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SEXUALITY AND GENDER IN TIMES OF TRANSITION: AN INTRODUCTION

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In 1989 a new époque began behind the falling "iron curtain".¹ It was marked by a spontaneous and chain-reactive collapse of communism - or state-socialism, if you prefer - that was not foreseen by Sovietologists and other social scientists (Ekiert, 1999). The change was profound in the sense that it affected every aspect of social life. Formerly communist states and societies were transformed from autocracy and authoritarianism of the one-party model toward democracy and pluralism. The ideological monopoly of the communist utopia gave way to a political market of different, often conflicting, concepts and orientations. The state ceased to exert almost total control over the society.

The failing socialist experiment with a hyper-regulated or command economy was replaced with a market-driven system, which required major legal and macro-economic reforms starting with the broad and controversial process of privatization. State owned resources were opened for competition, which often had a criminal or semi-legal character. Once-in-a-lifetime opportunities created a huge demand for, traditionally strong, political clientelism. The new economic system required new institutions. The reforms were usually introduced by copying Western standards, frequently encountering obstacles in local mores and untrained administrators, although strange hybrids of the old and the new institutions - especially in the legal field - were not rare.

Prompted by political and economic changes, the dominant value system - anchored in collectivism - began transforming into a more individualistic one. Political participation based on

¹ We do not share the illusion that all (post)communist societies were basically identical, kept in place by Soviet military power, nor do we assume that they are all "in the same boat", facing identical transitional challenges and pressures (Ekiert, 1999; Kennedy, 1994). However, we do believe that the process of postcommunist transition is a specific social phenomenon that permits group treatment of the societies experiencing it.

the individual vote and market competition induced a new perception of society. The idea of an egalitarian or a class-defined society was replaced by the realization that society consists of loosely connected individuals pursuing their interests or, more often, trying to keep afloat. This led, as some authors observed (Świda-Ziemba, 1994), to the atrophy of the traditional social bonds.

Taken together, these rapid changes enabled the countries of Central, East, and Southeast Europe to step on the tracks of globalization, primarily in economic, but also in political (EU enlargement) and cultural terms. During the last decade postcommunist countries became societies open to international trade, information flow, and cultural influences. The world has, for better or worse, become smaller for the postcommunist citizen.

How has all this affected the postcommunist "habits of the heart"? Immediately after the "Great Transformation" the prevailing mood was one of high optimism. There was relief that the old regime was finally dead and hopes of rapid Westernization - by which people usually meant western prosperity and lifestyles. The cheers have hardly silenced when numerous problems caused by the complex task of simultaneous transformation of political, economic, and social structures surfaced. On the macro level, a normative vacuum and political instability - fueled by political struggles, weak governments, ethnic cleavages², irregularities in the redistribution of property rights, and raising corruption (Sojół, 1998) - led to the "delegitimization of the public sphere" (Ekiert, 1999). This growing distrust in state institutions and dissatisfaction with the politicians replaced the initial enthusiasm that the process of transition had inaugurated. As some have pointed out, everyday life became permeated with frustrated political discussions in which official politics are obsessively blamed for all the misfortunes of life (Świda-Ziemba, 1994). The

² Nationalism and ethnic issues, partially frozen under communism, re-emerged as tools in political strategies.

short-lived culture of optimism and limitless opportunities was over. A culture of pessimism and cynicism set in.³

Misfortunes were plenty. An increase in the level of uncertainty and social insecurity - mostly, but not entirely caused by the introduction of markets - set the psychological stage for the first part of the transitional period. Transitional costs came in various forms (Paci, 2002a). A sharp increase in unemployment, poverty, social inequality⁴, and mortality rates⁵, as well as the declining quality of public services, such as health care and social protection⁶, and widely perceived absence of the rule of law (Rose, 1999) created a new and oppressive social reality (Table 1). Few in the postcommunist world were catching up with the West. Most others were, at least subjectively, worse off than before (Arts, Hermkens and Van Wijck, 1995).⁷

Table 1 here!

In the second part of the 1990s several postcommunist countries, most notably Slovenia, Poland, and Hungary, began showing signs of successful transformation. Still, most of the other societies were grappling with both structural and procedural problems. Some took this as proof that institutional reforms imported from the West were simply not enough. Emerging path-dependency (North, 1990) and social capital paradigms (Putnam, 1993) provoked a rapid growth

³ Not surprisingly, nostalgia for the old regime is higher in the economically less successful countries (Ekiert, 1999).

⁴ Income disparity has rapidly increased; Gini coefficients almost doubled in the period 1988-1993.

⁵ By the mid 90s, male life expectancy in Russia shortened by five years (UNDP, 1999).

⁶ In 2000 the levels of GDP in most postcommunist countries were still lower than in 1990 (World Bank, 2002).

⁷ According to Szelenyi's research, 55-85% of respondents in the six transitional countries reported that they lived "worse" or "much worse" in 2000 than in 1988 (Szelenyi, 2002).

of scholarly analyses of the role of culture and traditional patterns of social interaction in social and economic development (Nichols, 1996; Krygier, 2001; Rose, 1999). The communist legacy, amplified by the fact that the communist party rose to power in societies with a largely absent democratic and civic tradition, is usually described as the dominance of state over society, the state of affairs responsible for the deficit of civic associations (Krygier, 2001). In the transitional context, an underdeveloped civil society manifests itself in the widespread preference for state paternalism, as well as in opportunistic behavior.⁸ High levels of distrust in institutions legitimate the use of the old "antimodern tactics" (Rose, 1999)⁹ based on corruption, law-bending, political connections, and informal networks. In short, the postcommunist "mentality" - although not always depicted as a fixed and uniform entity (Kennedy, 1994) - is usually considered to be an impediment to development (Świda-Ziemba, 1994).¹⁰

Changing the Gender Order

Unlike sexuality, gender(ed) relations in postcommunism immediately caught the attention of a number of scholars (Einhorn, 1993; Funk and Mueller, 1993; Jeahnert, Gohrisch

⁸ It seems that the former is more common among the older and the latter among the younger generations (Štulhofer, 1999).

