

intention and justification of the book. What would have been very useful – particularly in the case of feminist theory – is an attempt to explain the complicated struggle for recognition, as well as the difficult process of achieving intellectual credibility and respect, which the early feminist scholars and activists had to go through. In order to present ‘feminism’ as an history of ideas, at least the conceptual development from ‘women’ to ‘gender’ should have been explained. A rather descriptive compilation of a few sources (the latest dated in 1993), is a poor supplement to a project of such importance. The simplified definition of the concept of gender with a reference to a local source of no particular theoretical relevance is just one example. And a final deficiency is the lack of an index and a more complete bibliography?

The problem is the title of the book by which the editor seems to follow exactly the phenomena she is criticising in her introduction. One cannot but agree with her point, that in this country “there so far does not exist an open discussion on women’s questions.” What is questionable, however, is her opinion that “as long as someone wants to deal with them, he or she has to use a humoresque or forgiving tone, otherwise a defamatory label of radical feminist is at risk” (p. 14). She (or the publisher) apparently did not take the risk. The ‘Maid’s War’ – a legendary story on a defeated woman’s war against men – evoking in every Czech man or woman an image of a rather obscure and panoptical hopeless struggle, com-

bined with the ‘Ideology’, which is precisely the major argument locally used against feminism, is in my opinion a mistake. The longer we keep reproducing such a not particularly creative “humoresque or forgiving tone,” even in titles of our books, the longer the process of convincing the local audience of the seriousness of feminist intellectual agenda will last.

Due to the massive feminist publishing industry, particularly in English since late 1970s, any selection of ‘basic’ texts is necessarily a subjective one and can never present the field in its full variety. But at the same time, some principles of the field should be respected. Even though an absence of intellectual Godmothers belongs to one of the proudly presented slogans of feminist theory, even this area underwent in the 1980s a process of disciplinarisation and institutionalisation, including a process of building a canon. Considering the fact that the book under review is truly the first collection of this kind in the Czech language, it serves as a good and, for the local audience, very useful, representation of this canon. Although some texts may seem too short (15-20 pages), they offer introduction to the interested public and provide a good basis for gender studies courses, slowly but gradually emerging at Czech universities. One can only hope that the even more interesting and challenging texts – not only of Anglo-American, but say French, German, or Latin American origins – which have built up a new phase of feminism in 1980s and 1990s will follow before too long.

Jiřina Šmejkalová

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### Aspects of Contemporary Feminist Thought in Slovakia and the Journal *Aspekt*

This history of the Slovak feminist journal *Aspekt* can, without exaggeration, be said to be the history of post-modern feminist thought in Slovakia. Since its founding in 1993, four years after the fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, the journal has expressed the attempt of its founders, editors, contributors and readers to avoid delimiting, unifying or simplifying the search for a space for reflection on gender and the associated

activity of women in the post-communist countries today. The founders of the journal were largely writers, academics working in the fields of literature and film, artists, sociologists and psychologists from Slovakia and the Czech Republic and against the background of the war in nearby Yugoslavia they chose to ignore the split of the former Czechoslovakia into two independent states and founded *Aspekt* as a joint Slovak-Czech journal and association of women. They organised the first international feminist conference in Bratislava in June 1993, initiated and sponsored by the *Frauen-Anstiftung* foundation from Hamburg. If we

want to choose a concrete date and event as the beginning of post-communist feminism, this meeting can be said to be it. Alternatively, the whole process of the birth of post-communist feminism in Slovakia could be found in the artistic, scientific and social activities by unorganised individuals in the 1960s and 1970s.

After the 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989, women in Slovakia (labelled as revolutionaries for not the first time this century) *jointly* discarded the dirt of the modern hegemonies and communist emancipation, which had brought new forms of discrimination ("*Communist emancipation of women is dreadful, because under the guise of making them equal it in fact exploits them.*" The ethnographer, Soňa Kovačevićová, in an interview for *Aspekt* 1/1993, p. 45.) Feminists and non-feminists came to terms with this paradoxical situation in no less paradoxical ways. Either they tried to return to the pre-emancipation traditions and roots of the national culture in the belief that they had had enough of *emancipation*, or they looked for a *different form of emancipation* for that deceptive, unjust, now 'unveiled' and rejected *communist emancipation*, which they had thrown off with the fall of communism and which they loathed. Some found themselves in a Möbius strip of never-ending recycling of modern emancipations distributing gender difference only in relation to the idea of women as equal to and of equal value to men, others proposed the end of this idea of the universalising of equality/identity and worked to develop a late modern emancipation which proclaimed recognised specific features and values of women as biologically and culturally valued *differences*, differentiating and critical ideas and being. Still others concentrated on a post-modern release from ideas of emancipation as a battle between binary opponents and the distinction of the *different* and took a female and feminist view of the continuing process of biological and cultural becoming of multiple forms and their assemblies of gender differences. In this sense the texts and articles of the feminist cultural journal *Aspekt* provide an overview of these and other forms of post-communist feminist thought, of their subtle differences, deviations, tensions and strains.

