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## Rational Economic (Wo)Men

### Market Mantras and Managers

Every one of us has the chance to seek out comparatively new advantages and to realize the limits of one's possibilities.

—VÁCLAV KLAUS (1995c:5)

Before [1989], people had relatively equivalent incomes and everyone had pretty much the same possibilities, which were quite minimal. Of course, after the revolution, people seized the various opportunities—one started a business, another wasn't so aggressive and remained in a state-owned enterprise, another took the management route, another began working in a foreign firm.

—HEDA, a thirty-four-year-old communications manager

IN SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA, enterprise management was a heavily centralized, top-down undertaking with the state assuming primary responsibility for the establishment of production mandates. Within enterprises, individuals known as *ředitelé* (directors) and *vedoucí* (managers) were charged mainly with the task of insuring the implementation of the state's directives regarding production. As Elizabeth Dunn explains, "It was the central planners, not the enterprise managers, who were supposed to decide what goods would be produced, how much raw material was needed, and how the material would be transformed into the desired product" (2004:14). In the postsocialist era, these occupational titles—*ředitel/ka* and *vedoucí*—remain in currency, but they have taken on new meaning.<sup>1</sup> In the new market economy, management

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1. In Czech, the gender of the subject is commonly distinguished by inflectional endings on stems (e.g., *ředitel* = male director, *ředitelka* = female director). A lack of alteration (e.g., *vedoucí* = male manager) reflects a traditionally gender-specific—in this case, male—association.

has become decentralized; it is now carried out at the corporate and/or individual enterprise level. *Ředitelé* and *vedoucí* are no longer the state's lackeys, required to obey its dictates; instead, they have become analysts and strategists whose primary objective is to insure and grow enterprise profits. In the transition from a command to a market economy, management has become qualitatively different. It calls for unfamiliar kinds of behavior (i.e., initiative rather than obedience) and knowledge (i.e., how to foster profitability). For Czechs as well as for Central and Eastern Europeans more generally, management, in its capitalist sensibilities, is a new concept. Indeed, the term *management*—directly co-opted from English into the Czech language—is a postsocialist novelty. A slavized version of *manager* (*manažer/ka*) has been added to the repertoire of occupational titles.

At the outset of the economic transition, few individuals possessed any training in this style of management. During the early 1990s, foreign management courses such as Dale Carnegie Training and degree-granting programs such as those run by the Czech Management Institute quickly established themselves locally in the rush to fill the knowledge gap. However, the need for managers was immediate, especially for newly arrived multinational corporations. Unable to wait for the first MBA cohort, enterprises sought out individuals who could learn to manage on the job. Windows of opportunity consequently opened, enabling certain individuals to access positions of power and wealth. Enterprises relied heavily on human capital to determine an individual's qualifications for management. In greatest demand were university-educated individuals with a knowledge of English, French, and/or German. With a nearly 3:4 ratio of female to male postsecondary enrollment by the mid-1980s in socialist Czechoslovakia and with females overrepresented in the humanities, many women were well positioned to enter through these windows.

Indeed, virtually all of the female managers whom I interviewed accessed their manufacturing management posts through these sudden openings generated by the economy's reform. Enterprise ownership histories and the nature of goods produced (e.g., cosmetics versus textiles) varied, as did the type of management (e.g., communications versus human resources) and the level at which these women managed (i.e., middle versus upper). These women are, however, experientially similar in their points of entry into management. These women not only have gained a footing in the upper echelons of corporate power but

also are among the new socioeconomic elite in the postsocialist Czech Republic. Twenty-one of these twenty-six managers earned gross incomes<sup>2</sup> of more than 25,000 crowns per month,<sup>3</sup> more than 93.95 percent of the Czech populace and 99.47 percent of Czech women in 1999 and 92.28 percent of the wider population and 96.41 percent of women in 2000 (Czech Statistical Office 2000b, 2001).<sup>4</sup> In an economic system in which power and money are revered as symbols of success, these women are marked as transition's winners.

In this chapter, I detail how twenty-six Czech female managers draw on the market metanarrative in making sense of their success in the new market economy. While each of these women possesses an individual biography, their appropriation of the market metanarrative yields a commonly shared understanding of why they are winners rather than losers. As metanarratively promised, in their interpretations, the market has empowered them. Again and again, these women echoed free-market-conflated mantras of public origin, such as freedom and responsibility. In their assimilation of this metastory, their postsocialist triumphs become meaningful to them. Among the critical consequences of this invocation, however, is the muting of their gender consciousness. "Woman" as a category of constraint and difference is seemingly incompatible with a market metanarrative embodying the opposing neoliberal logic of freedom for every individual. In addition, in the reconciliation of the market metanarrative's ideological tenets with their personal experiences, history and culture are rendered seemingly extraneous. In Czech female managers' articulated perceptions, individuals' behavior in the free market is principally an outcome not of historical legacies or cultural mechanisms but of a self-interested rationality.

