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*Christian Schmitt & Heike Trappe*

## **Introduction to the special issue: *Gender relations in Central and Eastern Europe – Change or continuity?***

Recent decades have witnessed a growing interest in the interaction between the welfare state and the reproduction of gender relations. Scholarship in this vein has been conducted by Gøsta Esping-Andersen, whose most influential work laid out three paradigmatic types of welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990). The feminist critique of this pioneering concept (e.g., Orloff 1996; Bamba 2004) did not aim at demolishing it but at pointing out its shortcomings and at highlighting the extent to which the welfare state is organized around differential roles of men and women. The gendered division of labour, both on the labour market and within the family, is among the fundamental principles of welfare state organization (Esping-Andersen 2009), and gendered patterns of gainful employment and unpaid care are prevalent in virtually all modern Western societies. Feminist scholars have shown that the institutional structures of the welfare state promote the gendered division of paid and unpaid work (Ostner/Lewis 1995; Sainsbury 1996). However, these scholars have focused primarily on Western democracies. The few studies that have considered former state socialist regimes used the categories of the dual-earner model with state childcare (Pfau-Effinger 1998) or the dual-earner and state-carer model (Crompton 1999), neither of which fully corresponds to the institutions and social structures originating from the socialist era. The contributions to this special issue implicitly challenge this categorization as an oversimplification of both the past and the present. They shed light on the role of central social institutions in their impact on gender relations in different societal contexts.

In fact, state socialist societies went further than most Western welfare states in expanding the female role beyond that of a family caregiver, encouraging women to join the labour force, become economically independent, and participate in society outside the private sphere. However, social policy goals were inclined primarily to satisfy the extensive demand for labour, while ideas about women's emancipation played a subordinate role (Haney 2002). Nevertheless, the widespread integration of women into the labour market led to the emergence of institutions that supported and encouraged female full-time employment – even as early as the 1960s, when conservative Western welfare states strongly encouraged a traditional division of labour based on a male breadwinner and a

female homemaker. Although there were variations in the gender-specific roles that emerged across the socialist countries, the propagation of the dual-earner model was a universal feature of these countries during the decades preceding the fall of the Iron Curtain.

During the post-1989 period, most if not all Central and Eastern European countries witnessed a considerable decline in women's labour force participation, in many cases accompanied by a reversion to more traditional gender role attitudes and gender relations. The transition from centrally planned to market economies left many women in a more vulnerable position than men, not only on the labour market but also in the home (Schnepf 2010). Broadly speaking, women became more familialized, that is, more economically dependent on a male earner and more focused on family care than before 1989 (Pascall/Manning 2000). With the downsizing of public childcare, the model of the female full-time worker was undermined substantially, although to differing degrees across the Central and Eastern European countries. Consequently, the female employment rate (age 15-64) shows vast differences across Eastern Europe, ranging from below 50 percent (Hungary) to 64 percent (Slovenia) in 2009 (Eurostat 2010). A similar degree of variation is seen in the division of domestic work (Fuwa 2004). It appears that women's labour force participation in Central and Eastern Europe declined sharply immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain, but has re-increased steadily since the late 1990s. Again, the extent to which female employment has approached pre-1989 levels varies across the region. However, these aggregate figures only tell part of the story. They fail to take into account important changes in the distribution of paid and unpaid work at the household and family level.

A key intention of this special issue is to investigate changes and continuities in gender relations and gender role attitudes in the transition from state socialism to capitalism in different Central and Eastern European societies. Although this transition process has been going on for 20 years, social science research has been remarkably reluctant to address these issues. An obvious question is why some societies have produced distinctly gendered divisions of labour. Explanations for changes or continuities in these patterns could focus on institutional factors (i.e., the role of social policies), economic factors (i.e., the role of labour markets), cultural aspects (i.e., the role of traditional norms and preferences), or the notion of path dependency (i.e., the role of social legacies). This collection of articles aims to advance this debate by taking a strictly comparative approach across both time and space. Two of the studies employ this approach to compare developments in different Eastern European countries, while the other two compare gender relations between Eastern and Western European countries. As a joint trait, all the articles in this volume argue from a thoughtful and theoretically grounded perspective.