⁹ Rose's data show that "five-sixths of Russians think taxes can be evaded" (Rose, 1999, pp. 73); his multistage, randomly stratified sample included 1904 respondents.

¹⁰ As Inglehart and Baker have recently demonstrated, ex-Communist societies rank significantly lower than advanced postindustrial democracies on the measures of trust, tolerance, subjective well-being, political activism, and self-expression" (Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

and Hahn, 2001; Moghadam, 1993; Occhipinti, 1996). The process of transition, according to the analysts, had numerous negative effects on the lives of women. In addition, it provoked a deterioration of gender relations, both in public and private arenas.

The demise of the system of planned economy brought an end to the full employment ideology. Such a development, as is usually claimed, hit women the hardest.¹¹ Being the first to be let go and discriminated against in (re)hiring, women soon found themselves over-represented among the unemployed (Molyneux, 1995).¹² This and the shrinking of social services and benefits like maternal leaves and mothers' allowances led to the feminization of poverty. It has been argued that the situation is likely to remain unchanged for some time due to decreasing representation of women in politics during the early 1990s.¹³

Within the private sphere, at home, the situation seemed equally problematic, if not worse. The breakdown of the old social order, rising economic insecurity, poverty, and frustration often exploded in domestic violence and sexual abuse (Johnson, 2001). This was especially common in the countries affected by armed conflicts, as in the case of the former Yugoslavia where soldiers and militia men frequently had a hard time adjusting to ordinary, and most often pauperized life. Unfortunately, whether the rates of domestic violence increased in

¹¹ According to a new report (Paci, 2002a), the pattern of gender inequality in transitional countries is far from being as monolithic as suggested by feminist scholars. "No empirical evidence appears to support the notion that the treatment of women in the labour market has systematically deteriorated across the region", as reflected by the fact that "the burden of transition has fallen disproportionately on men in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine" (Paci, 2002b).

¹² However, recent empirical analyses (Ashwin, 2002; Paci, 2002) paint a different picture pointing out that the increase in unemployment, related primarily to the structure of socialist industry, was often sharper for men.

¹³ By the end of the decade the situation has changed somewhat, especially in economically successful transitional countries like Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovenia (Jelušič and Antić, 2001).

the 1990s cannot be determined since the same period is also marked by the increasing activity of women's groups and international organizations, which helped to raise public awareness of the problem and, consequently, made the victims more likely to report the abuse. Perceived as an attack on traditional family values, in some countries public campaigns against domestic violence met fierce resistance from the religious right.¹⁴

What is often lacking in the analyses of the gender relations in postcommunism is the fact that social reality did drastically change for men, too. The new uncertainty and increasing hardships pushed men into a "masculine anomie" (P. Watson, in Molyneux, 1995, pp. 646), as reflected in rising mortality rates. Among the younger, urban, and educated generations of men in the more successful transitional countries this collective male identity crisis seems to be already resolved - or at least sedated - by adopting a Western-like professional image. Among older generations this "new individualism" is often synonymous with embezzlement, materialism, and cynicism.

There is a firm consensus among analysts that the old communist gender order - its main characteristics being the declarative equality of genders (epitomized in educational rights and full employment) and systematic resistance to all the "feminist-inspired" innovations from the West - is long gone. Its legacy is probably still alive among the older generations, but a host of changes brought about by the historical opening of the societies in Central, East, and Southeast Europe began shaping a new gender order. To varying degrees, almost all postcommunist countries show evidence of the increasing public awareness of women's rights and growing sensitivity toward gender discrimination and abuse. Still, there is a marked difference in the perception of gender

¹⁴ During the first half of the 1990s political alliances between nationalistic parties and the power-gaining Church often produced attempts at new reproductive politics. These were invariably based on a neo-traditional redefinition

roles between the East and the West. According to World Values Survey 1995-1997 data, the average score on the gender equality index - ranging from 0 (absolute gender inequality) to 4 (absolute gender equality) - is 2.6 for the East and 3.1 for the West.¹⁵

Changing Social Regulation of Sexuality

As already mentioned, the studies of postcommunist sexualities are conspicuously missing. It seems to be less an act of omission than the consequence of the marginal status of sex research in Central, East, and Southeast Europe.¹⁶ A good example is the seminal work on HIV/AIDS related sexual behavior in Europe (Hubert, Bajos and Sandfort, 1998), which is completely silent on the situation in transitional countries. Although it could be argued that the research project presented in the book started back in 1991 when the HIV/AIDS situation in Eastern Europe was much less dramatic than at the moment, the reason behind the omission is the fact that postcommunist countries lack large-scale sex surveys on which the research project and the book were based (Hubert, 1998). So, where do we begin in assessing the impact of the

of woman's societal role emphasizing the centrality of motherhood (Occhipinti, 1996; Gal and Kligman, 2000).