### Moving In and Up

For Czech female managers, the events of 1989 dramatically disrupted their work and family lives: impossibilities suddenly became possibili-

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2. Net wages (take-home pay) range between 70 and 80 percent of gross wages.

3. Of the remaining managers, one refused to report her earnings, three reported monthly wages in the range of 12,000–15,999 crowns per month, and one reported earning between 16,000 and 20,999 crowns per month.

4. Based on individuals who worked seventeen hundred or more hours per year.

ties. Forty-four-year-old business manager Sabina's comments well expressed the radical nature of this historical moment: "1989 meant such a major break in a person's life because all of a sudden new possibilities opened up for you, and all at once you could see that it's possible to find something in a completely different environment, in another dimension. . . . A person's idea of their future life completely changed." As thirty-four-year-old sales manager Herma explained, "Before 1989, with the same education and the same knowledge, opportunities were few. Now we have lots of opportunities." Forty-two-year-old human resource (HR) manager Emílie used a metaphor to describe the post-1989 opening up of employment opportunities: "After the revolution, they removed the lid from the pot, and some suddenly had the opportunity to move up, and some really did move up." Many of those occupationally ascendant in the aftermath of 1989 saw themselves as getting "on the train at the right moment." Not just anyone, however, could climb aboard. Many observers acknowledged that buying a ticket required people to know one or more international business languages and to have a university education.

In the "right place at the right time," in Emílie's words, and equipped with the right human capital, the potential to move in and up occupationally and industrially became a reality for some Czechs. Of the twenty-six female managers in the manufacturing industry I interviewed, a mere seven had any experience in their current industrial arena prior to 1989. Of these seven, three remained at the same enterprise at which they were employed before 1989, although two had advanced from nonmanagerial to managerial posts during the privatization and restructuring process. The other four held similar occupational statuses pre- and post-1989, although their roles changed significantly. Company closure and merger had compelled two of the women to change companies, while the other two made self-initiated lateral moves in a quest for new challenges and better advancement prospects. Only forty-one-year-old finance manager Dora had not made a move.

By Western standards, nineteen of the twenty-six female managers had joined management's ranks in quite unconventional ways. And indeed, most Czech female managers were well aware of the atypicality of their move relative to Western norms—in Emílie's words, her promotion from executive assistant to HR manager was "once in a lifetime; it normally wouldn't happen." These women effectively jumped from

an internal or external job location into a management post. An internal jump typically involved a move within an enterprise from a low-level position to a mid- or upper-level management job during the company's expansion in which the individual (1) jumped over several rungs of a single job ladder or (2) jumped across and over the rungs of indirectly connected or entirely unconnected job ladders. While an internal jump is defined in part by an existing toehold in an enterprise, an external jump originates from outside in either (1) an already established professional career (e.g., doctor, lawyer) or (2) an unrelated job family<sup>5</sup> and/or industrial sector. Irena's, Margareta's, and Heda's detailed work histories help to illustrate more concretely the nature of these jumps.

*Irena: From Administrative Assistant to HR Manager (internal jump)*

After completing her education at the University of Economics in Prague, Irena began working at a research institute in 1987. She gave birth to her daughter in 1989 and was on maternity leave at the time of the Velvet Revolution. Although she had not exhausted her maternity leave, Irena decided to return to the labor market in 1990. Because her employer was legally obligated to allow Irena up to three years of maternity leave and to guarantee her the same or an equivalent job upon her return, she could have returned to her former job at the research institute. Irena, however, decided that she wanted to put her English-language skills to use in the changing economic environment. She responded to a newspaper job listing for an administrative assistant for a newly established multinational enterprise. The firm grew quickly, and Irena was offered her choice of managerial posts. She opted for the position of HR manager.

