

Identity Politics and the (B)Orders of Heterosexism: Lesbians, Gays and Feminists in the Czech Media after 1989

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Introduction

It might come as a surprise to many in the Czech Republic that in Poland and Slovakia gays and lesbians openly associate with feminism, define themselves in the media as feminists and have a clear understanding of the roots and benefits of such association. And vice versa, feminists openly identify with gays and lesbians and promote their activities. Polish feminist scholar Agnieszka Graff recently argued in her article that “Polish feminism did not go through a homophobic stage: it joined a rainbow coalition without ever considering identity politics. The first public appearance of a rainbow flag in Poland occurred in a feminist demonstration in Warsaw” (Graff, 2003: 103). The first ever gay-march in Krakow in May 2004 took place as a cooperative activity of *Campaign Against Homophobia* and the Krakow feminist organization *Efka*. Similarly in Slovakia, feminists, gays and lesbians seem to cooperate openly and consciously. For example, Jana Cviková, the editor-in-chief of the feminist non-profit organization *Aspekt*, notes that lesbianism and support of lesbians was an inseparable dimension of *Aspekt* from its very inception. Already in 1996, *Aspekt* published one issue of their journal entirely dedicated to questions of lesbianism and homosexuality called *Lesbian Existence (Lesbická existencia)* (*Aspekt*, 1996/1). By 2004, there were other seven books solely about lesbians, homosexuality and homophobia published in collaboration between feminist and gay and lesbian organizations and publishing houses (see for example Ondrisová et al, 2002; Jójárt, Šípořová and Daučiková, et al. 2002; Bass and Kaufman, 2003; Hacker, 2004; Cviková and Juráňová, 2003; and others). Slovak lesbian activist Hana Fábry even argued on Czech TV that “the connection between lesbians and feminism is a matter of course for me because the themes and argumentation, which feminism brings, is exceptionally important for lesbians. Feminism and lesbianism unquestionably belong together. Lesbian feminism or feminist lesbians, depends on how you look at it, can be even more useful because it can be more radical than feminism articulated by heterosexual women” (*LeGaTo*, 10/4 2004). Similarly, Slovak gay activist Ivan Pořgai noted in the same documentary about the gay and lesbian community in Slovakia that “if somebody or something gives gays philosophical impulses and argumentative inputs, then it is definitely feminism.” According to him, “feminism is something which intellectually feeds also the gay movement, not only the lesbian one” (*LeGaTo*, 10/4 2004).

The surprise might be not so much about the fact that this cooperation works in Poland and Slovakia because the Catholic Church has created a similarly hostile environment for all issues challenging conservative public discourses in both countries. Moreover, the fundamental threat to a woman’s right to choose and having control over her body has brought *all* women, and many men, in both countries together in a way, which has not yet been necessary in the Czech Republic. The information might be surprising because in the Czech Republic there seems to be no such organic and visible connection and cooperation between gays, lesbians and feminists. Czech feminist activists and scholars, visible and active in so-called “gender debates” surrounding gender equality on the job market, representation of women in politics, and the transformation of the family or reproductive rights are, for the most part, not vocal and visible in media debates concerning gays

and lesbians, such as the Registered Partnership Law, Anti-discrimination Law or struggle against homophobia, even though those are all issues inextricably linked together. Most well-known and cited “gender” volumes and studies of the 1990s include *no* articles concerned with homosexuality, gays and lesbians. For example, the *Czech Sociological Review* (7/1999), with the subtitle “Special issue on The Position of Czech Women in the Society of the 1990s in the Spectrum of Research”, reflects the reality that lesbian women have not been a part of Czech sociological research on women and gender. Likewise, other important works remain silent on inclusion of homosexuality in the topic of gender: a special issue on gender and feminism of *The Philosophical Journal (Filozofický časopis)* (5/1992) or a 30-essay volume on *Feminism of the 90s Through Czech Eyes (Feminismus devadesátých let českýma očima)* (Chřibková, Chuchma and Klimentová, eds. 1999) or the first edited volume on gender studies *Gender Aspects of Society of Women and Men (Společnost žen a mužů z aspektu gender)* (Věšínová-Kalivodová, ed. 1999) or a volume called *Transformation of Contemporary Czech Family (Proměny současné české rodiny)* (Maříková, ed. 2000) – none of them include a single essay or chapter devoted to gays and lesbians. Czech gays and lesbians, for their part, are equally reluctant to associate themselves with feminism or anything seemingly feminist (for example Stehlíková, Procházka and Hromada 1995; Jánošová, 2000; Baršová, 2000; Fanel, 2000; Procházka, Janík and Hromada, 2003; Valášek, ed. 2003).

Unlike in Poland or Slovakia, in the Czech Republic there is a significant gap between issues of “women/gender” and “homosexuality/homophobia.” They are understood and articulated as two separate topics that activists and scholars rarely bring together in one transcending and overlapping problem of hetero-sexism in Czech society. Of course, there are a few notable exceptions, but they seem to only underscore the general sense of gap and lack of understanding (for example Barša, ed. 2000; Šmausová, 2000 and 2004; Sokolová, 2003/a and 2004; Nedbálková 2002; Linková 2001; Vodrážka 2001). Both gays and lesbians on the one hand and feminists on the other hand tend to apply narrow identity politics of “gays/lesbians” or “feminists” as their main strategy in support of “their” causes. Clearly, both groups feel that they have something to lose by widening their self-presentation to include feminist politics on the one hand and gay/lesbian politics on the other. As a result, both discourses lose half their argumentative and political potential for productive critique and meaningful change in the way our society works and thinks. It is impossible to fight against sexism without reflecting and challenging homophobia and vice-versa it is impossible to fight against homophobia without understanding and analyzing the gendered foundations of social marginalization and exclusion.

