of the leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church, has called for the banning of abortion for the following reasons in order of priority: (1) 'the mass dying out of the Serbian nation; (2) the Biblical commandment 'thou shalt not kill'; and (3) the Lord's command to 'go forth and multiply'.⁷³ As Bracewell comments, the issue is phrased 'primarily as one of Serbian national interests, and only secondarily as a moral issue'.⁷⁴

The new conservative nationalisms with their distinctive reinvention of religious morality have provided arguments for the patriarchal reordering of gender relations, and seek to authorise a variety of controls over women whether through the family or via the state. A woman's 'duty' is described in terms of 'supporting her man', 'serving the nation', and in effect, surrendering her own interests to the cause. A certain definition of womanhood is

68. Komella Merdjanska and Rossica Panova, 'Transition and Transcendence of the Family Enclosure', unpublished paper, 1994.

69. Milan Vojnović, quoted in Wendy Bracewell, 'Women, Motherhood and Contemporary Serbian Nationalism', in *Women's Studies International Forum*, special issue on Eastern Europe, forthcoming.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

articulated into these discourses as symbolising the nation; in Poland the Virgin Mary is identified with the nation as 'Mother of God, Queen of Poland'. In Serbia, it is the Mother of the Jugovici who sacrificed nine sons, without a tear, in the struggle against the Turks.⁷⁵ Women's deportment, dress, and bodies become the terrain on which the claims of the nation against its detractors is fought. In East Central Europe women's bodies have become the site of multiple power struggles associated with versions of nationalist self-assertion—one example is the barbarity of rape in Bosnia deployed as a weapon and means of ethnic subjugation and forced deportation;⁷⁶ another is the introduction of swingeing penalties for practitioners of abortion in Poland as the Catholic Church claims its place as the definitive source of authentic 'Polishness'. These national and religious discourses talk of protecting women from the trends of the market, from the predations of 'western ways'. Yet, as Gail Kligman argues, they offer no solution to the conversion of women's bodies through prostitution and the sale of children as a means of generating foreign exchange.⁷⁷

These desperate strategies have been resorted to by the poorest, often ethnically subordinate members of their societies. While some ethnic minorities such as the Roma (Gypsies) enjoyed a degree of state protection under former communist regimes, the abolition of these policies has exposed them to the threat of even greater poverty and social marginalisation than was the case before.⁷⁸ Kligman shows how the market, patriarchy and kin control conspire to coerce gypsy women in Romania into selling their children or bearing children expressly in order to sell them.

The rise of racism in many of the post-communist states is but one manifestation of the growing social tensions which have attended the process of restructuring.⁷⁹ The plight of ethnic minorities coupled with increased opportunities for migration (and *fear* of migrants), have fuelled debate over who has the right to citizenship and on what terms, an issue which as far as

75. *Ibid.*, p. 17. The story goes that she finally wept only when the hand of her youngest son was dropped into her lap by ravens from the field of battle.

76. Silva Meznaric, 'Gender as an Ethno-Marker: Rape, War, and Identity Politics in the Former Yugoslavia', in V. Moghadam (ed.), *Women and Identity Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 77-98.

77. See Gail Kligman, 'The Politics of Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania', in *Eastern European Politics and Societies* (Vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 1992), pp. 364-418. 'Womb-renting', i.e., the bearing of babies for money, has become a way to survive for young women who advertise their services in the national press. See Forster, *op.cit.*, in note 23.

78. There are approximately half a million Roma in Hungary, 600,000 in the Czech and Slovak Republics combined, and two and a half million in Romania. In each country they constitute a special target for racist abuse.

79. On racism in Eastern Europe, see Paul Hockenos, *Free To Hate* (London: Routledge, 1994).

migrants are concerned promises to become one of the most important questions of the post-communist world.⁸⁰

There are two issues which can be raised here in the context of our current concerns. First, the new nationalisms and forms of ethnic supremacy raise questions about definitions of citizenship, and of the terms of social membership.⁸¹ As far as women's rights are concerned this is a complicated issue: ethnic minorities may feel the need to make communitarian claims against universalistic definitions of rights which deny them cultural recognition; yet there are well known dangers for women in conceding the principle of universalism to particularistic interests where the desire to protect cultural practices and values acts as a prohibition on criticising them as unjust, oppressive, and denying women their human rights and rights as women. It is striking that Poland has been censured twice by the Human Rights Commission of the Council of Europe for allowing unconstitutional legislative procedures in restricting abortion rights. The nationalist response to such censorship has been to defend Polish culture against illegitimate foreign intervention, while no measures have been taken as yet to remedy the violation.

A second issue returns us to our starting point. The character, rhetoric and policies of nationalist forces will to some extent be influenced by the integration of these states into the world economy and into the relevant regional bloc. All the major former communist states have joined the Council of Europe and are subject to its legal powers especially in the realm of Human Rights. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary are all expecting to join the European Union by the year 2000 and their policy environment cannot but be influenced to some degree by EU regulations concerning employment, human, and women's rights.⁸² As the case of Ireland shows, even the more recalcitrant national and religious traditions may be liable to influence by transnational processes.

Conclusions

This article began by recognising a need for caution about how far we can generalise about the European post-communist states, and to this must be added the fact that they are still at an early stage in their hoped-for transition to viable, and politically defined, democratic societies; indeed, there is no necessity in this goal of stable democracy ever being achieved. The three developments discussed above have contributed in different ways to creating a context in which it has been difficult to make much progress in advancing

80. See Mirjana Morokvasić, 'Fortress Europe and Migrant Women', in *Feminist Review*, *loc. cit.*, in note 13, pp. 69-84.