¹⁵ The *Gender equality index* is composed of the three variables: "Men are better political leaders"; "It creates problems if a woman earns more than her husband"; and "College education is more important for boys than for girls" (Alpha coefficients range from 0.6 to 0.8). The following countries entered the analysis: Germany, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Australia, the US, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Yugoslavia, Albania, Russia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, and Hungary.

postcommunist transition on gender and sexuality issues? According to the standard sociological approach, the process of social regulation of sexuality is anchored in social institutions - religion, family, and secular institutions such as the school, law and medicine (Figure 1)¹⁷ - that produce and/or re-produce ideologies and norms, which define social expectations (DeLamater, 1987; Reiss, 1986). In spite of the fact that every modern, complex society is a dynamic system in which a number of intimate ideologies co-exist and frequently compete (creating sexual subcultures), it is nevertheless argued that there is a dominant set of ideas regulating gender roles, sexuality, and inscribed power relations at any given time. Never a perfectly harmonious and consistent system, it provides everyday guidelines that resonate - and are sometimes contested - in the media and public discourse.

Figure 1 here!

All three major pillars of social regulation of sexuality underwent a profound change after 1989. Freed from strict Party control, the Church became an omnipresent social and political force influencing the decision-making process not only in matters of public morals. Already displaying the signs of growing instability before the beginning of the transition, the family in postcommunism seems to be less popular and more fragile than ever.

The imperatives of a new, and fundamentally different, political and economic life changed the existing state institutions, especially the legal system, often beyond recognition.

¹⁶ A notable exception is the long-standing tradition of sexological research in the former Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Francoeur, 1997).

¹⁷ Having an indirect influence, economy is omitted from the list.

Though only formally sometimes (Nichols, 1996), they were reshaped into Western-like institutions - often under considerable pressure from international organizations.

Religion

Prior to 1989, religion was under close Party scrutiny in most Eastern European societies. The social influence of the Church was strictly limited and its impact often actively discouraged.¹⁸ In the 1990s at least two elements - apart from the collapse of communist rule - came together to create favorable conditions for an explosion of religiosity. One was uncertainty, and the other psychological costs induced by the process of economic transformation and the related social disorientation and decline in the standard of living. The second element was a revival of ethnonational identities. Since an historic "national religion" is one of the core ingredients of ethnonational identity, it comes as no surprise that in the countries in which nationalist conflicts took place during the 1990s religion became an important ethnonational marker and one of the vehicles of social mobilization (Tishkov, 1996; Schoepflin, 1996).

Postcommunist Europe experienced a rapid increase in church attendance (Tomka, 1999; 2001; Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Świda-Ziemba, 1994). While in the EU the percentage of people who identify themselves as religious decreased somewhat during the last decade, the situation in the Eastern European countries points to the opposite trend (table 2). As argued by several authors in this collection, rising religiosity and the growing social impact and influence of the Church as the *ultimate moral authority* strengthened conservative viewpoints and policy initiatives, especially in discussions on abortion, sex education, homosexuality, gender roles, and family violence.

¹⁸ Which resulted in the so-called *domestication* of religious practices (Hann, 1993).

Table 2 here!

Family

Economic and social hardship, rising unemployment (due to the closing down of large production units), erosion of family savings, and breakdown of community ties, as reflected in high homicide statistics (table 3)¹⁹, had a direct impact on marital and family dynamics.²⁰

Table 3 here!

Personal distress and social fragmentation had several negative consequences. Although systematic empirical evidence is lacking, it is reasonable to assume an increase in the frequency of interpersonal tensions and conflicts. In spite of the fact that the trend of marital dissolution and the rise of alternative forms of marriage originated in the West, current divorce statistics place transitional European countries above their EU counterparts (table 4). This is not to say that marital instability simply exploded after 1989, nor that the process of transition was the sole (or even most important) initiator of marital dissolution. The process was already developing in the 1980s, especially in countries such as Hungary, Russia, and Czechoslovakia, and the process of postcommunist transition provided an extra spin. It accelerated the decline of the traditional family not only by bringing more marriages to an end, but also by lowering the likelihood of

¹⁹ Transition processes had a significant, elevating impact on crime rates; in Russia, for example, the percentage of increase in 1993 over 1992 was 27 for murder and 24 for grievous bodily harm (Shelley, 1995).

²⁰ As presented in the rising divorce rates in Russia in the period from the late 1980s to 1994 (Igor Kon, personal communication on December 5, 2002).

marrying. The reaction from the religious and nationalist circles was swift (Occhipinti, 1996), but ultimately impotent. The pro-family and pro-reproductive rhetoric proved too outdated and out-of-sync with the new and *globalized* cultural expectations of the urbanites.²¹ Alternative forms of committed intimacy, with their non-traditional sexual rules, continued gaining popularity among the new generations in "the East".

Table 4 here!

Societal Institutions

Since the very beginning of the transitional era, institution building was a top priority. Although not always recognized or embraced by local elites, in the eyes of international advisers and global financial institutions the task of reshaping legal, economic, political, and social institutions was clearly the most important one. It turned out to be a painstaking and often frustrating job, which showed no linear progress. In some countries institutional reform was relatively fast and successful. The new institutions proved efficient both in establishing and enforcing the new set of rules, providing an impetus for the development of civil society. In others, especially those with no pre-communist democratic tradition, institution building was stalled, undermined, and boycotted by authoritarian regimes.

In simplistic terms, institutional reform in postcommunist societies had two main characteristics: (a) it was modeled after Western standards²², and (b) it allowed, and sometimes

²¹ Which often revolve around (Internet generated) *imaginary* participation in and identification with Western lifestyles.