The reason for this separation, inability to work together and incapability to realize the potential of mutual understanding, I will argue, can be to a large degree found in the way Czech media has handled and treated debates on homosexuality and feminism in the last fifteen years since the collapse of communism. During this time, both gays and lesbians and feminists had to fight for and prove their worthiness as legitimate and serious subjects. Both topics went through early stages of virulent anti-feminism and homophobia in the early 1990s, especially in Czech tabloid media (*bulvár*), which were only slowly replaced by more serious and balanced discussions. From my analysis it seems evident that over this period of time the media discourse has, either skillfully or unwittingly, pitted feminists and gays and lesbians against each other. The discourse on gender and feminism has been characterized by strong heterosexist undertones. The discourse on homosexuality, on the other hand, has had a distinct anti-feminist character. In other words, heterosexism and anti-feminism have been integral parts and one of the defining characteristics of Czech media discourse after 1989. The most important consequence of the anti-feminist sentiments which accompanied media discussions for most of the 1990s has been not the (already criticized) inability of gay and lesbian discourse to effectively apply gender critique into their arguments against homophobia, but their unwillingness and fear to use gender and feminist arguments and rhetoric. In doing so, gay and lesbian discourse has been mostly resigned to defensive and reactive positions. As the identities of feminists and homosexuals have been stigmatized, both discourses

have had the tendency to articulate their own legitimacy through the exclusion, ignorance or silencing the other.

The following article maps out and explores the interconnections and mutual influence of anti-feminist and heterosexist dimensions of media discourse since 1989. This aspect, I argue, has had a lasting influence on the ability and willingness of the Czech gay and lesbian movement to adopt gender and feminist analysis and rhetoric into their self-presentation. In order to gain legitimacy in an environment with anti-feminist bias, the gay and lesbian movement has learned to purposefully distance itself from gender rhetoric and themes that might be labeled as “women’s” or “feminist” concerns. This tendency has helped to perpetuate the gap between the gay and lesbian communities, which was bridged only by a mutual decision not to discuss in public certain topics that the gay and lesbian communities do not agree on. These topics include primarily the theme of family and children, which lesbian women more often than not have wanted to bring into the discussion. However, in order to articulate such concerns, gay and lesbian representatives would have to openly use gender argumentation, which they are still reluctant to do with the reference that Czech society is not yet ready for it.

Description of the Material and Methodology Used and Analyzed in This Study

This study is based on a sample of 587 texts, published over the period of thirteen years, from 1991 to 2004. I used several sources to put together this collection. For the national dailies and weeklies I used available full-text databases: the Newton IT database for *MF Dnes* (1996 to present, monitoring 1993-1995), the web archives of *Respekt* (1990 to present), *Lidové noviny* (2000-2004), and *Právo*. This collection was verified and completed through a research of the media monitoring collection in the archive of the Gender Studies Library in Prague, which consists of newspaper and magazine clippings, collected by manual press monitoring of the main Czech dailies and weeklies from 1990 to 2004. The Gender Studies monitoring archive also includes articles from other national and regional papers and magazines (*Hospodářské noviny*, *Týden*, *Reflex*, *Koktejl*, *Mosty*, etc), which have dealt with issues of homosexuality. That collection is incomplete and somewhat random. It is reasonable to presume, however, that the analyzed collection represents at least ninety percent of all texts published in the printed media about homosexuality in the Czech Republic from the 1990s to the present. (The analyzed sample does not include tabloid media. Tabloid, even though it is responsible for the general atmosphere and tone of media discourse, is by definition concerned with scandalous, insulting and sensational reporting. Analysis of such material would not produce any new insights beyond what is already known about the interpretative potential of tabloid.)

In my search I checked articles that directly or by association touch upon the themes of homosexuality, gays, lesbians, homophobia, and registered partnership. In other words, the main criterion of selection was the subject of the article, which in some significant ways had to deal with the political, cultural or social dimensions of homosexuality. For the purposes of this essay, I did not include self-representative data from gay and lesbian magazines and papers published irregularly throughout the 1990s. Those periodicals did not have a standard media distribution and thus were available only in very specific places, such as gay and lesbian bars, meeting places, festivals, gender studies libraries and organizations. As such, they do not fit into the sample of mainstream media discourse that I have analyzed in this particular article.

Methodologically, this paper is based on critical discourse analysis, which is by definition mainly interpretive and qualitative, but exposes important systems and mechanisms of marginalization and oppression, enacted through language construction and usage (Fairclough 2002; Hardy and Phillips 2002; Jager 2002). The study explores the ways in which Czech media discourse has constructed the individual and collective subject of “homosexual,” “gay” and “lesbian” (as for example Kuhar (2003) has done for Slovenia), with a special emphasis on the

context of the anti-feminist bias characteristic of the media. As such, it points to ideological associations and power dynamics of the discourse, which are often oppressive and exclusionary, but stay invisible or implicit between the lines of the readily-available contents, and thus tend to remain overlooked and under-analyzed dimensions of the texts.