*Margareta: From Editor in Chief to Communications Manager (external jump)*

Margareta also completed her education at the University of Economics in Prague, where she studied foreign trade. According to Margareta, women had little "chance" to work in that male-dominated field under state socialism, so she began working as a reporter. Shortly before 1989, she changed newspapers to receive slightly better wages. She soon became its editor in chief and remained in this post until 1992. At this point, she began to reflect on her "value" in the new market

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5. Job families refer to groupings of jobs on the basis of similar characteristics.

economy, and at age forty-two she began taking courses in communications and marketing and, with the assistance of a recruitment agency, began interviewing for jobs. Margareta interviewed for twelve positions and received several job offers. She ultimately chose a position as a communications manager for a large food manufacturing company that had existed before 1989 but was bought out by a multinational corporation during privatization.

*Heda: From Transport Coordinator to Personnel Coordinator (external jump)* Heda graduated from the University of Economics in Prague in 1989 and took a job involving the arranging of transportation for various goods to be exported. Heda found the physical conditions of her job at the transport company unpleasant—the air quality was poor because of the exhaust emitted by the trucks. In addition, her English- and French-language abilities were incommensurate with the transport company's need for a German speaker. After a year, she came across an advertisement for a job as a personnel coordinator at a newly established multinational company specializing in the production of computer technologies. She applied and was hired despite knowing “nothing at all” about human resources.

While Irena's and Heda's jumps can be easily understood under Western norms as occupational progressions, Margareta's case is less clear. Indeed, six other managers initially pursued professions in law, medicine, or academia. Thirty-four-year old Josephina began her career as a physician working in radiation oncology; during the mid-1990s, she went to work in the pharmaceuticals industry as a manager of her company's oncology business unit. After nineteen years of teaching at the University of Economics in Prague, Ester, now in her mid-forties, opted out of academia and into a management job at a newly established multinational enterprise specializing in the production of computer technologies. In most Western capitalist societies, their actions would likely be seen as an occupational step backward rather than forward. Lawyers, doctors, and professors working in the capitalist West generally command greater prestige and status than managers. However, the (re)hierarchization of occupations in the transition from a command to market economy is not necessarily the same as that which exists in much of the Western world. Moving into management is perceived as an advancement to greater social status, influence, and remuneration.

Managers are among the most well compensated individuals in the postsocialist world in terms of both monetary remuneration (e.g., wages, bonuses) and nonmonetary benefits (e.g., company car, cellular phone). In addition, those employed by multinational firms can earn more benefits than those working in national enterprises, and in most instances, these women left professions such as medicine and law that became heavily feminized during the socialist era, resulting in their social and financial devaluation. In state socialism's aftermath, the health and education sectors have been plagued by privatization and restructuring complications. As a result, they have lagged well behind others in the financial revaluation of their occupations. In 2000, a physician working a sixty-five-hour week received an average monthly compensation of 23,832 crowns, including overtime pay and bonuses (Kubek 2000). In contrast, physicians turned managers Josephina and Herma earned more than 56,000 crowns each month, not including bonuses. As Herma explained, "Women [in medicine] are condemned for life to being a *sekundářka* [i.e., second-level doctor]." While women may dominate the medical profession, internal stratification means that men occupy much of its top tier (Šiklová 1994). A management position in a multinational enterprise manufacturing health products offered a way for Herma to move up. The conditions, both social and financial, for these professional women to stay put ultimately fail to rival the enticements offered by a job in management.

### Free-Market Freedom

In a free society, my success (and in close correlation the living standard of myself and my family) depends in no way on my hypothetical capabilities, knowledge, or skills but solely and exclusively on how I take advantage of these abilities.

—VÁCLAV KLAUS (1994a:122)

The possibilities are even greater today, and not everyone knows how to take advantage of them.

—HEDA

The economic restructuring of the heavily orthodox Czechoslovak command economy resulted in a dramatic opening up of economic opportunities. Taking advantage of these opportunities, much as Klaus

and Heda suggest, is about knowing how to mobilize one's abilities—principally, one's human capital, sometimes called “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1984). This type of capital comprises an individual's education, skills, and experience. In its broadest sense, human capital denotes knowledge. While under state socialism, social/political capital in the shape of one's social networks was the principal means of achieving personal gain, what you know now proves far more valuable than who you know (Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley 1998; Ledeneva 1998). Czech female managers' postsocialist success is based not only in a desirable mix of university education and international business-language skills but also in their “learning” of a free-market-appropriate set of behaviors, including self-reliance, personal responsibility, and independence. This knowledge is derived from their calculated reading of the market meta-narrative.

