

CHAPTER 3

GENDER IN TRANSITION

1. INTRODUCTION

Social and economic changes, analyzed in the previous chapter, have had significant impact on gender relationships and women's vulnerability to violence. However, as in Western societies, the relationships between changes in social and economic status and violence against women are rarely direct. Rather these relationships are mediated by stress, frustrations and/or changes in gender and other identities (ethnic, generation, class).

Gender structures contribute significantly to women's vulnerability to violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, prostitution and trafficking in women (Messerschmidt, 1993:8121-153). Thus changes of gender structures in post-communist societies are expected to have a strong influence on the vulnerability of women to these forms of violence.

In this chapter I will explore changes in gender structures in post-communist society against Connell's hegemonic masculinity/emphasized femininity and Messerschmidt structured-action theory. I will look at both changes in social constructions/representations of masculinities/femininities, i.e. normative gender identities, and changes of actual masculinities/femininities in post-communist society. The bases of these analyses will be Connell's (1987:183-88) notion of "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasized femininity" as the culturally idealized forms of gender in a given historical setting. These forms, as further elaborated by Messerschmidt (1995:173) are "culturally honored, glorified and extolled at the symbolic level in the mass media". "In Western industrialized societies", as stressed by the same author, "hegemonic masculinity is characterized by work in the paid labor market, the subordination of women and girls, heterosexism and the driven and uncontrollable sexuality of men, and underscores practices toward authority, control and aggressiveness". Emphasized femininity is a form that complements hegemonic masculinity and is defined by Connell through compliance with men's desire for titillation and ego stroking and acceptance of marriage and childcare, and on mass level is "organized around the themes of sexual receptivity in relation to younger women and motherhood in relation to older women" (Connell, 1987:187).

My analysis of changes of gender role identities in post-communist society will be focused on changes of three specific social structures, which, according to Messerschmidt, underlie relations between women and men: gender division of labor, gender relations of power and sexuality (Messerschmidt, 1995:172). For exploring both normative and actual masculinities/femininities, I use my own and

other survey findings. My survey findings on normative gender identities include those resulting from interviews as well as from content analysis of media representation of women. On the other side, the analysis of actual masculinities /femininities is based exclusively on the part of my survey which was based on interviews (with professionals, women's group activists, etc., as well as with women and men from the general population).

2. GENDER IDENTITIES IN PUBLIC REPRESENTATION/DISCOURSE ABOUT WOMEN AND MEN

As Messerschmidt (1997:10) puts it, "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasized femininity" are neither transhistorical nor transcultural, but vary from society to society, and change within a particular society over time. In any specific time and place, then, hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are culturally honored and extolled at the symbolic level (e.g. mass media) and are constructed in relation to subordinated masculinities and femininities (based on race, class, and sexual preferences, for example), to oppositional masculinities and femininities, and to each other. "Hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity", stresses Messerschmidt, "are the dominant forms of gender to which other types of masculinity and femininity are subordinated or opposed, not eliminated, and each provides the primary basis for relationships among men and women" (Messerschmidt, 1997:10).

Consequently, if we want to understand changes in actual gender identities and how they affect relationships and contribute to violence in post-communist societies, it is necessary first to look at changes in presentations of masculinities and femininities, i.e. to identify presentations which were normative during communism as well as those which became normative in post-communist societies. In fact, there is an ordering of versions of masculinity and femininity at the level of the whole society, which creates people's expectations about themselves and about other people. As a result, actual gender identities are always shaped in relation to people's compliance/ rejection attitudes toward the normative, which tend to be "more skeletal and simplified than the human relationships in face-to-face milieu" (Connell, 1987:183). The most important presentations in that regard are those connected to gender division of labor and sexuality, which I explore in the text which follows

2.1 *Gender division of labor*

During communism, the most publicized images of gender roles in regard to the gender division of labor may be described as housewife and breadwinner/shared bread winning (shared wage system) rather than housewife/breadwinner arrangement (family wage system). In other words, it means that women were

expected to have two or three roles (paid work, housewife, mother), and men only one (paid work), which was also shared with the wife.