A few years ago, I published a study on representations of homosexuality in the Czech Republic before and after 1989 (Sokolová, 2001). At that time I argued that the persistent monopoly of sexologists, psychologists and psychiatrists, who have dominated discussions of homosexuality (and sexuality in general, for that matter) at the expense of qualified gender analysis by sociologists or historians cannot be explained only in terms of repressive political and social practices of the communist regime, but that we have to look for answers also in the particular context of virulent anti-feminism in which this discourse developed. The study also showed that the discourse has had three main characteristics of criminalization, medicalization, and sexualization of homosexuality, which together have historically shaped the abilities of Czech society to regard the gay and lesbian subject. The aspects of criminalization disappeared from the discourse long before the fall of Communism and I have not encountered any significant mentions of that in the current study. The medicalization of homosexuality has continuously decreased after 1993, when homosexuality was removed from the List of Diseases and when the discussion of AIDS lost its first urgency. References to homosexuality as an illness, which is possible to cure, still occasionally fill the pages of printed media, which sporadically creates space for presentation of such attitudes (for example Karas, 2004), but on the whole it has been on significant decline. The media now gives equal space to counter-arguments about the naturalness and inborn quality of homosexuality (For example Procházka, 2001). Sexualization of homosexuality, however, has remained an important dimension of the discourse on homosexuality.

In 1999, Jiří Hromada, the president of former Czech umbrella organization of homosexual activities *SOHO* and now of *Gay Initiative*, cheerfully exclaimed that the “gay community can be satisfied with the progress of media presentation. Media left the bulvar trend, which characterized the news about gays in the early 90s” (Hanáková, 1999:17). He saw the main proof in the fact that Czech TV has been broadcasting films with gay characters and various documentaries, which have educated the general public, and have changed the attitude of the printed media. A few months later, he even raised the bar of optimism when he announced that “in its attitude towards gays and lesbians Czech society belongs among the most tolerant in the world”(Fliedr, 1999:5). This study confirms his view that since the mid 1990s, the issue of homosexuality started to be re-conceptualized as a human rights issue. In 1994, the debate about the Registered Partnership has become without competition *the* issue, which ever since dominates the discourse on homosexuality in media. As a result, the media has published much more balanced reports on homosexuality. However, two defining features have always been and have remained characteristic of discussions of homosexuality, both of which are directly interconnected with the anti-feminist bias and sexism of the Czech media: 1. the overwhelming patriarchal character in the coverage of what is considered by the media to be “gay and lesbian issues” and 2. the ignorance or lack of critical understanding of gender dimensions within the discussion of homophobia and discrimination of gays and lesbians.

“What is feminism good for?”

This is the precise question I was asked last year from the president of the Gay Initiative Hromada after one of my public lectures about homophobia (Sokolová, 2003/b). “I really enjoyed your talk,” he continued, “but I don’t think that feminism has any use for “us”. He automatically included lesbians under the umbrella term of “us” as he swiftly denied that gender analysis and feminist critique could offer anything to “homosexuals”. In order to demonstrate his point, he asserted that lesbians have always had some influence within *SOHO* and the Gay Initiative, that for

a long time, a lesbian was even the vice-president of *SOHO*, that the journal *SOHO Revue* had a permanent “lesbian section,” and that when distributing financial resources, given from the government for “homosexual activities”, they (the gay men) have always given (some) money to lesbian activities. Of course, he did not understand that his enumeration exactly supported the points I was making about the patriarchal character and gender-blindness of the Czech gay and lesbian movement.

But his comment was significant also in another way. Without understanding the talk, as he admitted, he immediately adopted the common perception of feminism as aggressive by definition. “We don’t need radicalism, what we need most is the ability to compromise,” he continued in his comment. To him, the mere suggestion of feminist argumentation was both threatening and anti-male, which has the same negative implications no matter what context it is used in. The occasional reference in my talk to feminism, feminist theory or feminist critique was enough to raise a red flag of resistance, to distance himself and to speak out. As a seasoned and by far the most interviewed, mentioned and cited gay person in the history of Czech media, Hromada knows very well what helps and hurts in media presentation. (Out of the 587 articles, Hromada himself alone appears – comments, gives an interview, expresses personal or official views, is mentioned, consulted, or cited – all in all in 416, which is more than 70 percent of the entire coverage.)

The fact that even after 15 years of public activism, he does not see how feminist discourse or gender analysis could contribute to the fight for “homosexual rights”, symbolizes not only the lack of understanding of the gender dimensions of homosexual experience on the part of the gay representatives, but also the lack of communication and mutual interests between feminist and gay and lesbian discourses. His comments thus, I would argue, aptly demonstrate the damage, caused by more than ten years of ventilation of anti-feminist sentiments in our media, for the possibility of a productive application of gender critique and feminist analysis to the fight against homophobia and the discrimination of homosexuals.

One of the most visible lesbian activists throughout the 1990s, Věra Vampolová, complemented this point, when she recently explained on the regular Czech gay and lesbian monthly TV show called *LeGaTo* why she is no longer interested in being active and openly involved on the gay and lesbian scene:

The same themes repeat over and over. I am tired of it. I thought that after so many years we could move forward. ... All we talk about is coming-out and acceptance of the society, over and over we discuss whether to walk openly on the street or not to walk openly on the street, while abroad these questions have been surpassed a long time ago. Gays and lesbians normally walk on the street and show their sexual orientation, they have flags on their buildings and bars, simply they are open. Here, we are convinced that we have no enemies, we loll about how tolerant the media is ... how tolerant our society is, how open it is to gays and lesbians, but in fact we don’t know that because *we don’t confront the society in any way. We have to confront the majority society, even if it might be dangerous.*” (*LeGaTo*, 4/19 2004, italics mine.)