The editorial staff and contributors to *Aspekt* have continued to reflect on *their own special movement* in various feminist ideas. In collaboration with Slovak and foreign contributors, *Aspekt* has offered a mix of 'our' and 'foreign', of 'known' and 'unknown', 'recognised' and 'unrecognised' femaleness and feminism. Thus the authors of *Aspekt* have collected, considered, written and translated into Slovak a quantity of historical and contemporary portraits and maps of femaleness and feminisms and suggested extensions of their differences and with differentiation occurring within *Aspekt* itself. After a number of reorganisations and in collaboration with permanent editorial staff and regular and occasional contributors, the journal now takes the form of separate issues investigating pre-modern, modern and post-modern conceptions of gender differentiation in contemporary religion, philosophy, science, art and culture. Subjects covered to date include: *the beauty myth, maternity, feminism, witchhood, women's writing, women and power, lesbian existence, fears and barriers, human rights, the female body (I and II), women's thought, women's spaces, violence (I and II)*. The most recent issue is on *the personal is political*.

After seven years, *Aspekt* is still alive and each issue represents a new building block in the construction of critical thought and formulation of contemporary feminisms against the background of experience with the paradox of '*discriminatory emancipation*', and at the same time initiates a reflection, critique and ironic play with the Slovak 'surroundings' of this paradox. The journal also has its own and foreign maps of texts and works of art which define and are defined by feminisms, as well as maps of anti- and non-feminisms. By superimposing these, *Aspekt* is delineating the emergence of feminism and is identifying, defining and criticising the historical and contemporary efforts by national and state powers in Slovakia to reconstruct 'the Slovak nation and its renegades'. The 'female' and 'male' gender differences of various historical periods are almost exclusively seen through the state prism of unborn national tradition, which has also to codify the contemporary forms of national, family, confessional and cultural belonging of

men, women and children in Slovakia. For *Aspekt* this means first and foremost a critique of the powers that be's harking back to pre-modern folk mythologies, both Slovak and other. It also means a critique of the restitution of modern thought, feelings, actions and behaviour which ignore the contribution made by modern Slovak, Czech and international feminist theology, philosophy, science and art, and finally a critique of the excessive importance placed on this reconstructing 'basis' with post-modern 'superstructures', which ignore the past and present of post-modern feminism in the Slovak architecture of post-modern thought.

*Aspekt* was formed and formulated in the course of reflections on a number of non-feminist, feminist and anti-feminist maps and images which are in circulation in Slovakia today. At the centre of these pictures of the distribution of patriarchal and matriarchal power lie the games of exchanges between female unfree 'freedom' and male powerless "power" (or the reverse). This enters and imprints itself on the relation to the real map of feminist sensitivity and rage, collaboration and non-collaboration. In relation to the reference map of their own vision of the Slovak cultural environment's lack of sensitivity which, in founding the journal, the editors of *Aspekt* wanted to "infiltrate by writing about 'sensitive' matters, that is by writing which is not common in this country (...) and to support the development of its own self confidence." (Jana Cviková: *List z Bratislavy: Pokus o postsocialistický feminizmus* [Letter from Bratislava: An Attempt to Create a Post-Communist Feminism], *Aspekt* 1/1993). It is also related to the maps of the aggression of modernist prejudiced unconsciousness and disorientation of the culturally isolated Slovak public and 'spiritual', 'intellectual' or 'political' leaders who after forty years of common and general state coordinated and misused 'emancipation', are unaware of the languages, methods and means of cultivating feminist reflection used by women living in Central and Eastern Europe. *Aspekt* therefore works with the sensitivity, insensitivity, violence, aggressiveness, anger, rage and hate (its own and that of others). It is aware of the feminist and anti-feminist anger and hate which are virtually ignored in the

social and cultural structures of contemporary Slovakia. The radicalism and exclusiveness of Slovak feminists today lies in their refusal to collaborate with institutions which discriminate against women. While in the past Slovak and Czech anti-Communist dissidents were experienced with non-co-operation, the non-co-operation of feminist radicalism, alternative cultures, and ethnic minorities is widely criticised by both governmental and non-governmental former dissidents in Slovakia and the Czech Lands, even though the possibility of not participating in the violence in modern democracies is entirely legitimate (on this question see the study by Mirek Vodrážka: *O politickém harémismu* [On Political Haremism], *Aspekt* 3/1998, p. 180-185). The general condemnation of radicals' non-co-operation is now used by the mass media as a modern verbal version of the pillory, seen in its most visible instances on television.

