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1 Kramer, Mark: Social Protection Policies and Safety Nets in East-Central Europe: Dilemmas of the Transformation. In: Kapstein, Ethan B./Mandelbaum, Michael (Eds.): *Sustaining the Transition: The Social Safety Net in Postcommunist Europe*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations 1997, p. 46.

2 Sasser, Brandie: Gender and Labor Markets in Transition Countries. Paper presented at a conference on Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region (Warsaw, Poland, January 15-17, 2001), p. 4.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 8f.

The argument I shall present consists of three parts: first, that the situation of women in East-Central Europe has deteriorated on a number of significant measures since the collapse of communism in 1989; second, that the deterioration in women's equality and women's rights is itself related to a broader context in which conservative forces promote so-called 'traditional values' including homophobia and sexual intolerance in general; and third, that the direction in which the struggle for gender equality must be directed is in the direction of moving beyond liberalism and democracy. These two legacies of the Enlightenment have been enormously positive in the past, but one has to recognize that liberalism has increasingly been interpreted too narrowly and that only a broader interpretation can lead forward, and that democracy has come face to face with serious problems with which it has been unable to cope, except in a dysfunctional way. This is not a call for authoritarian solutions, but rather a suggestion that what passes for democracy is, from both an Aristotelian and an anarchist perspective as well as from a feminist perspective, a travesty of democratic principles.

Deterioration of the Status of Women

The conditions under which the transition from communism was undertaken were less than ideal, and the result has been »[...] disruption and hardship for large groups of people.«¹ Layoffs from work, economic disorganization and decline, the spread of organized crime, widespread poverty, a proliferation of corruption, and the sale of capital stock at below-market prices to foreign concerns – these have been among the most salient problems in the economic sector. At least 20% of the population of East Central Europe lives below the poverty line, with the highest rates of poverty to be found in the Republic of Serbia (including Kosova), Albania, and Moldova, where an estimated 55% live below the poverty line.² Even in Hungary and Poland, although they have been doing relatively better among East European countries in transition, there are pockets of poverty. Women have suffered more than men in all countries in transition. According to UNECE, female employment shrank at faster rates than male employment during the years 1985-1997 in all countries for which adequate data are available (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia). In Hungary, for example, female employment dropped by 40% in these years while male employment declined by 30%.³ The collapse of the existing pension systems – most dramatically in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Albania – affected both women and men, though the fact that in average women are generally forced to retire five years earlier than men in the region has made pension reform a more troubling problem for women.

There are confirmed reports of a tangible increase in domestic violence throughout the East-Central European region since 1989, which one observer attributes to »increased alcohol consumption on the part of men due to feelings of inadequacy – both as providers and as men.«⁴ But this approach provides, at best, an incomplete explanation of the rise in domestic violence since the collapse of communism. A more complete explanation would mention also

- the delegitimation of communist ideology and, with it, the communist claim that gender equality should enjoy priority;
- the increased activity on the part of traditional ecclesiastical institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, Croatia, Slovenia, and Slovakia, and the Orthodox Church in Russia, Romania, and Serbia to the extent that they promote a 'traditional' role for women, in which women are urged to see their role as one of *service* to their husbands and children;
- the influx of neo-Protestant and New Age religions, many of them subscribing to extremely inegalitarian models of gender relations;
- the proliferation of pornography in the region, encouraging some women and some men to view sex and sexuality as a commodity, thereby contributing to the dehumanization of women;
- the dynamic of nationalism, which has affected the post-Yugoslav region above all.

Menschen 1994 (SOCO Project Paper 79), p. 11.

30 Ibid., p. 9.

31 Ibid., p. 7.

32 Contempt for feminism is also associated with tolerance for sexual harassment. In the Czech Republic, a recent survey found that 45% of Czech women had been victims of sexual harassment, many of them on repeated occasions. Cf. Sexual Harassment in Central and Eastern Europe. In: New York Times, 09.01.2000, repr. in WIN News (Spring 2000), at www.findarticles.com [accessed 01.09.2003].

33 Śróda, Magdalena: Król jest nagli! Niech żyje królowa! [The King is Naked! Long Live the Queen!]. In: Ośka Biuletyn 2 (2001), p. 33, as quoted in Renc-Roe, Joanna: The Representation of Women in the Political Decision-Making Process in Poland: Existing Problems and Advocated Solutions. Paper prepared for the ECPR Joint Session: Changing Constitutions, Building Institutions and (Re)defining Gender Relations (Edinburgh, 28.03-02.04.2003), p. 4.