To confront the society means to be necessarily confrontational in some way. But that is precisely what gay and lesbian representatives are urging against. It is this allegedly rational, compromising stance that feminists like Vampolová seem to be tired of. Both, *Gay Initiative* and the *Gay and Lesbian League*, argue that to accomplish something, they have to be patient, calm, rational, compromising and above all, non-conflicting. They seem to hold the belief that in order to gain media and, thus, public support, they have to be careful about how they present themselves and

what arguments they use.¹ In other words, gay and lesbian representatives do not want to appear radical because our society and media do not like radical voices. That is a valuable lesson, I believe, that gay and lesbian representation has learned in the course of the 1990s through the unfavorable media discourse and coverage of feminism and feminists. They do not want to be radical and aggressive because feminists are radical and aggressive and nobody likes that.

The attacks on feminism and feminists, which the Czech media provided space for in the early 1990s, are legendary and covered elsewhere (For example Malečková 1995; Havelková a Vodrážka, eds. 1998, especially the essay by Šmejkalová; Oates-Indruchová 2002; Nash 2002). These studies, as was already mentioned, do not consider homophobic dimensions of this antifeminist discursive production. In order to exemplify the point about how anti-feminist sentiments have helped to shape resistance against and fear of lesbians, it might be worth to cite one example in full. In 1992, *Lidové noviny* offered an entire page to the well-known emigré Otto Ulč² to share with the readers his personal experience with lesbians in the United States, where he lived and taught at the university level. Under a large close-up picture of two absent-looking women with dark make-up one can read a provocative imperative “Kill Newborn Baby-Boys!” (*Zabíjejte novorozené chlapečky!*) The subtitle of the article “Unrest on the Lesbian Front” (*Neklid na lesbické frontě*) unmistakably sets a militaristic tone. Ulč explains that he had a student visitor from China, “where homosexuality is solved by a bullet into a head”. Ulč informed the ‘surprised’ student, that in the United States these people are not shot. “To the contrary”, he explained to the Chinese student and now sets to explain the same to the *LN* readers:

In American universities new fields exist, whole scientific departments focused on homosexuality. Once I thumbed through one such textbook and found out that it is about ladies’ masturbation. When I attended the New York Lesbian Congress, I expected an optimistic festival, a happy carnival of emancipated female hedonists. Big mistake. Instead, it was a bleak happening. The delegates were frowning, irritated, insulting and aggressive, suggesting injuries. Witnesses saw that the ladies not only raised clenched fists in a revolutionary greeting, but with two fingers they were making a scissors motion, cut, cut. Passer-by men, even owners of the most peaceful penises all ran away, in fear for their manhood. ... I saw various propaganda laying in every corner. I even took some home. Here is the content: Feminization of poverty in our town. Housework Horror. About the needs of lesbian students today. I read about the problems of lesbian sadomasochism. I read about an unhappy marriage between feminism and Marxism. In greatest detail I read about an event in Geneva, at one time home of Calvin, where once lesbians got together: sisters of various races, of proletarian origins, fighters for world peace and also handicapped lesbians. Many little sisters got their relaxation in the form of violent rage and super-hooliganism throughout the city, where so many humanistic accords were signed. They rampaged the city, vandalized statues and buildings by spraying them with slogans such as “kill men daily” and “kill newborn boys.” The delegates destroyed everything possible. In the literature you can also read that God was a woman. Neither poetry is absent. I would like to direct your attention especially to a poet named Zoe Geto, who sings sonnets about the magnetism of unwashed skin and bodily odor. The magazine ends by a proclamation: We, female

¹ In the spring of this year, for example, I was asked by the *Gay and Lesbian League* to help write a brief analysis and critique of homophobia for a CD, which *GLL* was making for the members of the media and the Czech Parliament. The expressed demand was that my piece “should not use any of that gender stuff or feminist rhetoric because people don’t like that and they seem threatened by it.”

² Until this day there is a dispute as to whether the most offensive sexist arguments about sexual harassment were made by Josef Škvorecký, the famous exile writer or Ulč.

slaves, let's rise! Let's tear shackles of slavery! Let's rise! Let's rise!" My guest, the Chinese student, only shrugged his shoulders "You have strange concerns here." (Ulč, 1992:3).

This essay brings back to life all insults and mocking hurled against feminists in articles of dissident intellectuals and emigrants in the early 1990s, who warned then Czechoslovakia against crazy radical man-haters ready to invade our society and poison our fragile democracy through the dangerous ideology of feminism. Ulč simply recycles the same sexist and anti-feminist rambling, only this time he used it against lesbians. In this long article, it is possible to clearly see at work inter-discursive techniques of the anti-feminist construction of a stigmatized subject. First, the article presents a bleak vision of the world without men, which these women are thought to want. It is important to impress upon the reader that feminism is an anti-male activity, which is characterized by complete separation of men and women, and which will be accomplished only through radical and above all violent genocide. Second, Ulč uses the contradictory rhetorical strategy of threat and trivialization: on the one hand, lesbians are dangerous, big women who destroy everything in sight, on the other hand, they are ridiculous and not worth our attention, little sisters with little fists. Third, he uses the Chinese student through whom we are told that "lesbian (as much as feminist) problems" are not significant because we have more important things to worry about. Lesbianism, like feminism, is a luxury that women engage in when they are bored or get seduced by "pseudo-intellectual" academic activities. Importantly, it is an external imposition, which originates elsewhere. Fourth, he tries to delegitimize any serious or intellectual dimensions of gender or gay and lesbian studies, even though it is clear that he has a very limited understanding of it. Fifth, Ulč promotes the notion that a "real" woman is cute, nice-smelling and takes care of her beauty image by references to alleged lesbian aesthetic, which worships unwashed, sweaty and neglected bodies. And six, most significant at the time, of course, is the association of feminism as a pro-longed arm of Marxism, a message that certainly did not fall on deaf ears a few years after the collapse of communism. Articles such as these have created an important and lethal negative connection between feminism and lesbianism.