²² Many new laws were directly copied from the Western legal system. In Croatia, for example, German laws were usually used as a blueprint.

even encouraged, public participation in the process. Both elements were highly important. The first inoculated the new institutional design with the individual rights perspective, which was largely absent from the old, collectivist-bent legislation. Opening the door for civic initiatives and the participation of various interest groups also had important and long-term benefits. It resulted in greater transparency of the whole process and in generating public criticism.

The outcome is clearly visible in the context of what used to be regarded as the regulation-free "private sphere". Marital rape, family violence, sexual harassment, and trafficking in women are being increasingly prosecuted, even if not systematically sanctioned. In addition, intense and focused external political pressure - especially from the EU²³ - led to important legal innovations regarding gender and sexuality (Jelušič and Antić, 2001; Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, 2000). Paradigmatic cases here are the decriminalization of same sex contacts in Russia in 1993 (Nardi, 1998) and in Albania 1995 (Van der Veur, 2001).

Sexualities in Postcommunism

So how different is the East in terms of sexuality from the West? Could it be that the differences listed (Kon, 1999; Francoeur, 1997-2001; see chapters by Kon, Zverina, and Sierzpowska-Ketner) - from more sexual aggression in adolescent sexual encounters and more intolerance toward sexual minorities, to nonexistence of sexual offender treatment programs and lack of sexual health services - are mostly imaginary? Should we write them off as a mere mirage, the shimmering of *the exotic* in the "colonial" gaze?

²³ The EU accession is the main "carrot" used for influencing the decision-making in postcommunist countries, particularly in the Central and Southeast Europe.

If anything - having in mind the unique social conditions in postcommunist societies, as well as their specific socio-cultural inheritance - the absence of differences would be a real explanatory challenge. This must sound almost unbearably trivial to readers viewing human sexuality as a social outcome refracted through the lenses of individual dispositions and interpersonal negotiations. There are at least five dimensions in which real and important differences between the East and the West are observable: (a) the HIV/AIDS related epidemiological situation, (b) sex education, (c) the status of sexual minorities, (d) sexual permissiveness, and (e) sex commerce.

HIV/AIDS

In parts of Eastern Europe HIV infections are increasing at an alarming rate. As stated by UNICEF officials, "HIV/AIDS is currently spreading at a faster rate in parts of Central and Eastern Europe than anywhere else in the world" (UNICEF, 2002; UNAIDS, 2002a). Russia, Ukraine, and Estonia seem to be hit the worst.²⁴ Prior to 1995, as is well documented, transitional countries were almost HIV-free. Then the situation changed dramatically. Between 1995 and 2000 estimated HIV cases increased by a factor of more than 20 (UNAIDS, 1998a)²⁵; as elsewhere, almost 80 percent of new infections were recorded among young people.

The rapid increase was caused by a change in transmission patterns. Before 1995 most HIV cases in the Eastern Europe were linked to homosexual contacts. Then, the epidemic exploded among injecting drug users, some of whom were sex workers. Palpable social erosion, rapid increase in drug use and the volume of sex work, lack of relevant information and habitual

²⁴ HIV/AIDS rates in Estonia are almost 20 times the EU average.

avoidance of condoms provided conditions for the steady increase of HIV infections (UNAIDS, 1998a; 2002a).

Sex Education

An important part of the increasing HIV/AIDS problem in transitional countries is the traditional reluctance to use condoms and contraceptives in general (Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, 2000). In comparison to EU countries, almost twice as many women in transitional countries do not use any contraception.

Table 5 here!

The finding has a specific historical background. The fact that modern contraceptive methods were not easily available under the communist rule resulted in adoption of alternative practices, as reflected in high abortion rates (Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, 2000: 10). Unfortunately, after contraception became widely obtainable - if expensive - little or nothing was done to change the old habits. Systematic, i.e. school-based, sex education does not exist in postcommunist societies (table 6). Rare attempts at introducing comprehensive programs are met with fierce opposition, as well illustrated by the recent case of Russia (Nardi, 1998). Taking into consideration that economically more successful transitional countries are more likely than those less successful to have introduced some elements of sex education in their school system, it

²⁵ In 1994, only 44 people tested HIV-positive in Ukraine. Three years later there were 15000 HIV-positive cases; the estimates for 1998 are 110000 (UNAIDS, 1998b).

could be that further economic and social development in the region will weaken the resistance to systematic sex education.

Table 6 here!

Sexual Minorities

For a number of transitional countries decriminalization of homosexuality was a recent event. Most often, the legislative change was prompted by international pressure and was conceived of by local political elites as an "admission ticket" to international organizations and donor conferences. Being neither the outcome of grassroots action, nor the result of broad consensus over human rights, the exclusion of homosexuality from the penal code did not end everyday discrimination and harassment (Van der Veur, 2001). Although the situation varies considerably from one country to the other, ranging from widespread acceptance in the Czech Republic (Widmer, Treas and Newcomb, 1998) to extreme homophobia in Albania (Van der Veur, 2001)²⁶, sexual minorities' status in postcommunist societies is significantly less de-stigmatized than in the West. One has only to review prevailing attitudes toward same sex contacts (table 7).

There are two arguments in favor of the claim that the future seems brighter than the past when discussing the rights of sexual minorities. The first, the external political pressure, which will certainly intensify if the EU accession process continues as planned, was already mentioned.