Among the figurative threads of this metanarrative is the imperative for individuals to renounce the sinful ways of their socialist past to achieve their capitalist redemption. By Klaus's estimations as well as those of many free-market proponents, Czechs could not circumvent their past free of blame. In “The Market, Government, and Citizens,” 1968 émigré and economist Jiří Sláma writes, “Neither businesses nor citizens are without fault for state paternalism. . . . Today there is no longer this dependence on our government in place. We have to stand on our own feet and take the future into our own hands” (1990:2). In a September 1995 *Lidové noviny* piece, “Between the Present and the Future,” Klaus reminded Czechs that “communism wasn't a coincidence, nor was it a one-time event that fell upon guiltless individuals without their fault” (1995b:5). Reaching the “radiant future” that capitalism promised demanded that Czechs atone for their past. Dispensing with their immature, infantilized socialist habits and assuming mature, adult behaviors deemed requisite to success in and the success of the new economy would move Czechs beyond the limbo of economic transition. According to mathematician Marek Boguszak and sociologists Ivan Gabal and Vladimír Rak, their fellow Czechs needed to “finally start to ‘behave like adults,’ to take responsibility for one's life and to make decisions about it independently” (1990:2). Miloš Zeman, who was elected chair of the Chamber of Deputies in 1996 and was appointed prime minister in 1998, affirmed in “From Poverty to Wealth” that “in the process of economic reform we are first and foremost trying to change the economic behavior of individuals” (1990:4). Again, figuring

prominently among the necessary behaviors are self-reliance, personal responsibility, and independence. According to the market metanarrative, such behaviors would at the very least enable Czechs and their country to get on course, to reroute themselves away from poverty and toward wealth.

In their narratives, Czech female managers pull on this strand of this larger narrative. By their estimations, they understand its logic. In the hierarchy of values, self-reliance, personal responsibility, and independence take primacy; socialism's behavioral referents are no longer of real value and thus must be discarded. In Klaus's terms, the time has come for Czech citizens to "begin to rule over their own lives" (1995a:7). In these women's conceptions, they have cast off the unproductive waste of irresponsibility and dependency. Individual as well as societal success is contingent on the assumption of more productive comportment. Czech female managers view themselves as representing this success and its privileges. This self-perception is both articulated and implied.

The women I interviewed frequently classified their behaviors in opposition to a categorical and marginal "Other." This socially constructed polarization enables them to identify who they are and are not. Underlying this system of classification is a larger interpretive schema about who succeeds and who fails. In her study of changing management techniques in the postsocialist privatization of a Polish factory, Dunn similarly discovered Polish managers to engage in a "variant of Orientalism" in which they constructed themselves as "flexible capitalist selves," in opposition to workers, the "marked and denigrated other" (2004:93). Czech female managers often openly stated this perceived difference. For example, fifty-five-year old Lucie, a sales manager in a dairy enterprise, claimed, "There are people who can't get used to [capitalism and democracy]. . . . They were used to always having someone lead them. I'm happier when no one is leading me. I am doing what I want, but I have to take care of everything." Personnel director Zdenka dismissively declared, "I think that few people have this feeling of responsibility . . . I have a strong feeling of responsibility, personal responsibility. This is that I'm responsible for myself." Many managers deemed this deficit in responsibility as a "problem" or "handicap" that holds back individuals and the wider Czech society. As economic director Tylida, who is in her early forties, claimed, "The entire logic of this society" has changed. She agreed with Klaus's popular saying that

“Everyone must take care of themselves.” Emílie contended, “The problem in this society is that everyone relies on the state solving everything, or someone, something that will resolve everything. There isn’t enough of this feeling of responsibility for one’s life, like with me.” Fifty-year-old Margareta’s sentiments mirror those of Emílie: “For a lot of people, it’s difficult to live because they haven’t forgotten the past in the sense that before, the state resolved everything for them.” She later added, “I don’t receive anything from the state. . . . I feel good that I’m responsible for myself and my family.”

In thirty-nine-year-old HR manager Julie’s words, people have to “unlearn” their socialist ways:

In the past, the state was like a mangy hen that took care of everything in its own way. . . . People weren’t required to take care of themselves, and of course this was bad. It really wasn’t good at all. But at that time, people were really taken care of, whereas today, understandably, that care for you isn’t there. You have to take care of yourself.

Julie emphasized the imperative for Czechs to “change”: “People want the gains of capitalism, the advantages,” she maintained, but “have not changed” and remain “lazy.” Heda expressed her belief that “competent, healthy people should have to work and should have to take care of themselves and not want help from the state.” The subtext of these remarks is that independence and personal responsibility are good/superior/of value and that these managers believe that they possess these qualities. To lack these qualities is bad/inferior; *others* are deficient.

