

The Story Behind the Progress

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to discuss how are women affected by the collapse of the state socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe but the main focus will be ex-Yugoslavia countries. Social status and employment of women will be discussed, especially tertiary-educated women. I am particularly interested in quality of life that has changed and I will argue that these changes affect men and women in different ways i.e. that women lost much more of their quality of life due to great social changes. I am going to use different sources, primary researches, but I have also conducted small case study of women scientists working at the university. In conclusion I will show that "opening" and "liberalization" of new labour markets contributed to loss of the quality of life but especially forced women to change their ways of life. This is very interesting in light of the fact that in countries discussed woman is still expected to fulfil her domestic roles first and then to have successful career as well.

Key words: university, education, market, gender equality, life quality

Introduction

Sustainable development rests on maintaining long-term economic, social and environmental capital. While the importance of investing in economic assets to assure progress has long been recognised, sustainable development also bring attention to the ecological and human dimensions which are also key to growth and development. In failing to make the best use of their female populations, many countries are under investing in the human capital needed to insure sustainability.

The aim of this essay is to discuss how women are affected by the collapse of the state socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe but the main focus will be ex-Yugoslavia countries. Social status and employment of women will be discussed, especially tertiary-educated women. I am particularly interested in quality of life that has changed and I will argue that these changes affect men and women in different ways i.e. that women lost much more of their quality of life due to great social changes.

Indicators of life quality are not only material, i.e. economic but for the purpose of this assignment I will limit them to education, health-care and welfare.

Case study conducted here is about three women, different age groups who basically do the same job, in the same country, even at the same institution – University of Sarajevo, but under very different conditions.

Theoretical approach used in this study is frog's perspective i.e. the process of transition will be discussed through the lives of these three individuals.

Methodology used is qualitative analysis, one focus group aimed to provide better insight in specificity of gender roles in two different social systems. To explain, feminist epistemology is different from the classical one and so are the feminist methods of research. One of the main characteristic of feminist methodology is domination of personal experiences and oral histories that are recorded, so the interview was the most convenient method to get primary information. ++++++

The Story Behind Numbers, Post-Transition and Gender Equality: "Blessings of Transition"

After the war in ex-Yugoslavia countries and transition in other ex-socialistic countries question of gender equality became well known to general public, but most of the people still believe that it is the product from western democracies.

+++++ Note: Names in the interviews are changed in order to protect the privacy of participants.

I am not going to claim that socialistic society was not patriarchal but my claim is that if it had not been less patriarchal than Western European and American societies it was not more so. The phenomenon of a relatively high female presence among professionals and highly-educated is a legacy of women's long history of attaining advanced degrees under state socialism.*****

Socialistic system provided strong educational support for everyone regardless of gender, age, social status... etc. I am not trying to prove that there were no discriminatory experiences in that system but that would be the subject of another research and assignments. I was informed that in ex-Yugoslavia, for example, scholarships were available for everyone and that the education was in most cases absolutely free.

When gender is considered there have always been professions which are considered to be exclusively male or female occupations but lack of legal frame for such claims opened the door to change these stereotypes.

During the process of transition and after the collapse of socialistic system, countries faced "the blessings of transition". One of the most prominent is definitely opening of markets which I could experience as a child in 1989. and at the beginning of 1990ies. My generation can still remember famous "Ante Marković's Reforms" in ex-Yugoslavia and bananas and Austrian chocolates that became so cheap in that period of time. So my first image of transition is definitely the bright one. Others seem a bit foggy since the war came and the only economy I can speak about is the economy of survival.

Interesting experience of both Croatia and BiH is that in spite of escalation of war and abnormal life condition education in all levels was rarely stopped. Schools and faculties continued to function regardless of unimaginably miserable conditions. It is important to say that most men took the weapon and that education depended on women.

Collapse of once collective state and construction of new ones reinforced sense of ethnicity and ethno politics did renew the role of patriarchy, greatly helped by religious feeling regained. This added an extra burden for women to re-prove how good mothers and wives they are. In this contest linguistic analyses of word meanings is very interesting where we can prove that the term "nation" (narod) the most popular one during the age of transition is deeply enrooted in terms "birth, gender"... (rod, roditi...). So hand in hand of opening of new labour and all other markets came reinforcement of patriarchy and importance of women's domestic roles. By conducting a small case study I tried to find out what has transition brought to tertiary educated women.