²⁶ Another example would be the reaction to the first gay pride parades in the countries of former Yugoslavia. Unlike in Slovenia, where the event took place in the atmosphere of tolerance, in Serbia it was violently prevented on the spot by militant right-wing youth. In Croatia the parade succeeded with only occasional disruptions (by stone-throwing and slurs), but only, it seems, because it was heavily guarded by the special police forces.

The second argument points out to the existence of a new generation of sexual minority activists, whose political and social visibility should to a large extent be attributed to the development of civil society in Eastern Europe after 1989. Familiar with the international accomplishments and more accustomed to collective action than the older generations, their agenda is increasingly proactive and media-conscious.

Sexual Permissiveness

In comparison with the EU countries, the countries of Central, Southeast and East Europe score lower on indicators of sexual permissiveness (Figure 2 and Table 7). According to *International Social Survey Project* (ISSP) data, the vast majority of respondents in postcommunist countries find sexual contacts between two consenting adults of the same sex unacceptable.

Table 7 here!

Attitudes toward teenage sexual activity, another indicator of sexual permissiveness, do not differ to the extent observed in the case of acceptance of same-sex sexual contacts. Here, the East seems almost as permissive as the West. To test this further, we used another international database, the *World Values Survey* (WVS; www.worldvaluessurvey.org). The analysis confirmed the lower acceptance of homosexuality, but pointed out to an interesting bifurcation in regards to the question regarding sexual freedom. Figure 2 shows two distinct patterns: Respondents in the first group - Slovenes, Croats, Estonians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians - were as accepting of the idea of unlimited sexual freedom as the respondents from the selected

Western countries. Respondents from the second group of transitional countries were significantly more inclined to social restrictions.

Figure 2 here!

Sex Trade

Following 1989, the laws prohibiting adult entertainment were removed from the criminal code of most postcommunist countries.²⁷ While it is true that the laws on prostitution remained largely unchanged²⁸, associated policing became significantly more lenient. Although both sex work and explicit entertainment existed under communist rule, there was a rapid increase on the supply side after 1989 (Occhipinti, 1996; Gal and Kligman, 2000). Rapid commercialization of sex, including its gloomy international ramifications (Hughes, 2000; Dolby, 1995; Gal and Kligman, 2000), was due to several factors including the feminization of poverty, increased mobility, cultural opening of "the East", and the rise of organized crime (Shelley, 1995). Sex work in particular became a coping strategy, as well as a shortcut, in most cases only wishful, to a Western lifestyle²⁹.

In conclusion, it seems that in many respects the postcommunist Europe is following the sexual trajectory of the West, probably with a delay of some two to three decades. Should we

²⁷ Newly acquired freedom has not been abolished, not even in a Catholic country such as Poland, where in 2000 the President vetoed an anti-porn law passed by a parliamentary majority.

²⁸ In spite of occasional calls for legalization by populist politicians.

²⁹ According to the UNAIDS (1998a) study, a female sex worker in Ukraine can earn in 5-6 days as an escort up to 10 times as much as a medical nurse's monthly salary.

assume that in time sexual landscapes of the postcommunist East will become the mirror image of the West? If so, will it be the triumph of social and economic development, the outcome of the successful modernization of *the East*?³⁰ Aware that *the West* is no less a dynamic system - undergoing a far-reaching postmodern and global cultural change - the authors presented in this volume are not unanimous on the issue. For some, this is certainly something to be wished for. For others, it is an irrelevant, purely speculative question. Finally, there are those who are skeptical about the *sexual convergence* theory either because they question the standard presumptions of "transitology" or because in their view the importance of distinct cultural traditions cannot be overstated. It is our hope that the variety of standpoints and approaches presented in the chapters that follow can only benefit the future development of sex research in Eastern Europe.³¹

The Contributions

The central theme of the first four chapters of this book is the post-communist construction of gender and sexuality. Tatjana Durić-Kuzmanović focuses on Serbia, the only post-communist country which political elite rejected the transition during the 1990s, while other countries were politically and economically changing. What she describes as "state-directed non-development" resulted in Serbia in isolation, rapid economic deterioration, and the reinforcement of patriarchal cultural patterns. The negative consequences of these developments were

³⁰ Particularly if we define communist rule as a conservative claim to communal, *mechanical* morality, to borrow Durkheim's term.

³¹ With the exception of a long tradition of medical sexology in the Czech Republic, sex research remains an undeveloped discipline in the postcommunist countries.

disproportional for women. While she highlights women's role in the maintenance of patriarchal values, she also demonstrates the role of women in the recent democratic changes in Serbia. Throughout her analysis she shows the importance of a gendered perspective in understanding and promoting societal change that goes beyond equal participation of women in paid labor.

Voichita Nachescu goes even one step further in the subsequent contribution, when he puts forward the perspective of sexual minorities. He does so in his analysis of the heated debate about human rights for sexual minorities, as that took place in Romania, around the turn of the century. There was a strong attempt to avert the potential decriminalization, by constructing a national, Romanian identity in which homosexual desires did not exist. Putting forward this Romanian identity was, however, insufficient to outweigh a European identity that includes rights for sexual minorities. The most decisive factors in this struggle came from outside Romania: the European Union and the Council of Europe, which required recognition of sexual rights to allow Romania to participate in their political play.

That gender categorizations are in a process of change in countries in transition, is the starting point for Kevin Moss in the next chapter. He draws his conclusions on the analysis of two Yugoslavian movies from the early 1990s, which both feature transgendered persons. The first film is based on the cultural phenomenon of the sworn virgins, in which women are forced to live as men. The second movie portrays homosexuality, transvestism, and prostitution in a way that, as Moss convincingly argues, not just challenges gender identities but – in a centralized, politically dominated society - destabilizes national and ethnic identities as well.