The nearly identical discursive constructions about lesbians that Ulč created in 1992 can also be seen in articles by Škvorecký and Vaculík from the early 1990s, as well as in a recent article by the well-known philosopher Milan Machovec, who argues that "Feminism is not a Linguistic Problem" (*Femismus nebyl a není problém jazykový*) (Machovec, 2000:6). Moreover, as with homosexuality, these authors often argue that they are actually feminists. They "like women," "have nothing against feminism," they are even "trying to help feminism." In other words, feminism itself is not problematic. It has only been hijacked by the wrong crowd. These tactics were exposed and analyzed by feminist scholars and activists as antifeminist and sexist, harming "women" (See especially critiques by linguist Jana Valdová, for example 1997 and 2001). However, because of the heterosexist nature of the feminist discourse itself and the lack of interconnected critique of antifeminism and homophobia, there has not been the same attention paid to the ways in which these same mechanisms have been applied to lesbians and gay men. To the contrary, similarly negative connotations between feminism and lesbians are present even in articles, which defend feminism as a viable world view as, for example, in an interview with writer Iva Pekárková, who argued that

The feminist movement has been fragmented for a long time and nobody understands what it actually means. ... One of my friends considers herself to be a feminist, which means that she takes care of her husband and children and feels equally valuable as her man. A feminist attitude to her means to raise well her children and pass on to them a woman's view of the world. Another feminist, Andrea Dworkin, looks like a big piece of furniture and has a beard. You know,

some lesbians grow beards in order to recognize each other and say that every heterosexual relationship is rape of a woman. (Pekárková, 1998:6).

Pekárková seems to be defending a feminist identity as an attitude that does not threaten traditional gender division of labor and patriarchal order of society, only introduces into it the value of a “woman’s view.” However, what allows her to create a peaceful, domestic and complementary vision of feminism is its juxtaposition with an unappealing vision of lesbian feminism, which pathologizes heterosexual relationship as a generally rejected form of violence. In other words, the legitimacy of feminism is built here on a negative representation and rejection of lesbianism.

Gay and lesbian representatives thus try to avoid topics that might sound like radical issues and could create suspicion. They argue that they do not want to confront, they want to compromise. But in order to compromise, however, they have to sacrifice something. Not surprisingly, the aspects, which seem to be consistently sacrificed on the altar of legitimacy and are pushed to the back burner in the media discourse on homosexuality, are issues with potential feminist undertones, which threaten with their negative associations between feminism and gay and lesbian rights.

Who are “we”? The Patriarchal Nature of Gay and Lesbian Discourse

In the mid 1990s, journalist Alena Plavcová claimed that “more than half of the Czech population says that they are not aware of ever meeting a homosexual or a lesbian.” To make the point clearer to her readers, she added that “they themselves prefer the term gay, besides other reasons also because this term also refers to lesbian women.” (Plavcová, 1995:2). As already mentioned, Hromada himself supplies over seventy percent of all coverage of homosexuality in the Czech media.³ But he is not alone. The other thirty percent is for the most part filled with other gay men. Lesbians as authors or sole subjects of articles appear in less than eight percent of all texts. Moreover, the term *homosexuálové* refers collectively to women and men. However, it is not uncommon to see the tandem *homosexuálové a lesbičky*, which then, when the term *homosexuálové* appears alone, gives the more immanent connotation of gay men only. For example, a title of one article in *MF Dnes* exclaimed that “lesbians worked on their self-confidence, but space ... was open even to homosexuals and feminist women” (Kostlán, 2001:4). On the one hand, homosexuals are thus presented only as men and, on the other hand, lesbian women are by definition not feminists (which in many cases works to their advantage). The perhaps best-known Czech feminist Jiřina Šiklová supported the author’s perception by further arguing that “lesbians and homosexuals don’t think only about sex.” Moreover, even though she is most noted for her feminist views, in answering why she is present at a lesbian event she did not connect feminist concerns and the fight against homophobia together at all. She simply said that “[lesbian] events, like this, help the plurality of open society. That’s why I support lesbians, even though I am not a lesbian myself” (Šiklová in Kostlán, 2001:4). The patriarchal character of the discourse, on the one hand, certainly reflects the inner structure of gay and lesbian movement itself, but, on the other hand, also fits within the gender bias of the Czech media in general.