34 Ibid., p. 12.

35 Ibid., p. 14.

36 Women in Politics in the Council of Europe Member States. Strasbourg: CoE Directorate General of Human Rights (May 2002), pp. 59-64.

I, personally, do not wish to see a parliament, in which sit my supposed representatives (almost all) of male gender, because I am becoming convinced that we [women] really have different interests, needs, different ways of understanding the world, different hierarchies of values, aims, different conceptions of politics, the function of the family, children, different notions of upbringing, economic priorities, different role models.³³

In fact, the representation of women in Polish parliamentary life had been declining steadily since it had reached an early high of 23% in the years 1980-1985. From then, the proportion of women in the *Sejm* (what is today the lower house of the Polish parliament) sank to 20% in 1985-1989, 13% in 1990-1991, and just 10% in 1991-1993, stabilizing at 13% in the years 1993-2001.³⁴ But in the 1990's, women organized to change this situation. One such group, *Grupa Nieformalna 'Kobięty Tez'*, emerged in 1993 and started to organize conferences and workshops, giving support to female candidates in local elections and pushing for equal treatment of women and men in media coverage. The group sought to promote both a more proportional representation of women in public life and a greater responsiveness on the part of female politicians to women's needs. When in 2001 female representation in the *Sejm* rose from 13% to more than 20%, and in the Senate from 13% to 23%, *Kobięty Tez* and other such groups saw their efforts crowned with success.³⁵

Table 1

Representation of Women in Political Bodies, 2002
(Central & Eastern Europe, member states of Council of Europe, in %)

	Cabinet (uni- & bicameral)	Parliament	Municipal councilors	Mayors
Albania	16.67	6	11	3
Bulgaria	18.75	26	20.0	8
Croatia	8.33	6/21	4.0	--
Czech Republic	0	15 / 12	--	--
Hungary	6.25	8.5	9.1*	13.0
Macedonia	5.88	6	8.4	21.4
Poland	21.43	20/23	13.2	5.3
Romania	20.00	7/12	--	3.4
Serbia	--	2.08 **	--	--
Slovakia	10.00	13.3	--	16.9
Slovenia	20.00	13	12.2	4.2

-- = no data

* = local representatives

** = data from spring 2000

Source: Women in Politics in the Council of Europe Member States. Strasbourg: CoE Directorate General of Human Rights (May 2002), pp. 59-64. The Serbian figure comes from Bijelić, Biljana: Nationalism, Motherhood, and the Reordering of Women's Power. In: Ramet, Sabrina P./Pavlaković, Vjeran (Eds.): The Dysfunctional State: Serbian Politics & Society since 1989. Seattle: Univ. of Washington Pr. [in print].

In fact, women's mobilization is only one factor which has arguably begun to reverse the conservative tide in at least some societies of East Central Europe. Among the other factors one should mention the revival of left-wing political parties in some of these countries and international pressure (all of the states in the region have either signed or succeeded to the *International Treaty on Discrimination Against Women*, and some have also signed an optional protocol, expanding the guarantees to women). The big success stories (in relative terms, of course) in the region are Poland, where (as of 2002) women constitute more than 21% of cabinet members (the highest figure in the region), 20-23% of parliamentary deputies, and 13.2% of municipal councilors, Bulgaria, where women constitute nearly 19% of cabinet members, 26% of parliamentary deputies (the highest figure in the region), and 20% of municipal councilors (again the highest figure in the region), and Slovenia, where women constitute 20% of cabinet members, 13% of parliamentary deputies, and 12.2% of municipal councilors.³⁶ On the other hand, there were no women in the Czech cabinet in 2002, while women constituted less



37 Human Rights Internet, For the Record 2001: The United Nations Human Rights System 5: Central and Eastern Europe. Ottawa: HRI 2002, p. 3.