### Rational Economic (Wo)Men

I do not doubt that East Europeans are part of the tribe called *Homo economicus*, for I am sure they react to the same incentives as their counterparts in Western countries. Our tremendous task, therefore, is to create an environment which will make it possible for all economic agents to behave rationally (in the economic sense).

—VÁCLAV KLAUS (1990b)

I often say that *Homo economicus* rests in each of us who impatiently awaits his awakening. . . . I refuse [to accept] that, in us . . . a satisfied *Homo sovietici-*

cus dominates who has grown accustomed to the conditions of the past and doesn't want to be liberated from them.

—VÁCLAV KLAUS (1991C:21)

Forty-seven-year-old business manager Miluše describes freedom as “independence and . . . responsibility in everything.” If this is freedom, then indeed some individuals in the postsocialist world, such as the twenty-six managers in this study, are free. By their own self-assessments, they are independent and responsible. In the market metanarrative's construction, liberation is accessible to all, without qualification. In the free market, individuals' behavior is determined by nothing more than rationality; past, place, and personhood (e.g., man or woman) have no bearing. With the right incentives in place, as Klaus espoused, all individuals will behave similarly, irrespective of time and space. The environment is irrelevant. In these female managers' conformity with the contours of the market metastory, their stories of success lack much of the anchoring of history and culture. Moreover, any acknowledgment of the salience of their gender for their lives is lacking. To recognize that their gender mattered would disrupt the coherence of a metastory whose core emphases are opportunity and choice. To be a “woman”—a gendered category of constraint—is an inconsistency.

Among the core assumptions of neoclassical economics in which the neoliberally inflected market metanarrative finds its ideological origins is that human nature is guided by a self-serving rationality. The rational economic man, *Homo economicus*, strives to maximize his personal gain in an ultimate quest for self-betterment. Accordingly, “*Homo economicus* is the personification of individuality run wild. ‘Economic man’ . . . springs up fully formed, with preferences fully developed and is fully active and self-contained” (Nelson 1996:30–31). For Czechs, *Homo economicus*'s individualism sits in stark and appealing contrast to the collectivist aims of state socialism. In their constructions of a post-socialist identity, the imagined self among Czech female managers is that of *Homo economicus*. They are genderless agents focused on enhancing their productive capacity as workers in an ultimate attempt to acquire more resources. One of the most intriguing expressions of this individualism is found in female managers' co-optation of the terms *kariéra* (career) and *kariérista* (careerist).

Prior to 1989, the concept of a *kariéra* existed in Czechoslovakia; however, its connotations were politically derogatory and overtly gen-

dered. According to Emílie, *kariéra* was a “profane” term. In Ester’s recollection, a *kariérista* was “an individual who climbs over others’ backs,” exploiting party contacts to gain “key positions.” Such individuals, say the female managers I interviewed, were most often male. This self-serving conduct was seen as “indecent” and “objectionable” on both public and private fronts. Publicly, the prevailing “political climate” was “hostile to individual differences and . . . did not acknowledge individual achievement” (Věšínová-Kalivodová 1998:362). Under state socialism, the notion of *kariéra* was antithetical to the espoused values of collectivism and egalitarianism. As Sabina elucidated, for the many Czechoslovaks trying to “escape from the communist society” by retreating into the family fold, the political adherence to the Communist Party on which the *kariérista*’s ascent depended was personally aversive.

Since 1989, however, the meanings of *kariéra* and *kariérista* appear to be undergoing some modification, as suggested by several managers’ use of these terms in describing their contemporary work trajectories and in their more general comments about the possibilities that the market offers for the wider populace. Sabina explained, “Before, the family was essentially the one possibility. A person had the prospect of building something that was only his. . . . And now, perhaps, it isn’t, because a person has the chance to build a career.” Irena said that it had become “the fashion to talk about career.” These remarks signal a shift away from negative understandings of *kariéra*. To be a *kariérista* is no longer dishonorable, and a *kariérista* is no longer necessarily assumed to be male. In an economy in which such self-seeking behavior is expected and desired in everyone, the *kariérista* has become respectable and can be either male or female. *Kariéra* and *kariérista* have also changed in terms of how they are accomplished. Whereas *kariéristas* previously drew primarily on their social capital to further their *kariéra*, Communist Party connections now have become largely worthless. Cultural capital is now the main means for individuals’ advancement.