Such context also sets the tone for the presentation of “our” issues. As already discussed, topics, which would create grudges or invite dangerous attacks are brushed aside by gay representatives, mainly Hromada, who assume the powerful “we” as a rhetorical strategy of

³ It is not that Hromada would be the only person active in the gay and lesbian movement. I would argue that the representational monopoly he has reflects a tendency of the Czech media to recycle the same names and “authorities”, especially in areas, in which the media is not too educated. The same trend we have witnessed for years with questions connected to feminism, when Jiřina Šiklová was asked over and over to comment on anything connected to “women” and “feminism,” no matter what the area or issue and at times, when Šiklová was no longer actively involved in projects and research agendas carried out by either various NGOs or academia.

exclusion. There are issues that seem to be more important to lesbian women than to gay men, such as parental rights and family stereotypes, or more open and assertive pressure placed on both media and political representatives or greater visibility of lesbian women. The fact that they might be perceived as “women’s” issues only works to their disadvantage, because the label of feminism could be more readily applied and thus discredit gay and lesbian activities. In 1999, *MF Dnes* reported that “The representatives of lesbian organizations are convinced that homosexual couples should have the same possibility to raise children as heterosexual couples ... These women consider the main discrimination in the Czech Republic the fact that they cannot enter into regular marriage and openly raise children” (“Lesbické ženy připravují již pátý ročník festivalu Apriles,” 1999:2). To that, in his chapter about the state of homosexual rights in the Czech Republic for the Czech Helsinki Human Rights Committee, Hromada countered that “it is completely irresponsible to impose on the public that the Registered Partnership is or could be an alternative marriage. The proposed law ... did not place a legitimate relationship between two people of the same sex on the same level as marriage because it could not do so. By marriage *we* understand man, woman and children, for whom it [such a unit] creates the most appropriate environment for coexistence and upbringing of children.” (Hromada 1999:2).⁴ Clearly, at least some lesbian women have had quite a different view from Hromada and expressed it publically. Nonetheless, Hromada silenced this view when speaking from the patriarchal *we* position on behalf of all homosexuals in the Czech Republic.

A year later, in a report from the *Apriles* Festival of Lesbian and Women’s Culture, a headline in *LN* announced that “Lesbian Women Demand Equal Rights” (*Lesbické ženy požadují rovná práva*) and continued that “lesbian activists want to open again a discussion about raising children by homosexual couples” (“Lesbické ženy požadují rovná práva,” 2000:7). To this Hromada replied directly: “I am happy that new initiatives are coming, it is brave.” In one breath, however, he reprimanded lesbians and their initiative as “too aggressive” and reinforced his own position that “adoptions and the upbringing of children has never been, is not and will not be a part of the Registered Partnership law” (“Lesbické ženy požadují rovná práva,” 2000:7). It is significant that Hromada and other gay representatives are so afraid of lesbian women’s claims, which are not in line with their own views and moreover speak from a position that challenges traditional gender stereotypes. In the media gay representatives themselves often use rhetorical strategies that reinforce both stereotypes about natural womanhood and fears of potential threats to the gender division of labor and roles within the family, as well as stereotypical characteristics biologically tied to each sex. “For *us* it is sacred (*pro nás je svaté*) that the family consists of a father, mother and a child,” Hromada claimed elsewhere (“Registrované partnerství nikomu neublíží,” 1998:7).

In such encounters, lesbian women are relegated to a fraction or subsection of the homosexual community, which is entitled to express its view, but that view is not a legitimate voice in itself because it is not in accordance with the position of the “*we*.” Challenges to traditional notions of family, however, are by no means a taboo issue in the Czech media. To the contrary, in the last few years, articles critiquing gender stereotypes and expectations in family and parenthood relations have been common in all main Czech dailies. It is clear, however, that critiques of the traditional model of the family are legitimate only when they come from heterosexual positions. Gays and lesbians simply cannot dare to question family values because when they do, they open a floodgate of homophobic reactions that threaten the fragile discussions about the Registered Partnership. The best and most visible example of this trend is the media coverage of attitudes and

⁴ In the title of this article, Hromada himself used the phrase “Registered Partnership: A Step Toward a Real Equality of the *Gay* Minority” (Italics mine). Obviously, to Hromada the term *gay* truly is an umbrella term for both gay men and lesbian women (as is also demonstrated from the title of his new organization *Gay Initiative*). Given Hromada’s general lack of understanding of gender analysis, I would argue, this usage corresponds with his inability (rather than unwillingness) to see the patriarchal and gendered significance of his argumentation. What prevents him from learning more about it, however, is a different issue.

statements of Czech politicians related to the discussions about the Registered Partnership (especially between 1996-2000), which more often than not go uncommented and unreflected in the Czech press. Arguments, such as “I don’t want to live to see the day when two men explain to their son who is the mom” by Vlastimil Tlustý (“Registrované partnerství prochází sněmovnou”, 2001:5) or “it would be perverse and civilizationally decadent to allow that one [gender] role is erased” by Marek Benda (Bartoniček, 1998:6), demonstrate that homosexuality is allegedly tolerated only when it does not aspire to question gender stereotypes too openly and consistently. *Gay and Lesbian League* and *Gay Initiative* have become well-disciplined by these reactions, and seem to have set “women’s” issues aside indefinitely. Feminist and gender scholars and activists, for their part, have not helped gays and lesbians in the media at all by systematically pointing out that discrimination of women and homophobia work hand in hand.

It is also significant that in her one media article, in which Tereza Kodíčková, the spokeswoman of the *Gay and Lesbian League*, used feminist argumentation to support her points about the legitimacy of public display of “gay men in peacock feathers and tight tank tops,” she defined herself as a private person, as a “translator and a feminist.” She made it clear that she was not speaking as a representative of the *GLL*, but from a strictly personal point of view. As a feminist, she distanced herself from the *Gay and Lesbian League*, probably in order not to harm its interests by making a dangerous association. On the other hand, as a private person, she felt free to use the definition as a feminist without any qualms (Kodíčková, 2004:1 and 12). Interestingly, in other statements, in which she is defined as a “spokesperson of the *GLL*”, she so far has not openly used the identity of a feminist. In other words, the identities of being a spokesperson of the *GLL* and of being a feminist, for some reason, do not go together.