38 Equal Opportunities: MEPs vote for more women in power. European Report, 25.11.2000, at www.findarticles.com [accessed 01.09.2003].

than 10% of parliamentary deputies in Albania, Macedonia, and Hungary, and just 4% of municipal councilors in Croatia. Commenting on the Albanian case, *Human Rights Internet* noted recently that »the emergence of a more democratic society has not in fact led to greater participation of women in decision-making but to a greater exclusion of women from public life and political participation.«³⁷

Table 2

Representation of Women in Political Bodies (2002)
(Nordic & Select West European Countries, in %)

	Cabinet (uni- & bicameral)	Parliament	Municipal councilors	Mayors
<i>Nordic</i>				
Denmark	27.78*	37.99	27	--
Finland	44.44	37.50	34	--
Iceland	33.33	34.92	29**	3.0
Norway	42.11	36.97	42	--
Sweden	45.00	42.69	42	--
<i>Western Europe</i>				
France	21.43	10.92	47.5	10.9
Germany	43	31.24/17.39	--	--
Italy	10.39	9.84/7.67	16.7	6.6
United Kingdom	32.58	17.91	--	--

-- = no data
* = down from 45% in 2000
** = local representatives

Source: Women in Politics in the Council of Europe Member States. Strasbourg: CoE Directorate General of Human Rights (May 2002), pp. 26, 59-64.

A comparison of the Central and East European data with data from Northern and Western Europe is instructive. In the Nordic countries, women comprise 28-45% of cabinet ministers and 35-43% of parliamentary deputies, while in the »Big Four« (Britain, France, Germany, and Italy) women account for 10-43% of cabinet ministers but only 8-31% of parliamentary deputies (Italian inclusion of women in parliamentary life being the lowest in this particular set). Whether the Nordic countries can exert any influence in the societies of East Central Europe is, at best, uncertain, and if there is to be any such influence, it can only be the result of special relations between the countries. But the Nordic countries provided, at least, a model of *near-equality*. It is noteworthy that the *Women's Rights Committee* of the European Parliament has recommended that women comprise at least 40% »of all political bodies at European, national and international levels.«³⁸ As of 2000, the European Parliament itself consisted of 30% female deputies and 70% male deputies.

Abortion: the Case of Poland

In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Macedonia, Romania, and Bulgaria, laws on abortion are liberal, allowing women unrestricted access to abortion at least through the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. In Russia, abortion is authorized for social reasons for up to 22 weeks and at any point in the pregnancy for medical reasons.³⁹

Abortion was legal in Poland from 1956 until 1993, when the Polish *Sejm*, under heavy pressure from the Catholic Church, passed a highly restrictive law. After the election of a more liberal *Sejm*, however, the law was liberalized in 1996, and for a few months in 1997 abortions were allowed to be conducted on »social grounds« (which usually meant for financial reasons). But the law was toughened once again in 1997 after a decision by the Constitutional Tribunal. The Catholic Church wanted a total ban on abortions, without any exceptions. However, the 1997

39 East Central Europe Abortion Laws and Policies in Brief. Center for Reproductive Rights (August 2000), at www.crlp.org/tools/print_page.jsp [accessed 29.08.2003].



40 Nowicka, Wanda/Tajak, Monika: The Functioning, Social Effects, Attitudes and Behaviors – The Report. The Anti-Abortion Law in Poland (September 2000), at www.waw.pdi.net/~polfedwo/english/reportoo/repo03.htm [accessed 11.08.2003].

41 Ibid., p. 6.

42 Ibid., p. 3.

43 The Guardian, 20.06.2003 and 23.06.2003 – both at www.guardian.co.uk [both accessed 18.07.2003].

44 Nowicka/Tajak 2000, p. 3.

45 Ibid., p. 5.

46 Ibid., p. 7.

law allows the termination of pregnancy when continuation of the pregnancy would endanger the life of the woman, when a pre-natal exam reveals severe and irreversible damage to the fetus or the presence of an incurable disease, or when a state prosecutor confirms that the pregnancy is the result of a rape.⁴⁰