The paper by *Hana Hašková* and *Christina Klenner* is a fascinating case study of the emergence and persistence of distinct types of dual-earner models in Czech, Slovak, and East German societies before and after 1989. The analysis focuses on the role of institutions, norms, and practices in establishing different work-care policies. The authors argue that the socialist ideal of female full-time work led to the emergence of a variety of dual-earner models, as the social policy approaches aimed at disburdening women in the reconciliation of work and motherhood differed across countries (public childcare in the GDR; extended maternity leave in Czechoslovakia). In Czechoslovakia, an interrupted

dual-earner model prevailed, and in the GDR, a continuous dual-earner model. These models and the work-care policies associated with them had a deep impact on the norms and ideas of “good” childcare and motherhood that remain in place to this day. The transformation after 1989 brought about slight modifications in the two distinct dual-earner models, but these models still reflect the cultural and institutional legacy of their respective societies. This continuity is even more astonishing in light of the radical social changes these particular societies underwent in the processes of reunification in Germany and separation in Czechoslovakia.

The paper by *Éva Fodor* and *Anikó Balogh* explores differences in gender role opinions and attitudes between men and women in 13 Eastern European countries. They analyse a unique set of representative country data collected in 2007. The data set also covers some countries that have been almost entirely neglected in the social science research to date (like Belarus, Moldova, or Ukraine). The study investigates the assumption that women in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe fail to recognize their interests as women or that they lack “feminist consciousness.” This idea has been put forward to argue that a conservative turn in gender role attitudes is to blame for the declining number of women in the labour force and for the unequal division of household work (Gal/Kligman 2000). Contrary to this line of reasoning, the main findings of the empirical analysis show that gender remains an important determinant of gender role attitudes in post-socialist Eastern Europe. Like women in Western industrialized countries, women in the former socialist countries tend to express more egalitarian attitudes than men do. In this sense, Eastern Europe corresponds to the broader trends in the formation of gender-role attitudes, and does not seem to form an exception to the general rule.

The other two contributions to this special issue examine gender relations in post-socialist societies, each comparing a Central European to a Western country. *Heather Hofmeister*, *Lena Hünefeld*, and *Celina Proch* investigate how dual-earner couples in Germany (primarily West-Germany) and Poland cope with job-related spatial mobility. They use data from the 2007 Job Mobility and Family Lives Survey. Their central finding is that gender trumps national differences and spatial mobility constraints. Polish and German women, whether mobile or not, report doing more housework and childcare than their partners. Men who travel for their job often report delegating housework to their partners, but women rarely do. However, there is a stronger tendency toward an egalitarian division of labour among Polish couples than among German couples, especially in terms of childcare, which may be the result of the longer tradition of a dual-earner model in Poland. This legacy might also be relevant for the younger Polish generation that did not grow up under state socialism, but may have absorbed the ideal of a more egalitarian division of labour through processes of socialization.

*Anna Matysiak* and *Daniele Vignoli* provide an elaborate investigation of the relationship between women’s first birth and employment choices based on national retrospective data. For their analysis, they focus on a comparison of Poland and Italy, two countries that share important *similarities* (e.g., culture, family ties, low support for working parents), to better understand the crucial role of *differences in important details* (Neyer/Andersson 2008) as can be observed in female labour market attachment around birth. The authors disentangle how educational differentials affect the transition of working women to motherhood and the return of the labour market after first birth. They also identify clear cross-

country differences in women's return to the labour market: women tend to combine work and motherhood more often in Poland than in Italy. The authors argue that Polish women's stronger labour market attachment is rooted both in economic necessity and in the lasting influence of the socialist ideal of the full-time working woman.

This special issue of the *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung/Journal of Family Research* does not provide a generalized answer to the question of whether post-1989 transformation processes resulted in change or continuity in gender relations. Rather, the articles presented here offer important insights into how state socialism and subsequent transformation processes interacted with the cultural and historical origins of these diverse societies. The findings underscore the importance of more differentiated, in-depth research on the gendered welfare state with respect to the former socialist countries.

Such a differentiated view needs to go beyond conceptualizing present-day gender relations in Central and Eastern Europe simply as the consequence of a joint legacy of state socialism. There is no doubt that the socialist era left a powerful imprint on the societies in question, perhaps the most important one being the ideal of the full-time working woman. This ideal remains prevalent in all the countries examined here, but its impact on women's economic independence differs widely from one country to the next due to specific economic developments, traditions, and policy paths taken. The outcomes range from the close labour market attachment of women in East Germany and Poland to a stronger focus on caregiver roles in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Future research on gender relations needs to take such differences into account by looking at specific national historical legacies rather than attempting to collapse the Central and Eastern European countries together into the single category of state socialist origin. This special issue has taken a first step in this direction by stressing the key role of national historical and cultural legacies in the emergence of the broad variation in gender relations seen today across the former socialist countries of Europe. It remains a task for future research to investigate the underlying mechanisms and to search for consistent patterns in gender relations across Central and Eastern Europe.

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