Unreflected Sexism as a Meeting Ground in the Discourse on Homosexuality

“From a certain point of view I am actually an ideal prototype of a gay. I was raised only by my mother. I practically never saw my father.” (“Jsem občan Jiří Hromada,” 1991:9). This voluntary proclamation of Hromada in 1991 shows that being a publicly active and aware gay does not automatically prevent one from holding gender stereotypical views, which feed homophobia and heterosexism. Hromada never forgets to emphasize that homosexuality is a natural disposition and inborn quality. He also directly correlates being an “ideal prototype of a gay” with being raised by a single mother. A few years later, *Magazín Dnes* chose a similar revelation into a highlighted introduction of Hromada: “I have always been only with my mother. I don’t claim that it is typical for all gays, but it is most often that way” (Neff and Pavlová, 1993:9-11). What his, perhaps harmlessly and well-meant, comments imply is that an “ideal” or average gay grows up in a feminized environment, characterized by an absent or dysfunctional father.

Sexologist Antonín Brzek contributed as an expert to this debate in *Lidové noviny* that “the mother plays the greatest role in the creation of the sexual orientation of a child. If the mother is confused about her own orientation, there is a great chance that her child will be homosexual.” He does not explain at all why (if homosexuality would be indeed a learned behavior) only a mother’s confusion over her orientation should have an influence on the sexual orientation of a child. A few sentences later he explains that “a person is not guilty for his or her attraction to the same sex. His (or her) orientation is formed by the age of three” (Brzek, 1998:14). Even from this explanation it is still not clear how exactly a mother’s confusion about her sexual orientation can influence a two-year-old and why the influence of the father is irrelevant. What seems to be suggested, however, is the almost magical influence and natural connection between a mother and a baby which men simply cannot possess.

In a seemingly unconnected article about the decreasing age of young criminals, the leader of the non-profit organization *In the Name of Fathers’ Rights (Za práva otců)* claims that homosexuality “is caused by the fact that too many children end up in the mother’s custody after a

divorce. Women are not capable of disciplining their children, especially their sons. A child needs the strong hand of a father” (“A co práva otců?,” 2004:3). This view is by no means new, even though it is gaining strength and visibility in the Czech media. In 1998, parliamentary representative Andrej Gjurič argued in his contribution to the Registered Partnership debates that “I can imagine many more destructive influences for the institution of family than Registered Partnership. ... It is the increase of single motherhood and the rise of monoparental, mother-only families. It is the increase of the significant weakening of the father role” (“Poslanci zvažují, co s homosexuály,” *MF Dnes*, 3/27 1998:4). In other words, Gjurič’s implicit tolerance toward homosexuality, once again, rests on his sexist interpretations of problematic motherhood which is most often connected with feminist thinking and activities.

What connects the logic of these claims is a tendency to problematize the mother’s parental abilities and idolize the father’s parental competencies in raising “proper” citizens. All these accounts point to the problematic position of a woman as either a sole parent or, indirectly, two women as lesbian parents, who have a tendency to raise either gays or criminals. Such gender stereotypes, produced regularly over the course of fifteen years, have had a certain influence on the public perception of proper gender roles and social positions of men and women in society, whether they be homosexual or heterosexual. Pekárková legitimizes feminism on the back of her negative depictions of lesbianism, while Gjurič supports the legitimacy of homosexuality through the negative representation of women as competent mothers. In either case, instead of working together, feminist and anti-homophobic arguments in Czech media discourse work against each other.

However, it is not only the realm of parenthood and child-rearing where “natural” gender expectations decorate the discourse on homosexuality. When asked in a full-page interview: “What about women?”, theater director Zdeněk Potužil, who is an open gay, ventured into the following answer:

Well, it is individual. But I know one very active homosexual, who once a year gets a woman deficit (*absták na ženskou*). He finds one somewhere, hammers it into her all night and then he is done for several months again. You know, the domination that a man can experience over a woman is never quite possible with a man. It is a completely different type of excitement. (Žantovská, 1998:5).

Appearing in the media without a single follow-up comment or discussion, his view became legitimized as “this is how things are.” “Hammering it” into a woman is an exciting act precisely because of the “natural” domination that a man can exert over a woman. Even if one is gay, at least sometimes it is important (for any man) to get a dosage of that exciting domination and a woman seems to be the “natural” object for that urge. Sexist rhetoric and logic flow seamlessly under the surface of the main topics discussed in this otherwise well-balanced and non-homophobic article, demonstrating that homophobia and sexism are not yet seen in the Czech media as two sides of the same coin.

In an article titled “A Homosexual is Not an Animal,” publicist Ondřej Neff and Hromada, ventured into the following discussion about homosexual teachers:

Neff: “Sexual harassment committed by a heterosexual teacher is less dangerous than when committed by a homosexual teacher.”

Hromada: “So if a teacher seduces a 16-year-old girl, it’s ok, but if he seduces a boy, he should go to a prison?”

Neff: “Don’t use the prison argument! On principle a teacher should not abuse his position. But there is a big difference in it [in the committed sexual harassment]. If it happens to a girl, then it is only something that a

woman is already predetermined for by nature. I know it sounds rough, but the truth is that nothing harmful happens to her. ... But if a boy is initiated into a sexual life by a man, it will damage him for the rest of his life.” (Neff and Pavlová, 1993:9-11.)