From the point of view of Czech female managers equipped with the right cultural capital, their climb is unimpeded. This sense of unrestricted possibility became especially manifest in their reactions to my questions about gender-based discrimination. Although they affirmed the existence of such discriminatory practices in the Czech Republic and in the former Czechoslovakia, most managers dissociated themselves from the experience. For these women, gender-based discrimina-

tion is an obstacle that other women face. As Miluše responded, “I haven’t encountered it in my own life. I hear about it. In the news they write about it. On television they talk about it.” Forty-nine-year-old HR manager Háta complained that male colleagues often do not treat women as equal partners but quickly added, “I personally don’t feel this treatment, that someone would behave in a discriminatory way toward me because I’m a woman.” As Miloslava Umlaufová, president of the *Asociace podnikatelek a manažerek* (Association of Female Entrepreneurs and Managers)<sup>6</sup> explained, gender-based discrimination exists; however, “if this woman is capable, is effective, is a good partner with [men] in what she works with them on, then they don’t regard her as ‘You’re a woman.’ . . . They look at the work results as such . . . and they don’t notice that it’s a woman.”

On the basis of Miluše’s and Háta’s responses, it might be surmised that female managers in the Czech Republic are somehow exempt from gender-based discrimination. Umlaufová’s comment, however, intimates a slightly different twist: she links gender-based discrimination with competence—that is, gender does not work against a woman if she is “capable.” From a quantitative standpoint, statistical findings challenge these qualitative claims. While an estimated 8 percent of all Czech working men hold managerial posts, only 3.5 percent of all Czech working women occupy managerial jobs (Křížková and Pavlica 2004). Moreover, as of 2000, male-female wage differentials were greatest in management positions; female managers earned an average of 54 percent as much as their male counterparts (Křížková 2002). These data indicate that occupational stratification and wage differentials exist along gender lines. With the associations among occupation, wages, and gender well established by the literature,<sup>7</sup> the likelihood that these occurrences are the consequence of gender-based discrimination is strong. Whether occupational segregation is also at play in the management field is statistically unverified. With ten of the twenty-six female managers holding human resources/personnel management posts, the anecdotal evidence gleaned from this study is suggestive, however. An even larger number (fifteen) are employed by multinational enterprises. The ques-

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6. This nongovernmental organization was founded in the Czech Republic in 1990. As of August 2000, it had a base of between three hundred and four hundred members.

7. See, e.g., Reskin 1984.

tion of whether corporate (inter)nationalization in the postsocialist world is gendered is, in statistical terms, uncharted territory.

While Czech female managers are aware that gender-based discrimination exists, some observers, like me, may find these women's assumption of invulnerability perplexing and perhaps naive. Their denial of personal disadvantage is not, however, a novel phenomenon. In research conducted more than two decades ago, Faye J. Crosby found this to be a common occurrence among employed women in the United States. Crosby theorized that the "notion of deserving" is firmly entrenched in categorical conceptualizations. Because the reference of justice and therefore injustice is in essence to a "class" of individuals rather than to a single individual, claiming injustice compels individuals to recognize themselves as part of a larger categorical group (e.g., as women, as black) (Crosby 1982:162).<sup>8</sup> As Crosby writes,

One can sustain more easily the claim that a class of individuals have been denied their just desserts than the claim that a particular individual has not received her or his just desserts. When one asserts that a particular woman is the victim of sex discrimination, one treats the individual woman as a member of a larger class, woman. (162)

Its quite plausible that the same mechanism is at work in the Czech context. Missing from Crosby's explanation, however, is an identification of the wider narrative frame in which "justice" is embedded and of the notion's conceptual linkages. In the postsocialist Czech Republic, this construct is situated within a metanarrative whose protagonist is the self-interested individual with freedom and opportunity his/her emplotted prospects. For Czech female managers, to acknowledge any injustice as "women" would significantly disrupt their capacity to reconcile the happenings of their lives with the market metanarrative. The constraints of their gender are antithetical to the market's mantras. To construct an identity as "winners," they cannot then be "losers." In this complicity with the market metanarrative, gender consciousness is squashed. In their steadfast adherence to the structure of this meta-tale,

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8. "The essence of justice," says moral philosopher Chaim Perelman, "is that one must treat like alike" (quoted in Crosby 1982:62).

the ramifications extend beyond an interpretive severance of the tie between gender and the economy to that between gender and the state.