The law itself is highly restrictive, but it is striking that its application *de facto* has been tougher and more restrictive than the law itself. Many women who would be entitled to an abortion under the 1997 law have been denied the procedure.⁴¹ As a result of the restrictive legislation and the pressure from the Church on the hospitals, as well as of the stigma attached by conservatives to the procedure, the number of legal abortions conducted in Poland has declined from 82,137 in 1989 to just 151 in 1999. Formally, it would then appear that the Church has scored a big victory in its fight against abortion. But in fact there are thought to be between 80,000 and 200,000 illegal abortions each year in Poland since the passage of the tough anti-abortion law,⁴² and many women travel abroad on so-called »abortion vacations«. In June 2003, there was even a visit by the world's first floating »abortion clinic« which docked in Polish ports and then sailed into international waters where women in their 10th week of pregnancy or earlier were given RU-486, a drug which can produce an abortion.⁴³ But most Polish women wanting an abortion obtain it at home, illegally, and the proliferation of illegal abortions has carried its own risks. Illegal abortions in Poland are often carried out in less sanitary conditions than would prevail in hospitals and with less ample resources. As studies conducted during 1999-2000 showed, the result is an increase in »health and personal problems [for] hundreds of thousands of women in Poland.«⁴⁴ In addition, there were 31 to 59 reported cases of infanticide by unwilling mothers annually in the years 1990-1999, 20 to 77 reported cases of child abandonment annually over the same period, and 252 to 803 children left in hospitals annually in the years 1993-1999.⁴⁵

Finally, as for rape is concerned, a woman seeking abortion for reasons of rape must obtain a certificate from the prosecutor's office – a certificate which is not given lightly. The result is that although some 2,000 rapes are reported annually (the actual number of rapes, including those not reported, may be higher), there were only 53 abortions authorized in 1998, for example, on grounds of rape, and in 1999, only one abortion was conducted for reasons of rape.⁴⁶ The conclusion is inescapable that the passage of the restrictive law on abortion has not made any appreciable dent in the number of abortions carried out in Poland, but has affected the health of perhaps hundreds of thousands of women negatively, and has resulted in incidents of infanticide, child abandonment, and children being left at hospitals.

47 Buchowska 2002, p. 1.

48 Mappes-Niediek, Norbert: *Balkan Mafia. Staaten in der Hand des Verbrechens – Eine Gefahr für Europa*. Berlin: Ch. Links 2003, pp. 109-115.

49 Ralph, Regan E.: *International Trafficking of Women and Children. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs*, 22.02.2000, at www.hrw.org/background/ward/trafficking.htm [accessed 11.08.2003], p. 2.

50 Ibid.

Trafficking and Forced Prostitution

One of the big scandals of the post-communist systems has been the proliferation of trafficking in women and children, often for the purpose of forcing the women into prostitution. Most of the women come from Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Albania, though Polish women have also been trafficked in some numbers. According to the *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, about 500,000 women are trafficked from formerly communist countries in Eastern Europe to foreign destinations each year.⁴⁷ Albanian and other Balkan mafias are knee-deep in trafficking and, according to Italian aid organizations, there may be as many as 30,000 young Albanian women working as prostitutes in Western Europe – none of them voluntarily.⁴⁸ Some countries are both countries of origin and destination countries – such as Poland and Bosnia. Some women are moved into countries where they do not speak the local language, in order to minimize their options, but others are trafficked locally. The women and girls who end up as prostitutes are lured with false promises of a good job in the West and told that they will earn good money and enjoy new opportunities. In some cases, girls have been sold by their parents for cash; in some cases, invitations to go on vacation have served the purpose; and in yet other cases, the victims have simply been abducted.⁴⁹ Once in custody, the woman has no control over her destination or her work. She is escorted to a brothel and then told that her transportation has involved some costs which she must pay back. The woman then ends up working without wages to »repay« the costs of her abduction, with arbitrary fines and dishonest bookkeeping serving to keep the woman in debt for the long term. Even where some women are eventually released from debt, it is »only after months or years of coercive or abusive labor.«⁵⁰ Typically, the women's passports are confiscated. If they try to escape and fail, they are beaten severely. If they manage to escape, they find



51 Ibid., p. 3.

52 Ibid.

53 Lindstrom, Nicole: Regional Sex Trafficking in the Balkans: Transnational Networks in an Enlarged Europe. In: *Problems of Post-Communism* 51/3 (May-June 2004), p. 47.

54 UN Cracks down on Bosnia Prostitution; Victims of Bosnia's Sex Trade. In: *BBC News* (02.11.2001) – both at news.bbc.co.uk [both accessed 11.08.2003].

55 ›Sex trade‹ thrives in Bosnia. In: *BBC News*, 08.03.2001, at news.bbc.co.uk [accessed 11.08.2003].

56 Serbian Police Swoop on Vice Bars. In: *BBC News*, 25.01.2002, at news.bbc.co.uk [accessed 11.08.2003].

57 Trafficking in Women: European Commission Paper Sets out Priority Actions. In: *European Report*, 16.12.1998; *European Parliament Urges Action to Stop Trafficking in Women*. In: *European Report*, 24.05.2000 – both at www.findarticles.com [both accessed 01.09.2003].