Education in the field of gender or women's studies is not yet widespread in Slovakia. In the humanities and technical departments of state universities, an introduction to feminism is offered as an option by the Department of Philosophy for all other Departments of humanities, while in the natural and technical sciences feminist ideas remain untouched. In private educational institutions, gender studies have begun to be taught this year in connection with Cultural Studies (Open Society Foundation and SCCA, Bratislava). There are five non-governmental women's organisations which deal with feminism in some degree (*Aspekt*, Bratislava; *Aliancia žien Slovenska*, Bratislava; *Fenestra*, Košice; *Centrum Nádej*, Bratislava and *Pro Familia*, Humenné), of which only one openly claims to be feminist (*Aspekt*). There is only one homosexual and lesbian organisation (*Ganymedes*, Bratislava), one lesbian organisation with three offices (Museion Bratislava, Museion stred Banská Bystrica and Museion junior). Feminist thought and behaviour is not highly developed in Slovakia, either in local civic associations and initiatives, nor in anarchist groups. For this reason, *Aspekt* provides a space for non-dichotomic female solidarity and a transitory, repeated and many-directional alliance of women and men willing and able to discuss the

question of feminism in Slovakia and abroad, and above all a unique space for assessing the contribution of ideas on gender difference to contemporary Central European culture.

Whether womanhood is linked more or less with the history of the morphology of physical reality, or whether we separate it off from the (biological and cultural) physical reality, it is difficult to ignore the fact that, like women, the word is seen in the history of western philosophy in terms of sense, corporeality, materialness, externality and superficiality. The cultural history of words and women are similar: just as western Judeo-Christian tradition conceived the difference between the Word and words, so it saw that between woman and man. Women was (is) the mediator of man, was (is) seen as the sign of a sign, was (is) primarily a representation of an utterance. This is a further reason why *Aspekt*, both the magazine and its book publishing, which began in 1993 and has continued with financial support from the *Heinrich Böll Stiftung* and *Pro Helvetia na Slovensku*, concentrates on the *written* aspect of contemporary Slovak feminist philosophy, literature, art and architecture, together with discussing and translating into Slovak writings on gender by many contemporary national and international feminists (both women and men), homosexual and heterosexual women and men reflecting on problems related to the social acceptance of their gender. Through these writings in Slovak, it also has an influence on the language in gender terms and demonstrates the influence of feminist criticism, gynocriticism and theories of women's writing. *Aspekt* includes not only feminist studies from the humanities and such established literary genres

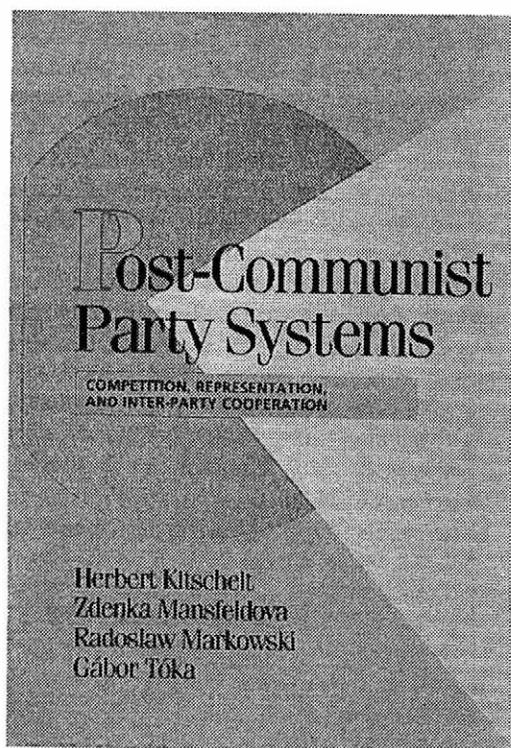
as lexicons, reviews, essays, sketches, notes, interviews, reflections, plays, poetry, legends and fairy tales, but also less common forms of comment and irony (the column *Pearls (of Men) before Women*) and the even less established – and less likely to be so – gossip (the *Let's Gossip* column). *Aspekt* is therefore first and foremost an aspect of feminist writing, graphic and polygraphic work. *Aspekt* presents the work of Slovak and international feminist artists, painters, sculptors and architects. In its own library and in public places in the city, it hosts group discussions, artistic performance workshops and presentations of feminist art. It performs both art and writing on art.

If I had not been able to write in *Aspekt* on aspects of contemporary feminism, I do not know where I could have *touched* on the contemporary writing and written, private and public division of Slovak feminism. I would probably have to repeat Gertrude Stein's "*There is not there there*". *Aspekt* also creates the maps of the feminist *there*, in Slovakia and abroad, in *Aspekt* and outside it. The map of the *there* of Slovak feminism is a not very extensive tissue of various interpretations of creative feminist currents and movements with a sense for deviations and inner tensions, rather than a harmonising, homogenous, symmetrical Platonic body, atom or thing – object – of female or feminist interpretations of womanhood. That it is like this is partly due to the *unformedness* of Slovak women writers, philosophers, artists, art historians, architects and all those who are interested in feminism in Slovakia today.

Monika Mitášová

## Post-Communist Party Systems

Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation



HERBERT KITSCHELT  
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Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics  
Cambridge University Press 199, 457 pp.

*Post-Communist Party Systems* examines democratic party competition in four post-communist polities in the mid-1990s: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. Legacies of pre-communist rule have played as much a role in accounting for differences as the institutional diversity incorporated into the new democratic rules of the game. The book shows various developments within the four countries with regard to the different voter appeal of the various parties, patterns of voter representation, and dispositions to join other parties in legislative or executive alliances. The authors also present interesting avenues of comparison for broader groups of countries.