Biljana Kašić critically examines the ideas of sexualities in transition in the final chapter of the first part. *Which* sexuality, and in transition *whereto*? Examining the situation in Croatia, she wonders whether something more is accomplished than the introduction of the sex-world

economy, in which the complexity of women's sexuality is bound by male social imagery. Her conclusion is that not much has changed. During socialism, the right to pleasure has been a culturally "forbidden" demand for women. Real changes would require a politicizing of the personal combined with in depth exploration of female sexuality, she argues.

The second part of this book brings together chapters that focus on sexual politics and sexual identities. Igor Kon analyzes the situation in contemporary Russia. He documents changes in the sexual behavior of urban adolescents, similar to those in Western countries. These changes result in a variety of problems pointing at the need for a "systematic sex education strategy." Such a strategy is, however, not only missing, it is thwarted by the Russian state, the church, and right-wing ideologues, Kon demonstrates.

Tea Nikolić focuses on Serbia, where sexual liberalization arrived long before the political liberalization of the media. Pornographic movies on TV were defended by political parties as part of population politics, assuming that they would promote reproduction. It, however, not only reinforced a patriarchal framework of thinking, which, Nikolić argues, was and is still dominant for both genders in Serbia, but was often used as a political tool.

Tatjana Greif explores the social and legal situation of lesbian women in Slovenia. She demonstrates that even though homosexuality is not criminalized in Slovenia, it does not imply that lesbian women enjoy the same civil and human rights as other citizens. The still pervasive ideology of nationalism places women exclusively in the context of family and reproduction. A lesbian movement, active since the 1980s, does not encounter any official acknowledgment. Media responses to homosexuality are predominantly sensationalist or homophobic. A lack of recognition of homosexuality as an issue of civil equality prolongs the intolerant climate towards homosexuality.

Belarus is the focus of Alexei Lalo's chapter. They show that due to cultural and demographic factors, Western feminist ideologies don't work in Belarus. Addressing sexual issues remains largely taboo and is constructed as subversive, reinforcing a state of sexual illiteracy in the general public as well as in social institutions. Regardless of democratic changes, social institutions were not reformed and continue to promote sexual discrimination and homophobia, with full support of the state and the church.

In the chapter concluding this second part, Brian J. Baer analyzes the way in which homosexual minorities are represented in the popular culture of post-soviet Russia. He argues that to understand the phenomenon of homosexuality, one should not adopt Western rhetorics, but explore Russian-ness itself. He subsequently describes a range of representations of homosexuality. No longer understood as a symptom of bourgeois decadence, homosexuality is now used to represent the critical state of masculinity in Russia. Even though it remains difficult for contemporary Russians to imagine homosexuality as a legitimate source of pleasure, Bear also shows examples of gay visibility that illustrate a sexual openness and experimentation, unbound by the frontiers of homo and hetero identities.

The subsequent part discusses the rise of sex markets as a major social problem that came along with social and economic opening the transitions the new independent states are going through. Donna Hughes analyses sex trafficking as a supply and demand trade, in which countries with large sex industries create the demand, and countries where women and girls are easily recruited provide the supply. She demonstrates how a variety of conditions in contemporary Russia facilitate trafficking, such as the economic collapse and inefficient state, unemployment that disproportionately affects women, increased organized crime and

criminalization of the economy, ignored sexual violence against women, and promotion of Western glamour which nourishes unrealistic expectations.

Tatiana Osipovich analyzes the phenomenon of the Russian mail order brides, as a specific form of sex trafficking. Facilitated by the rapid growth of the Internet, this industry has become a lucrative, albeit largely unsuccessful business. Osipovich describes the discourses that underlie this industry. Russian women are presented to North American men as highly educated, but still traditional and feminine, contrasting them with an image of American women as career-oriented, materialistic, and selfish. She criticizes the dominant media and public discourse, successfully avoiding black and white analyses.

Feminization of poverty and a renaissance of patriarchy are used by Natalia Khodyreva to understand the rise of sex work in contemporary Russia. She explored how women get involved in sex work and how they experience it. Usually lacking free choice between standard jobs and sex work, women expose themselves to a variety of risks, including violence from the main partner as well as from clients. The women involved seldom have an understanding of the way in which sex work is related to their position in society.

The last part of this book offers findings of various empirical studies on sexuality, carried out in the new independent states. Marianna Supeková and her colleagues explored how in a group of sexually active young adults in Slovakia, subjective meanings of sex, sexual satisfaction and sexual behavior are interrelated. They show that for these young people sexuality as an expression of intimacy and love is more rewarding than any other functions of sex, such as a tool to enhance self-esteem, self-realization, and personal success. Subjective meanings of sex seem to motivate particular types of sexual behavior. The authors show that while having a steady

partner does not automatically imply sexual satisfaction, not having a partner does not necessarily mean being sexually dissatisfied.

Ivan Bernik and Valentina Hlebec present a comparative report on adolescents' first sexual encounters. They compare experiences of young people in representative city samples from seven post-socialist societies, expecting behavioral patterns that resemble those of their Western counterparts from the 1960s. Their findings suggest, however, that there is little ground for speaking about patterns of post-socialist adolescent sexuality, arguing for the need to analyze sexual behavior relatively independent from its broader socio-cultural context.