58 EU ›to protect‹ Sex Slaves. In: *BBC News*, 08.03.2001, at news.bbc.co.uk [accessed 11.08.2003], p. 1.

59 Buchowska 2002, p. 3.

themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, where they often do not speak the local language, lacking personal identification and fearing arrest by local law enforcement authorities. Threats of retaliation against the women's family members back home, in the event of escape, also tend to deter attempts to break out.

The problem of trafficking in women and children is global, and in many countries, corrupt officials have actually facilitated trafficking by providing false papers to trafficking agents, by turning a blind eye to violations of immigration rules, and by taking bribes from the women's employers; *Human Rights Watch* has also documented many cases in which local police have patronized brothels where trafficked women have been working.⁵¹ Moreover, as Regan Ralph noted in a report presented before a Senate subcommittee in February 2000,

Trafficked women may be freed from their employers in police raids, but they are given no access to services or redress and instead face further mistreatment at the hands of authorities. Even when confronted with clear evidence of trafficking and forced labor, officials focus on violations of their immigration regulations and anti-prostitution laws, rather than on violations of the trafficking victims' human rights. Thus, the women are targeted as undocumented migrants and/or prostitutes, and the traffickers either escape entirely, or else face minor penalties for their involvement in illegal migration or businesses of prostitution.⁵²

Among the destination countries are Bosnia and Kosovo, where the prostitution racket has boomed, with the »Arizona« sex market located next to the SFOR base in Bihać.⁵³ Many of the prostitutes working in Bosnia come from Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. Until public outcry forced the trade underground, many of the women were publicly auctioned off at the so-called »Arizona market« near Brčko.⁵⁴ In late 2001, the UN mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina closed down 15 bars employing women who had been forced into prostitution, and some peacekeepers have been sent home for frequenting local brothels. But on several occasions brothel owners in Bosnia have been tipped off that a police raid was imminent and by the time the police arrived, the bar had been locked up for the night.⁵⁵ In January 2002, authorities in Belgrade announced that some 150 persons had been arrested, most of them on charges related to the trafficking of women; the arrests were the result of a police sweep across more than 400 bars and nightclubs in various parts of Serbia.⁵⁶ Between 2000 and 2004, IOM repatriated more than 2,000 trafficked women; but within a year, nearly half of these women had been re-trafficked. EU foreign ministers have agreed that combatting human trafficking should be given high priority and, with EU support, the British government drew up proposals including the establishment of a network of special police and immigration officials authorized to share information and coordinate on responses to trafficking. Likewise, the European Commission and the European Parliament have called for systematic action to combat trafficking in human beings.⁵⁷ Women's organizations have also demanded that victims of trafficking who give evidence against traffickers be granted asylum, as well as increased penalties for those found guilty of the practice.⁵⁸ But where enforcement is concerned, the problem lies in the first place with local officials, and that is where the problem must be solved, if it is to be solved at all.

Those most at risk of being lured or abducted into forced prostitution, according to Stana Buchowska, are

[...] young women and girls over the age of 14. These include high school students, trading school students, and college and university students; dropouts from schools; and girls in dormitories, boarding schools, special schools and orphanages. Other high-risk groups are unemployed women and low-waged women.⁵⁹

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence and abuse have increased across the region since the collapse of communism. In those areas affected by warfare (Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia), domestic violence has increased most significantly, with one Serbian legislator telling feminist activist Sonja Licht at one point, »Don't talk to me about a law against violence in the family. It would destroy the essence of the Serbian family.«⁶⁰ In Croatia, a poll conducted in 2000 found that 44.2% of respondents knew at least one woman who had been beaten at home, and 25.8% of respondents said that there were situations in which it was »acceptable« for a husband to beat his wife.⁶¹ About 20% of Slovenian families have had problems with domestic violence,⁶² while 85% of divorced

60 Quoted in: Ramet, Sabrina P.: *Social Currents in Eastern Europe: The Sources and Consequences of the Great Transformation*. Durham/NC: Duke Univ. Pr. 21995, p. 449.

61 *Women 2000: An Investigation into the Status of Women's Rights in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States*. Vienna: International Helsinki



Federation for Human Rights 2000, p. 123; and U.S. Department of State, 1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Croatia. Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 25.02.2000, at www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/croatia.html, p. 23 of 31.