### Being a Good Citizen

During the socialist era, the state generally dictated the economy's workings, determining production, allocation, and consumption. In the postsocialist Czech Republic, the dynamic sought is quite the reverse. Supply and demand are now to be determined primarily by market forces. This dynamic is based on the assumption that economic efficiency is best achieved when "market forces operate, and products and services are not subsidized, heavily regulated or produced by the government" (Sparr 1994:1). In one of Klaus's many iterations of this belief, he declared,

The government can only very little . . . take care of the framework of conditions for a functioning market, the stabilization of prices and the health of state finances. The government should not want to know what is going on in individual enterprises and organizations, and it should in no way want to advise on what should be produced and to whom it should be sold. (1990e:2)

Inhibiting the state's controlling tendencies, as he reiterated again and again, requires that Czechs be responsible for insuring their freedom: "We know that it is our task to attack the expanding state, which was and still is a dominant tendency of the twentieth century, of the century of socialisms with a variety of confusing adjectives. . . . We want to demonstrate that it is possible to make a return to a liberal social order" (Klaus 1997:40). Yet again, freedom would be linked to responsibility for the Czech citizenry. Here, it would necessitate keeping the state at bay.

The socialist state assured the common good by assuring a vast array of economic (e.g., guaranteed employment) and social (e.g., child benefit) rights. Although rhetorically framed as universal rights, social rights such as maternity leave and the family allowance were directed primarily at mothers and families. Entitlement to such rights was, however, conditional on one's having worker status. As such, the state cre-

ated a system of mutual and engendered reliance, with the system dependent on women to labor and women dependent on the system to mother. In the postsocialist Czech Republic, neoliberal proponents seek to sever this tie. Adhering to neoliberalism's prescripts means allowing the market to determine its labor requisites and to meet laborers' needs. In this shift, much of the rights previously meted out by the socialist state are now to be furnished by the market economy. In this scenario, the "good citizen . . . recognizes the limits and liabilities of state intervention and, instead, works longer and harder to become self-reliant" (Brodie 1994:57; see also Drache 1992). In this schema, citizenship—as a set of economic and social rights—is heavily subsumed by the market. The "good citizen" and the "ideal worker" are narratively imbued with the same behavioral correlates of self-reliance and responsibility. In this conceptual conflation, being a good citizen effectively means being an ideal worker, and vice versa.

As neoliberals so aspired, Czech female managers construe the ties among women, family, and the state as no longer viable. This interpretation becomes even more general (and gender neutral) as any and all ties between individuals and the state are deemed incommensurate with free-market freedom. As Josephina pragmatically explained, "We lived in debt. It wasn't free. It had to come from somewhere." Much as the market metastory says, this debt numbers among Czechs' socialist transgressions. In female managers' inferences, success in the present as well as the future requires righting these past wrongs. In their construal, this amendment involves a wholesale rejection of state economic and social supports. As Josephina put it, "It's a fact that there were a lot of advantages. . . . But you know what? Everything that was before the revolution, I don't like." For Josephina and for other female managers making sense of their present privilege compels them to disdain the privileges of their past. Their denunciation is indiscriminate rather than confined to those populaces' enfranchised in capitalism's wake. In their estimations, this is capitalism: as Zdenka explained, "It means you don't get anything." As Lucie articulated, the past had "definite advantages. . . . There were family allowances and the like, but you know, it isn't right. . . . I don't expect anything from anyone. A person must be self-sufficient, and they have to learn in life how to take care of everything. I don't expect help from the state or anyone." Julie similarly advocated a gradual but eventually total discontinuation of state social benefits:

I think that if I decide to have a child, I would know that I can take care of this child—that I'm economically strong enough. . . . In the transition from [the socialist] regime, you can't cancel everything at once, though, because a lot of people would economically collapse. Nonetheless, I think that definitely, gradually [the benefits] should be canceled.

Ester claimed to want only one thing from the state: "to create a legislative framework . . . for firms that don't have a chance of survival to finally go bankrupt so that the economy is cleaned up to start growing. Because if there is growth, then of course the entire situation will be better." Herma, Emilie, and Miluše declared themselves to have no expectations of the state. Dependence is implicated in socialism's failure. In Czech female managers' appropriation of the market metanarrative, given a chance at redemption, their task is to avoid repeating the same sins.