Images of masculinity seemed to have softened as a consequence of restrictions on the acting out of traditional masculine identity, while increasing the social significance of the feminine (Watson, 1992:145). Due to the absence of private property, politics and civil society, both women and men were neutralized as social actors. However, Watson (1992:142) is right when she notices that the neutering of men in the public domain was particularly emphasized, bearing in mind that they were expected to fit the position which was in obvious contrast with traditional expectations regarding their gender. In addition "the opportunities offered by civil society for the experience of 'success' were withheld from men under state socialism, while careers in the state-run public domain increasingly appeared to be devoid of value or sense." (Watson, 1992:142) Hence, men's role was rather passive, i.e. restricted in terms of both economic and political initiative in the outside world, or, as Blagojevic puts it, the male gender role became significantly "emptied", while male domination, unless it was based on physical strength and violence, got caricatured (Blagojevic, 1997:83). However, bearing in mind that, in spite of the formal equality of women and men and the fact that women obviously gained some advantages as well, patriarchy never disappeared, and conflicting images about both genders persisted throughout communist time. This was confirmed by my interviewees from all countries included in the survey, who agreed that it is difficult to notice any radical change in male identity since the macho culture was always very widespread in that part of the world.

State socialism, as Watson argues, provided a social context which acted to conserve patriarchy (Watson, 1992:144), which was already strongly embedded into the culture (Najcevska and Marinova, interviews, 1999). This also may mean, using Connell's terminology, that during communism traditional masculinity and femininity were subordinated to socialist masculinity/femininity. Having that in mind, it is not difficult to understand changes in public discourse, i.e. restoration of male dominance within it, which occurred after the establishment of a market economy and civil society.

Consequently, public images of women appeared as two conflicting images consisting of the image of New (Amazon) Woman (or superwoman, omnipotent woman) and the traditional image of woman as housewife and mother (Kotzeva, 1999a:85)

One the one hand, as Kotzeva (1999a:85) puts it, "the feminine vision of socialism is completely linked to the workplace and the public domain, owing to the mass-mobilization of women in state-run factories. The visual rhetoric of socialism is imbued with photographs of women, looking proudly from the seat of a tractor, a conveyer belt or other technical appliance, which is emblematic of the socialist progressive transformations and the human race's domination over nature...The visual space of the socialist society is inhabited by the new Amazons - they are labeled 'doers', 'fighters', 'functionaries', 'laborers', 'activists', and so on."

However, on the other hand, the traditional image about women as well as about men was never erased. Hence, women were equally expected to be good housekeepers and mothers. As pointed out by Bejkova, in Macedonia, for example,

"woman was superior in comparison to man, but the public image was still such that the husband is the one who is the main breadwinner, while women's earnings are only supplementary and her main role is one of housewife and mother (interview, 1999). On the other side, expectations toward men's share of household duties and caring were always weak and unarticulated publicly. As Kotzeva says, women are the best representatives of collective life and the collective values of socialism - "they are named 'national heroines' as mothers, toilers and social activists" (Kotzeva, 1999a:86). As such they were expected to sacrifice their own interests to the "higher" interests of the state and nation. However, as Watson well noticed, women's subjective sense of self-esteem was enhanced during communism, at first place because of the pivotal role of the family, where the partners are economically independent, which simultaneously underlines the central importance of women's work, and thereby, adds to women's sense of self-worth. "It is the family, the domain of women," says Watson, "which becomes of crucial political and economic importance", which is in radical contrast to the status of the family in the civil society of liberal democracies (Watson, 1992:140). Thus, as we will see later, the problem that women faced during transition was connected exactly to the loss of self-esteem as a consequence of the loss of economic independence.

Many authors argue that after political changes public presentations of gender changed as well. Since traditional gender roles and power relations were accepted as "given" and "natural", whereas women's equality was identified as "forced" and "unnatural", re-traditionalisation and "renaturalization" of gender roles is something which started to be largely publicized as desirable. It seems that the focus started to be put on the fact (whether true or not) that "values like 'equality of women' and 'all around personal fulfillment of women' were not internalized and remained foreign to the 'socialist' lifework...The traditional family pattern - the breadwinner/housewife arrangement, which was to a certain degree eroded under communism though never seriously challenged - is reinforced". (Petrova, 1993:23, 27).