62 Women 2000, p. 421.

63 Prevalence of Domestic Violence. Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, at www1.umn.edu/humanrts/svaw/domestic/link/statistics.htm [accessed 11.08.2003], p. 1.

64 Moore, R.I.: *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1987.

65 Pavlović, Tatjana: Women in Croatia: Feminists, Nationalists, and Homosexuals. In: Ramet 1999 (*Gender Politics*), p. 134.

66 Orthodox Statement on Homosexuality. In: *The Word* (January 1984), pp. 6-11, posted at www.holy-trinity.org/morality/homosexuality.html [accessed 13.08.2003].

67 The Church is Against the Homosexuality: Open letter of His Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist against the Intention of the Romanian Parliament to abrogate Article 200 in the Penal Code, concerning the Homosexual Relations, 13.09.2000, at biserica.org/Publicatii/2001?NoX/XII_index.html [accessed 13.08.2003].

women in Poland said that they had been beaten by their husbands (25% said repeatedly, the remaining 60% reported having been beaten at least once).⁶³

Summary

Since 1989, female representation in political office, including in the national parliaments, has declined; female unemployment has risen; access to abortion has been restricted by law in Poland, resulting in damage to women's health, while recourse to abortion has been stigmatized by conservative religious institutions in other countries; trafficking and forced prostitution have become serious problems; domestic violence has increased; feminism has been demonized and demands for gender equality ridiculed; conservative forces have done their best to revive so-called 'traditional' gender models, in which women are subordinated to men; and the general quality of life has declined. Given all of these conditions, the conclusion seems inevitable to me that the situation of women in East-Central Europe has tangibly deteriorated since the collapse of communism.

The Broader Context

The restoration of the traditional family – an impossible goal actually, though of no less interest to conservatives – is associated with a revival of homophobic and transphobic prejudices. Conservatives want to depict those who reject the traditional authority of husbands over wives as sinners (or traitors), to draw firm boundaries, and to exclude those who violate those boundaries from the »communion of saints«. As R.I. Moore showed in his study of the Catholic Church in 11th- and 12th- century Europe,⁶⁴ the creation of out-groups plays a strategic role in disciplining those fearful of being ostracized, forcing them to conform to the (new) rules being imposed on the society. Not surprisingly, the Orthodox, Catholic, and certain other Christian Churches have been in the forefront of the new homophobia in East-Central Europe, though other groups (especially nationalists) have embraced sexual intolerance as well. Examining Tudjman-era Croatia, Tatjana Pavlović writes,

Both Serbs and homosexuals ›betray‹ the Nation. Ethnic and sexual scapegoating go hand in hand and are justified by imaginary, arbitrary borders. The homosexual/Serb exemplifies the creation, reification, and expulsion of the Other. It is an undesirable element in both family and national rhetoric. On the level of the family, the homosexual is a dark counterpart of the hypermasculine father/defender/warrior.⁶⁵

Although the Roman Catholic Church has blocked the recognition of gay and lesbian marriage in Poland and sought to keep neutral treatments of homosexuality off the airwaves, the Orthodox Church has been far more energetic in its campaign against affection between members of the same sex. The Orthodox Church's position is that all sexual contacts which do not serve the purpose of procreation are sinful. Since same-sex relations cannot lead to procreation, it follows for Orthodox Church that they are sinful.⁶⁶ The Russian Orthodox Church threatened to resign from the *World Council of Churches* in 1999 when that body authorized a study of sexual diversity, with an eye to reassessing its posture on homosexuality, and clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church have been associated with expressions of intolerance against gays and lesbians – in the case of Fr. Žarko Gavrilović, a retired Serbian priest, with a group of skinheads who attacked a small group of gay Serbs who were trying to stage the country's first Gay Pride march in June 2001. But it is the Romanian Orthodox Church which has found itself at the vortex of the battle against homosexuality. The Church had made its peace with Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who in 1968 had toughened the anti-gay legislation in his country. But when Ceausescu lost his power, Romania sought entry into the Council of Europe. In 1993 it was approved on the condition that it changes 11 of its laws, among them the law affecting homosexuality, to conform with European standards. The Romanian Orthodox Church was unbudgingly opposed to the proposed decriminalization of homosexuality, however, and held to its line that homosexuality was a sin and that practicing homosexuals should be imprisoned. Patriarch Teoctist, who in his youth had been a member of the fascist *Iron Guard*, even tried to persuade the country's parliament that the Council of Europe was not really serious about its demand that Romania repeal its anti-gay legislation and would approve Romania even if the law remained.⁶⁷ After an 8-year battle, the parliament finally voted to agree to the Council's conditions and repealed the anti-gay legislation.