Women in the Sciences, B&H Universities

Focus of this research is age of the women that took part in this study, since their profession is the same one. Two of them finished the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo and the third one finished Faculty of Arts at University of Sarajevo as well.

Ms. Amy (as aforementioned names are changed) was born in 1940. and she got her B.A. degree at Sarajevo University in 1965. Being the best student in generation she was awarded a scholarship to continue her education in England and position of Teacher Assistant at the University was guaranteed to her.

When she came back from UK in 1967. she was working at the University and in the meantime she got married and had her first child. Ms. Amy remember that period as one of the most beautiful in her life since she was already starting her PhD and than she had enough time to think about her baby and her future education. She was provided maternity leave for one year without any reduction of her salary. Anyway she came back to work after six months since she had great help of both her mother and mother in law and also of the whole her end her husband's family who were very proud of her academic achievements.

Her second child Ms. Amy had as already well known young university professor and once again she enjoyed her maternity leave. She explained to me that at the time when her children were babies and while growing up there was no need to worry for health care since it was free of charge for everyone and for every cure that people needed.

Her salary was a bit higher than average one in ex-Yugoslavia so she was happy to be able to travel abroad both for business and private purposes.

Ms. Amy still works in couple of universities in BiH and is highly admired by all her students for being great professor and a great person.

Ms. Layla is 29 years old. She got her B.A. at University of Sarajevo in 2002. and continued her education at the same institution. Ms. Layla had to pay full tuition fees for her education since no scholarships were available. She's been also working as a teacher's assistant for three years now, for one of the public universities but her engagement is still on free lance basis. That mean she has no pension or health insurance

***** UNIFEM, *The Story Behind the numbers: Women and Employment in Central and eastern Europe and the Western Commonwealth of Independent States*, 2006. p. 47; in „Gender and Development“, Reader, Ceter for Interdisciplinary Post-graduate Studies Sarajevo, 2008/2009, edited by Marina Blagojevic, PhD

Part-time and free lance employment:

Coming back to the case study once more, I have to mention part-time employment and free-lance based employment which is very often seen as a good solution to problem of work-family balance. But as the example showed apart from saving a couple of working hours, part time engagement can only provide social insecurity for women. So as flexibilization of employment relations and lowering of social protection have been widespread in Central and Eastern Europe since transition, reduction in unemployment was expected.

It is not necessary to mention again that the goals are not achieved and that as the transition started, the number of employed people has never reached the level of employed workers in industrialized communist society.

Gender gap is envisaged once again if we just consider how much easier is for men to take more flexible jobs at the same time since the reinforcement of patriarchy once again confirmed the attitude that it is not their obligation to participate in "care-work". This shows that woman does not necessarily have to be married or to have children to be "eligible" for extra work of providing care. Women have always been first in chain to provide care for older members of family, sick ones, etc.

It is obvious than why employers are very often so keen to give advantage to men, when choosing employees.

Conclusion:

Trying to reflect my personal impressions through the lance of feminist perspective I gave my best to show that "opening" and "liberalization" of new labour markets contributed to loss of the quality of life but especially forced women to change their ways of life. Private life became almost impossible, or at least undesirable in the process of establishing successful carrier. My greatest wish is that this claim becomes false and outdated as soon as possible and one of lights at the end of tunnel might be plan of European Commission to improve communication between society and science. Still as long as we expect someone else to solve our problems and are waiting to see »the sun coming from the west« there cannot be much improvement. Successful model of career-private life symbiosis has already been seen in EEC and it is up to educated people to renew and improve that model now.

If we just pay enough attention to the facts how this change affects not only women, but also those who »rely on« their help in some phase of their life (children and other members of family) we shall se that it is not only feminists' policy and duty to improve these condition. In this case it is so obvious that term feminist implies terms »childrenist«, »humanist«... I gues that than patriarchists would not have such a big problem to understand that improving the quality of life for women means the quality of life for everyone and science is to play the key role in creating new pespectives. Very interesting for me was the statement that classical academic knowledge is too slow, and that centers established apart from universities should enable articulation of new knowledge created by interaction of excellent scientists. *****

***** http://www.womenngo.org.rs/sajt/sajt/saopstenja/razgovori/marina_bлагоjevic.htm

Accessed july, 2009. Iz knjige: Nadežda Radović, Politika na ženski način – RAZGOVORI MARINA BLAGOJEVIĆ

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