As Kotzeva (1999a: 88) stressed, referring specifically to the situation in Bulgaria, two discourses contributed to the trend toward re-creation of a traditional image of women in post-communist society: "return to the home" and/or "motherhood" discourse and "westernisation" and "normalization" discourse. "Return to the home" and "motherhood" discourse is expressed implicitly rather than explicitly and occurred alongside the rise of traditional (hegemonic) masculinity images. Both occurred as a consequence of market economy and liberal democracy, as well as under influence of nationalism and militarization of the society in some post-communist countries, such as Serbia.

"It is obvious that the development of a market economy and privatization encouraged the macho character of (post-communist society's) men", said Maria Adamik from Hungary (interview, 1999). "This kind of very clear ideology supported the idea that men have to be strong, that they have to have power and be dominant, that they have to cope with their enemies and have to defeat them - whether it is an advertisement for a car or money, the message is clear: you have to win". This support, what Watson already stressed, that the new gender relations are shaped by liberal democracy and market economy based on private property, which essentially entails the

(re) structuring of opportunities and the creation of institutionalization of hierarchy based on market advantage. "Traditional ideas concerning difference, including gender difference, are playing a key role in shaping such exclusionary advantage in the new public sphere" (Watson, 1996:217). Thus, in (neo) liberal capitalism (which elements, together with the remaining elements of communism, post communist societies obviously have) "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasized femininity" became associated with being a good provider and a full-time mother/housewife.

Social construction of masculinity is especially important since femininity (as all other masculinities) is subordinated to hegemonic masculinity. Thus masculine domination of the gender division of labor in both Western liberal democracies and post-communist societies is expressed, as Adamik noticed so well, as pressure on men to be "a good provider, to win, to succeed, to dominate" - since they are (should be!) breadwinners (Messerschmidt, 1993:67). Additionally, there is an impact of global capitalism or neoliberalism, which, as well noticed by Connell (2001:64), has an implicit gender politics:

"The 'individual' of neoliberal theory has in general the attributes and interests of a male entrepreneur, the attack on the welfare state generally weakens the position of women, while the increasingly unregulated power of transnational corporations places strategic power in the hands of particular groups of men. It is not surprising, then, that the installation of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has been accompanied by reassertion of dominating masculinities and, in some situations, a sharp worsening in the social position of women".

"Return to the home" and "motherhood" discourse was especially evident in media coverage and campaigns regarding restriction of reproductive rights (Watson, 1996:221; Einhorn, 1993:40; Daskalova, 2001:247; Toth, 1993:214; Milic, 1993:112) and domestic violence (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2001:291; Corrin, 1999:73) but also, and sometimes more explicitly, in public discussions about (un) employment and importance of the family.⁶¹ Similarly as in Western society (Messerschmidt, 1993:66), the "familiar" accusation that the high divorce rate, juvenile delinquency and alcoholism can be directly attributed to women's absence from the family, is used in post-communist society as well. It seems that the role of woman as mother as well as self-sacrifice of woman for collective aims is central to the ideology of both communism and post-communism (Einhorn, 1993:40; Blagojevic, 1994:477). It is also central to the nationalism and war discourse in Serbia, as well as in other parts of the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 1996:360; Corrin, 1999:74; Millett, 1977:165; Moeller, 1993:5). However, in connection to the rise of the women's movement, new or emancipatory images of women emerge alongside traditional ones as well (Daskalova, 2001:246; Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2001:285). But these images are still not strong enough and are mainly subordinated to prevailing social constructions of traditional masculinity and femininity.

It is important to notice that traditional images/discourse re-creation is closely connected to the economic difficulties and unemployment problems in the society as a

⁶¹ H. Szilvia and P. Lajos "Szabadsag a rend keretei kozott" (Liberty among the framework of social order), *Nepszabadsag*, March 3, 1999, p.9

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