68 Kernberg, Otto F.: Hatred as Pleasure. In: Glick, Robert A./Bone, Stanley (Eds.): *Pleasure Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New Haven/Conn.: Yale Univ. Pr. 1990, p. 179f.

69 Nussbaum, Martha C.: *Sex and Social Justice*. New York & Oxford: Oxford UP 1999, p. 190.

70 Nussbaum, M.C.: Religion and Women's Human Rights. In: Weithman, Paul J. (Ed.): *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Pr. 1997, p. 134.

71 On the relationship between liberalism and feminism, cf. Nussbaum 1999 (*Sex and Social Justice*), chap. 2: *The Feminist Critique of Liberalism*.

72 Hollenbach, David: Afterword: A Community of Freedom. In: Douglass, R. Bruce/Hollenbach, David (Eds.): *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1994, p. 333.

The phenomenon of Christian intolerance is a well-known phenomenon, and »[...] may give rise to highly pleasurable aggressive behaviors [...] rationalized as an expression of righteous indignation.«⁶⁸ The »recreational« aspect of gay beating is confirmed by Martha Nussbaum, who notes, based on research in the American and Canadian context, that anti-gay violence is often motivated in the first place by a desire to escape from boredom and by a desire to have some »fun«.⁶⁹ But where Christian intolerance is concerned, it is not without guile. Its ostensible irrationality is cunning, as revealed in its effort to pass itself off as Christian ›love«. Its cunningness lies precisely in its capability in maintaining clear gender boundaries and clear gender roles, revealing once again the centrality of sexuality for religious ethics. Against the tendency of some religious organizations to limit women's prerogatives, to legitimate violent acts against women who dare to deviate from prescribed religious norms, and to countenance hate speech against nonconformists, Nussbaum has urged that »there is a basic core of international morality« which all religious organizations must respect.⁷⁰

Rival Cultures

Four rival cultures are clashing in East-Central Europe – liberalism, nationalism, conservative Christianity, and feminism. Although there have been efforts to marry liberalism and nationalism, on the one hand, and Christianity and feminism, on the other, these pairs are not natural allies. Nationalism and conservative Christianity have been long-standing allies, on the other hand, and the compatibility of the left-wing of the liberal tradition with feminism can be traced back to John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women*.⁷¹ But although liberalism may be interpreted in such a way as to imply and entail feminism, the concerns of feminism go beyond those of liberalism in a crucial respect. While both liberalism and feminism emphasize the importance of human rights, tolerance, and equality, feminists have been more inclined to stress the importance of cultural change (as per textbooks) than liberals, and more inclined to support the use of quotas and affirmative action programs to redress imbalance. Classical liberalism has been strong on defining individual rights, on demarcating the imperative of the harm principle, and on establishing the necessity for the state to be confessionally neutral. At least some segments of the liberal tradition have also been strong in defining moral imperatives under Natural Law. The liberal tradition has been weaker in defining any imperative for human solidarity or in according any recognition of animal rights or even species rights (along the lines of the rights of a species to survive) or in mandating conditions for the preservation of the environment or in prescribing active remedies to assure equality between the sexes. Among the reasons for this are: first, the fact that the main lines of liberalism were developed in the 18th century, under entirely different conditions and within a culture facing very different challenges from those today; and second, the fact that the liberal tradition has been influenced by the ›realist‹ notions of the illiberal Thomas Hobbes and associated with the *laissez-faire* prescriptions of Adam Smith and his successors, with the result that sectors of the liberal tradition have been drawn into the embrace of Social Darwinism. A full embrace of the equality of women, of animal rights, of the duty of states to protect the environment and assure a decent living to all their citizens and legal residents, and of the place of solidarist thinking in economic life does not represent a repudiation of the liberal tradition, but an expansion of it, moving it, as it were, to the next level.