Neff alibistically argues that sexual harassment is wrong and unacceptable, but somehow it is only a matter of degree in the otherwise natural biological determination of a woman. Clearly, the most damaging aspect of such encounters is not the nature of the act itself, but the sexual behavior involved. Heterosexual sexual harassment is of a different nature – and less dangerous than homosexual sexual harassment – because it happens within the confines of a heterosexual relationship, read as domination of a man over a woman. Both Neff and Potužil, a heterosexual and a gay, seem to be in unison about the naturalness and pleasures of male domination over a woman. Not surprisingly then, Neff’s discussion involves only male teachers, who push their active sexuality onto passive girls (even though the majority of middle and high school teachers in the Czech Republic are women). Moreover, Neff is claiming to protect the emotional and sexual well-being of the harassed boy only at the expense of the harassed girl’s “natural” experience (because it is a heterosexual experience) and by rejecting homosexuality as a legitimate sexual or emotional behavior. Of course, he does not even consider the possibility that the harassed girl could be a lesbian, and what consequences such a “twist” would have for his argument about “damages for life.”

In 1999, a well-respected writer, self-described lover of women and outspoken antifeminist Ludvík Vaculík argued in an essay entitled “Between Us Boys” (*Mezi námi kluky*) that

“when I was young, sex was a personal matter. We knew that there are some homosexuals, but we didn’t say anything to them and they didn’t talk about it with us. I don’t mind homosexuality, I just don’t like that it is being talked about so much. At the end we might even live to see that women will start a public debate about who should be on the top! ... Normal people live in a marriage or non-marriage and those innocent wretched men, who are not for that, simply live differently. ... However, what I can completely understand is homosexuality among women, that they can be so attracted to one another, since we men are attracted to women as well” (Vaculík, 1999:16).

Vaculík blends sexism and homophobia together in such a seamless way that it is clear how much they are built on and feed on each other. Active sexual behavior of a heterosexual woman falls into the same category of impropriety as publicly expressed homosexuality. However, Vaculík does not forget to stress that he does not mind homosexuality. It may not come as a surprise that this view is expressed in the majority of homophobic views.

Using traditional gender order as a soap box seems to be the most frequently used rhetorical strategy by the opponents of gay and lesbian emancipation, detected in the Czech media through the 1990s. An illustrative example is the view of Ladislav Jakl, a personal adviser to the former chairman of the Czech conservative party *ODS* and current Czech President Václav Klaus, who argued that “our Western Judeo-Christian tradition introduced the family as a bearer of legal subjectivity. And for its definition it chose a heterosexual, monogamous unit. One of the reasons for it being the biological ability of reproduction – sexual organs to a certain degree gain their full maturity only in a couple. The question is not a question of tolerance and minority. The question is: is it necessary to make homosexual relationships a matter of the state? Do homosexual partners need the state to make their bond real? And moreover – do we need the state for love, faithfulness and care for the family?” (Jakl, 1996:12). To Jakl, the Registered Partnership is unacceptable because homosexuality (unlike heterosexuality) is a fully private matter into which one should not

pull the state. And, perhaps even more outrageously, by the nature of their sexual encounter gays and lesbians are basically not fully mature biological beings (unless they sexually matured in some heterosexual couple). Once again, what underlines his arguments is the rigid notion of gender as a biologically inevitably heterosexual binary, which has been equally often used as much against gays and lesbians as against heterosexual women. It is this type of seemingly logical argumentation about natural gender differences and the order of things that has created the buffer zone against meaningful feminist interventions into public discourse and productive alliances between discourses on gender equality and against homophobia.

Sexist accounts, built on biological determinism, are an integral part of the Czech discourse on homosexuality. These notions are based on two classic, yet contradictory gender stereotypes. Men (unless they are gay) are genetically strong, active and dominant. Women (whether lesbian or heterosexual) are naturally passive, submissive, predetermined by nature to wait for a man (or enter in some harmless “Vaculíkian” version of homoerotic play). This passivity, according to these authors, is genetically coded. Feminism, however, has some magical ability to overrun this power of biology and turn these women (whether lesbian or heterosexual) into beings that are aggressive, dominating, intimidating and in need of control. So while in men strength and weakness are both a matter of the “natural” predisposition of sexual orientation, in women it is not sexual orientation but “ideology” that can alter their natural predisposition. In many authors’ accounts, lesbian sexual orientation and feminist “ideology” seem to go hand in hand – being one makes a person more susceptible to also becoming the other one. These identities both transgress and threaten traditional gender order, even though from different, and seemingly incompatible (as coverage in the Czech media has demonstrated) points of view.

Conclusion

The sexist and homophobic corollary presented in the Czech media in the course of the 1990s, even though unwittingly, has been the most successful discursive tandem in preventing mutual understanding and desire for cooperation on the part of feminist and gay and lesbian activists and scholars. The point of this study has not been to try to find the origins or some proper route of influences between homophobic and antifeminist discourses. Rather, the essay aimed to show the ingrained hetero-sexism, in both senses of the word, which has characterized the Czech media discourse all throughout the 1990s since the collapse of communism to the present. What has been symptomatic of this state is the inability of the Czech gender and feminist community to openly and systematically embark upon a fight against homophobia as part of their feminist agenda and reluctance of Czech gays and lesbians to understand the potential, and thus embrace, feminist analysis for their argumentation of marginality and discrimination. As was already argued, feminist and anti-homophobic arguments in the Czech media do not work together, but against each other. The media discourse has played a crucial role in this gap and misunderstanding by facilitating a discursive environment significantly hostile to both groups, which has created an implicit (and often explicit) pressure on feminist advocates and gay and lesbian to gain legitimacy and respect through applying narrow identity politics and distancing from each other.

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