81. See S. Hall and D. Held, 'Citizens and Citizenship' in Stuart Hall and M. Jacques (eds.), *New Times* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989).

82. This should also have a positive effect on homosexual rights; Romania for example will have to change its repressive laws before applying to join the EU.

women's rights, or indeed to get the main political forces, in power or in opposition, to take them seriously. That context is one in which there has occurred a deepening of gender divisions and a worsening for poor women of their overall situation. Women's rights organisations have, in a number of these societies, found themselves engulfed by processes which they seem to have little ability to influence.

These issues pose a number of problems with respect to the policy process which could form the basis of further research. In particular, the argument presented here is based on the assumption that an awareness of the shared, international context may help in understanding and in formulating responses to the current situation. Of these, the issue of direct pertinence to considerations of the role of international factors is that of the future direction of these states in relation to their international alignments, and international influences more generally. With respect to laws and policy affecting women, the main international financial institutions, the IMF and the World Bank in particular, have been able to exert a powerful influence on the policy-making agenda to date. However, new conservative forces when aligned with powerful religious influences have also had an impact, sometimes one in which the objectives of policy converge with those of their neoliberal counterparts. This is nowhere more evident than in relation to family policy, which in both cases, is premised on strengthening the family by reinforcing women's responsibilities within it.

Although the current policy environment is in many ways unfavourable with respect to women's rights for the reasons given above, its overall effects are contradictory, undermining some forms of protective rights, but also promoting others. It may well be that the very process of integration into the international economy acts as a check on the adoption of legislation influenced by the more extreme forms of nationalist communitarianism. The bid for membership of 'the West' to some degree rests on leadership claims to being *modern* nation-states. While a nationalist authoritarianism coupled with an isolationist stance cannot be ruled out in the case of some of the least developed states, the future for Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic lies in closer identification and alignment with the European Union. At the legislative level this promises a more sanguine outcome for women's rights, if only because some progress has been made in the community on agreement over some basic principles. All EU member states must comply with the 1976 Equal Treatment directive and it may soon be mandatory to make labour and welfare legislation both more consistently available and more gender neutral. Parental leave, for example, will replace maternal leave and only that legislation strictly necessary to protect the 'special biological condition of women' will remain valid.⁸³ However, legal frameworks alone will not determine the future of the post-communist states, let alone of women's place

83. Funk, *op. cit.*, in note 13, p. 100.

in society. As Pearson suggests, the future of both may well lie in providing the EU with a cheap but educated labour supply. In such a scenario 'women's labour, which is more productive, better disciplined, educated and working from a higher technological and training base, might yet become the basis of the EU's strategy in the 21st century'.⁸⁴

In either case, international factors will continue to play into the field of debate over women's socio-economic and political situation in Eastern Europe. The least one can say, however, is that as in the West and in the semi-peripheral countries of the South, little or nothing will be achieved by leaving this question to the automatic workings of the market. In western Europe, the USA and some parts of the Third World, particularly Latin America, the greater awareness of gender issues, and of state support for them, is a product of their receptivity to international trends, and internal needs, but also of political action by groups within these countries committed to making women's rights and gender equality a priority. The societies of Eastern Europe and the former USSR have surprised us on more than one occasion during this century; perhaps, in this and in other ways, they can do so again.

*Maxine Molyneux teaches Political Sociology
at Birkbeck College, University
of London, Malet St., London*

84. Ruth Pearson, 'Questioning Perestroika', in *Feminist Review*, loc. cit., in note 13, pp. 91-6.

ISLAMICA

اقلام اسلامية

We are pleased to participate in a program that will increase worldwide awareness of Islam and the Muslim world.

GORDON L. ANDERSON
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL ON WORLD PEACE
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, USA

Periodica Islamica is an international contents journal. In its quarterly issues it reproduces tables of contents from a wide variety of serials, periodicals and other recurring publications worldwide. These primary publications are selected for indexing by Periodica Islamica on the basis of their significance for religious, cultural, socioeconomic and political affairs of the Muslim World.

Periodica Islamica is the premiere source of reference for all multi-disciplinary discourses on the world of Islam. Browsing through an issue of Periodica Islamica is like visiting your library 100 times over. Four times a year, in a highly compact format, it delivers indispensable information on a broad spectrum of disciplines explicitly or implicitly related to Islamic issues.



PERIODICA
ISLAMICA

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Munawar A. Anees | Consulting Editor: Zafar Abbas Malik (Islamex Arts Foundation, London)



Periodica Islamica, Benta Publishing, 22, Jalan Liku, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Subscription Order Form

Annual Subscription Rates:

Individual US\$35.00

Institution US\$70.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

City(+ Postal Code): _____ Country: _____

Bank Draft/International Money Order in USS

 Coupons



Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

□ □ □ □ - □ □ □ □ - □ □ □ □ - □ □ □ □

 BY PHONE

 BY FAX

 BY MAIL

To place your order immediately, telephone (+60-3) 282-5286

To fax your order, complete this order form and send to (+60-3) 282-1605

Mail this completed order form to Periodica Islamica

SUBSCRIBERS IN MALAYSIA MAY PAY AN EQUIVALENT AMOUNT IN RINGGIT (RM) AT THE PREVAILING EXCHANGE RATE