In the subsequent chapter, Elina Haavio-Mannila, Anna Rotkirch and Osmo Kontula argue for the existence of differences between post-socialist and Western states. Comparing population-based studies conducted in St. Petersburg, Estonia and Finland, they show an overall decline in the procreational dimension of sexuality and increase in recreational sexuality, both developments first happened in Finland and then in St. Petersburg and Estonia. The importance of relational sexuality, with its stress and love and fidelity, did not change over time. Differences were found in relation to female sexuality. A sexual culture that treats women with respect and equality was clearly present in Finland. In St. Petersburg and Estonia, people were less sensitive towards women's sexual needs; women were also less satisfied with their sexual lives. Haavio-Mannila and her colleagues interpret these differences against the historic background of the three places.

In the concluding chapter of this book Miroslav Popper and his colleagues compare the sexual conduct and HIV risk behaviors of young people in Slovakia, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom using data from qualitative studies. The differences they observed reflect each country's specific political and cultural traditions, in particular regarding sexuality. Open

communication about sexuality was characteristic for families in the Netherlands and lacking in the other two countries. Communication with friends about sexuality seemed to occur most frequently in Slovakia. Condom use was less frequent in Slovakia compared to both, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The authors attribute the comparatively less favorable situation in Slovakia to the dominant impact of politics and religion.

Together the chapters in this book reflect the fresh and rich thinking and first empirical studies from the new independent states. They clearly illustrate the naivety of the assumption that the disappearance of the socialist regimes would automatically lead to more Western sexual lifestyles. The various contributions convincingly demonstrate the importance of economical factors and the church, with its, at least in some countries, increasing influence. The rise of national identities seriously frustrate progress in the position of sexual minorities, but also more generally in the position of women and ultimately that of men. The chapters finally show the importance of on going research and theorizing about sexual ideologies and practices. It is likely that in the new independent states, change will continue. It would be a lost opportunity not to follow how sexualities keep *transitioning*. For now, the work of the contributors is at least accessible at a larger scale.

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Table 1: Socio-Economic Development: A Comparison

| | <i>EU, the US, and Australia</i> | <i>Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union</i> |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (1997), in US\$ | 23,700 | 4,200 |
| GDI* | 0.92 | 0.75 |
| Gini coefficient of social inequality (1993)** | 37 | 46 |
| Corruption index*** | 7.8 | 3.5 |
| Non-survivors over 60 (%) | 11 | 25 |
| Divorces (% of new marriages) | 41 | 48 |
| Suicide per 100.000 women/men | 6/20 | 11/52 |

Sources: UNDP, 1999

* *Gender relations development index* = female/male life expectancy at birth + adult literacy rate + education + income

** Source: World Bank, 2002

*** Source: Transparency International, 2000; the index ranges from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean)

Figure 1: Social Regulation of Sexuality

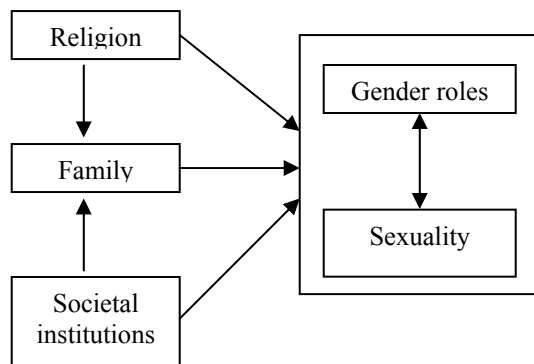
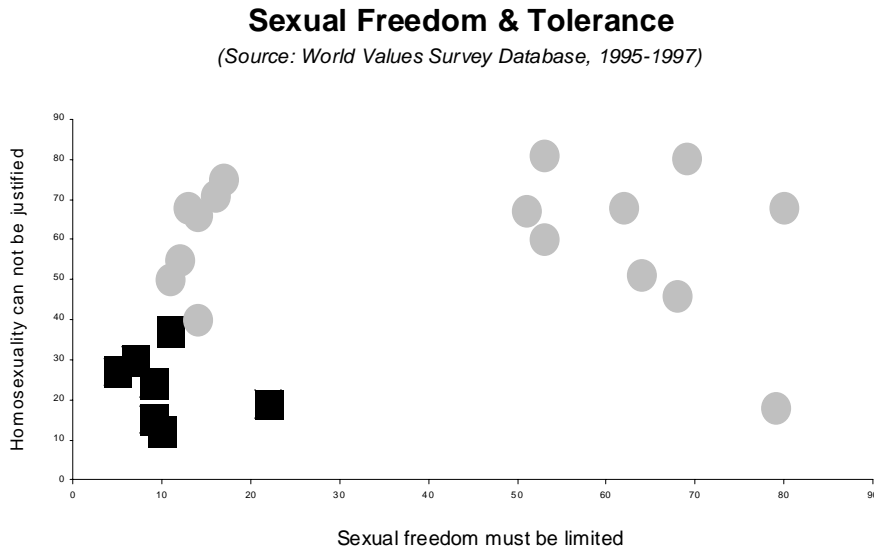


Figure 2: Attitudes toward Sexuality in Comparative Perspective (Štulhofer, 2002)



Legend:

- "The West" = Finland, Germany (West), Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Australia
- "The East" = Albania, Belarus, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine

Table 2: The percentage of religious respondents in selected Western and Eastern European countries

| | 1990 | 1999 | 1990-1999 difference |
|---------|------|------|-------------------------|
| Italy | 84.5 | 85.8 | 1.3 |
| Austria | 81.3 | 80.9 | -0.4 |
| Denmark | 72.5 | 76.5 | 4 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Belgium | 69.3 | 65.1 | -4.2 |
| Germany (West) | 64.6 | 62.1 | -2.5 |
| The Netherlands | 60.8 | 61.4 | 0.6 |
| Spain | 66.8 | 59 | -7.8 |
| France | 50.7 | 46.3 | -4.4 |
| Great Britain | 57.4 | 41.5 | -15.9 |
| Sweden | 31.3 | 38.8 | 7.5 |
| Western Europe (average %) | 63.9 | 61.7 | -2.2 |
| Eastern Europe (average %) | 56 | 65.7 | 9.7 |
| Poland | 95.3 | 93.9 | -1.4 |
| Romania | 74.5 | 84.8 | 10.3 |
| Lithuania | 55.1 | 84.2 | 29.1 |
| Slovenia | 73.1 | 70.2 | -2.9 |
| Latvia | 54.4 | 76.9 | 22.5 |
| Russia | 56 | 66.9 | 10.9 |
| Hungary | 56.8 | 57.5 | 0.7 |
| Bulgaria | 36.1 | 52 | 15.9 |
| Estonia | 21.2 | 41.3 | 20.1 |
| The Czech Republic | 37.7 | 29.4 | -8.3 |

Adapted from: Tomka (2001); data source: *European Values Survey*

Table 3: Homicide statistics of selected Western and Eastern European countries

| | <i>Homicide in 1995</i> (per 100.000 inhabitants) | <i>Homicide in 2000</i> (per 100.000 inhabitants) |
|--|---|---|
| | | |

| | | |
|------------------------|-----|-----|
| Average Western rate* | 2.7 | 2.8 |
| Average Eastern rate** | 9.2 | 9.2 |

Source: *International Crime Statistics* (Interpol, 2002; ICS are based on national crime statistics)

* Norway, France, Greece, Portugal, Finland, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, and Switzerland

** Croatia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Russia, Romania, Estonia, Moldova, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, and Ukraine

Table 4: Divorce statistics of selected Western and Eastern European countries

| | <i>Divorces, 1996 (as % of marriages)</i> |
|------------------------|---|
| Average Western rate* | 38.4 |
| Average Eastern rate** | 39.4 |

Source: UNDP (1999: 225-227)

* Norway, Belgium, Sweden, Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Finland, Denmark, Austria, Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal

** Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Croatia, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Macedonia, Albania, and Moldova

Table 5: Percentage of married women not using any contraceptive device/method in selected Western and Eastern European countries

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>%</i> |
|----------------|-------------|----------|
| Belgium | 1991 | 20 |
| Denmark | 1988 | 22 |
| Finland | 1994 | 21 |

| | | |
|----------------------------|------|-----------|
| France | 1994 | 25 |
| Germany | 1992 | 25 |
| Netherlands | 1993 | 26 |
| Switzerland | 1994 | 18 |
| Great Britain | 1989 | 28 |
| W. European average | | 23 |
| E. European average | | 41 |
| Czech Republic | 1993 | 31 |
| Hungary | 1993 | 16 |
| Romania | 1993 | 43 |
| Slovakia | 1991 | 26 |
| Slovenia | 1989 | 8 |
| Estonia | 1990 | 65 |
| Latvia | 1995 | 32 |
| Lithuania | 1994 | 34 |
| Belarus | 1995 | 50 |
| Moldavia | 1990 | 78 |
| Russia | 1994 | 33 |
| Ukraine | 1990 | 77 |

Source: USAID, 1999

Table 6: School based sex education (SE) in Europe

| <i>The West</i> | <i>Status of SE</i> | <i>The East</i> | <i>Status of SE</i> |
|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Austria | -/+ | Bulgaria | - |

| | | | |
|-------------|--------|--------------------|-----|
| Belgium | + | Czech Republic | -/+ |
| Denmark | + | Poland | -/+ |
| Finnland | ++ | Hungary | -/+ |
| France | -/+ | Russia | - |
| Greece | - | Yugoslavia | - |
| Ireland | - | Macedonia | - |
| Italy | - | Bosnia-Herzegovina | - |
| Island | ++ | Croatia | - |
| Netherlands | ++ | Romania | - |
| Spain | -/+ | Slovenia | -/+ |
| Germany | -/+ | Slovakia | -/+ |
| Portugal | - | Ukraine | - |
| Sweden | ++ | Albania | - |
| U.K. | -/+; + | Moldavia | - |

Sources: Caron, 1998; Francoeur, 1997-2001

- SE is non-existent or only sporadically mentioned
- /+ Some elements of SE are incorporated into other classes
- + Obligatory SE program in schools
- ++ Comprehensive SE is a part of the national *curriculum*

Table 7: Attitudes toward teenage and same-sex sexual contacts

| | "The West" ^{****} | "The East" ^{****} |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Index of teenage sex tolerance (ITST)* | 48.2 | 50.3 |
| Index of same-sex tolerance (ISST)** | 21.5 | 50.5 |

Source: Widmer, Treas and Newcomb (1998)

* ITST = A (percentage of answers "teenage sex is ALWAYS wrong") -- B (percentage of answers "teenage sex is NEVER wrong); the original scale is 4-point (always, almost always, only sometimes, never)

** ISST = C (% "homosexual sex is ALWAYS wrong") -- D (% "homosexual sex is NEVER wrong)

*** Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany (West), Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the US

**** Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Slovenia