Finally, where democracy is concerned, the way the concept has increasingly come to be operationalized – emphasizing elections rather than participation, passing off short terms as the best guarantee of responsible government even at the risk that office-holders, fearing the loss of their seats, will feel the need to pander to the public, rather than to defend the public's best interests, paying too little attention to the need for the public to be informed about public issues, and allowing entirely unqualified persons to run for public office and be elected, even inflicting serious damage on the public interest – has undermined the very principles supposedly being furthered by what we have come to call democracy. As David Hollenbach has warned, the neo-liberal tendency to trust to the struggle among competing interest groups subverts the democratic project itself insofar as »[...] interest group politics is frequently incapable of even naming the social bonds that increasingly destine us to sharing either a common good or a ›common bad.«⁷² Where solidarity is weak, where women are unable to participate in the political system on an equal basis, and where participation itself is too often reduced to marking a box on a ballot every four years, democracy itself is attenuated.



73 Steinem, Gloria: What it Would Be Like if Women Win. In: Adelstein, Michael E./Pival, Jean G. (Eds.): Women's Liberation. New York: St. Martin's Pr. 1972, p. 143.

74 For further discussion of these values, cf. Tismaneanu, Vladimir: Truth, Trust, Tolerance: Intellectuals in Post-Communist Society. In: Problems of Post-Communism 43/2 (March-April 1996).

75 Regarding the debacle produced by America's ›realist‹ approach to crime-fighting, cf. Justice in America: Too Many Convicts. In: The Economist, 10.08.2002, p. 15.

Conclusion

When I was still teaching in the United States, I would hear (American) students tell me, from time to time, that they objected in principle to any system providing rewards, recognition, and promotion on the basis of merit; since the system of grading itself is based on merit, this attitude struck me as shocking, especially in view of the fact that the alternatives – corruption, cliques, favoritism, nepotism, and outright criminality – are generally considered to be corrosive of civilized society. But in registering this ›opinion‹, the students were, perhaps unconsciously, merely registering their acceptance of and resignation to some of the negative features of the system in which they found themselves living. Against this conservative posture of resignation, liberals demand equality, only to bicker about whether equality should be merely an equality under the law, an equality of opportunity, or an equality of result. What feminists have wanted is to cut through the Gordian knot of weak-kneed professions of egalitarianism and »[...] to change the economic system to one more based on merit.«⁷³ The advantages of meritocratic criteria over criteria derived from favoritism, nepotism, male-bonding, corruption, or the perverse resentment of merit which results in the rewarding of the mediocre and the punishment of the talented would seem to be so obvious as not to require demonstration. Indeed, so obvious are these advantages that those promoting or differentially rewarding the undeserving always attempt to make the claim that the undeserving are, in fact, deserving. Meritocracy cuts through the self-serving lies and constitutes not only the point at which feminism and liberalism come together but also a vital demonstration of the way in which the feminist agenda serves the interests of all persons.

A vision of a better world can start with Tismaneanu's demand that a community be based on truth, trust, and tolerance.⁷⁴ More concretely, a better world – whether in East-Central Europe or elsewhere – must, of necessity, involve provisions for good schools, affordable access to job training, assured low-cost medical and therapeutic care at a fixed level of quality, and sufficient economic opportunities available. Also essential are the marginalization of discourses of intolerance, whether justified on the basis of religion or on some other basis, the vigorous investigation and prosecution of traffickers and those involved in the sex slavery racket, and provisions for the adequate rehabilitation of victims of trafficking, and – I would add – the use of sensible quota systems to assure a reasonable approximation to gender equality, and the decriminalization of moral choices in areas where widespread consensus does not exist (e.g., in the area of abortion). These elements are the minimal ingredients necessary so that all members of society have the real possibility to develop their talents and feel that they are valued members of society. But it is no accident that ›realists‹ talk endlessly, not about building good schools or providing low-cost medical care, but about law and order – and that, without ever being able to achieve it. It is precisely the failure of realists to understand that civil peace is the by-product, not of coercion, but of strategies of policy-making directed toward fostering a sense of community which has accounted for the failure of many a ›realist‹ scheme in the past.⁷⁵

But while the recent conflicts in the western Balkans have highlighted the importance of a sense of community, the success or failure of the transition from communism to a legitimate system of governance and a healthy society depends on a variety of other factors, too. These include success in the fight against organized crime and political corruption, the struggle against poverty, the development of functioning democratic institutions, and the assurance of procedural regularity in the system and full respect for women. As long as these challenges are not met, no transition in the region can be counted as a success.