### Rationalizing Reproductive Labor

Czech female managers see themselves as having heeded capitalism's calls for rational comportment not only as workers and citizens but also in their family roles. Their rationality pervades economic, civic, and family life. Rationalizing reproductive labor (labor requisite to the maintenance of the productive workforce, such as housework, child-bearing, and child rearing) can be seen as their greatest interpretive challenge. Because the market metanarrative is silent on reproduction, they must fill in this gap in the story. According to its storytellers, the self-regulating free market is the sole means of generating wealth. Outside the market, in the realm of reproduction, there is nothing to be bought or sold, no profits to be made. With no apparent monetary gain, reproductive labor is construed as empty of economic value and is thus immaterial to the market metanarrative.<sup>9</sup> The only identity of real value in this metastory is that of the ideal worker. For Czech female managers, this identity conjoined with freedom warrants preservation. Gita Sen contends that "while market expansion in many instances builds on and

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9. For feminist critiques of this assumption, see, e.g., Elson 1991, 1992; Waring 1988.

reinforces preexisting gender relations, it may also destabilize such relations” (1996:826). In the case of Czech female managers, both processes appear to be occurring.

These twenty-six women have an acute awareness that the values have shifted, as Irena conveys: “In first place [now] is knowing how to make money and knowing how to enjoy oneself and live well, but the family goes all the way to the back. . . . The ranking of life values has changed. . . . Before, in my opinion, the values were reversed. People were more oriented toward family, to family life.” Many Czechs saw the family as an “escape,” in Sabina’s words—a sacred space beyond the reach of a profane state. The burden or responsibility for this realm has fallen predominantly on Czech women since well before the socialist period, and state socialism only slightly alleviated the dynamic. Despite legislation enacted by the Communist Party and the constitution’s proclamation of “equality for all,” gender equality remained more *de jure* than *de facto*. As I discussed in chapter 2, while the socialist state’s professed ideology and legal directives appeared committed to women’s emancipation, the challenge to gender inequality was only partial and to a great extent was confined to the public sphere. Czech women became supplemental wage earners, but their responsibilities as wives and mothers in the private sphere endured, with little alteration. For example, from a Western vantage point, the generous maternity leaves granted to women under state socialism appeared progressive. However, without comparable leaves for men, the practice reinforced women’s traditional parenting role.

In its practical connotations, the home was unequivocally women’s domain prior to 1989. Despite the home’s burdensome nature, the permutations of state socialism also symbolically elevated the stature of the private sphere. Confronted by a state that “abrogated all prerogative in the public sphere,” Czechs came to view the private sphere as sacrosanct, as beyond the reach of a state with a seemingly ubiquitous presence (Watson 1998:9). As Croatian journalist Slavenka Drakulić explained, “An apartment, however small, however crowded with people and things, kids and animals, is ‘ours.’ To survive we had to divide the territory, to set a border between public and private” (1993:91–92). With the home sanctified, the task of its preservation was worthy. Consequently, Czech women little resisted its “burden.” As Czech sociologist Jiřina Šiklová described, Czech women were both

“martyrs” and “saints.”<sup>10</sup> In light of its practical redress and its symbolic salience under state socialism, gender equality was virtually impossible in the division of reproductive labor under state socialism.

In the new market economy, the practical circumstances have shifted and the private sphere is no longer so highly esteemed. While the home was the sole preserve of individual autonomy during the socialist period, in the postsocialist era, independence defines the public world of work. With the economic turnabout, emancipation in the domestic arena has become a possibility for some Czech women. The managers interviewed describe processes that simultaneously fortify and weaken existing gender relations in the home. Driving these paradoxical processes is the seemingly unbounded nature of market activity. In capitalism’s relentless pursuit of profit, employers demand that workers of both genders provide virtually infinite time availability and flexibility. These twenty-six women clearly understand these demands. In the socialist era, Heda recalled, time cards limited workers to 42.5 hours per week. Now that she is a manager, there are no time cards; she can come and go freely. However, this situation is not necessarily a benefit: she cannot go home until the work is done, and “the work is never done.” High time investment is further deemed a demonstration of personal responsibility and thus is one of success’ requirements. As Julie asserted, “If you want to achieve something, if you want to work in management, then it isn’t eight hours a day. It’s about responsibility.” Work has expanded not only in terms of time consumed but also in terms of the spaces it occupies. For many female managers, work has invaded the domestic sphere, filling up not only evenings and weekends but living rooms and kitchen tables.

To cope with the market’s temporal sprawl, however, those activities that take place outside of the market—that is, reproductive labor—must be contained. Here, the market metanarrative leaves off, and Czech female managers must create an interpretive bridge to grapple with the metastory’s silence. They deem their interpretive innovations “rational” responses, with two variations. In the first, they relinquish their household duties (e.g., cleaning) to lower-class women. This strategy to some extent subverts the public/private divide by converting nonmarket activities into market activities. However, this approach fails

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10. Personal communication.

to overturn the gendered nature of household work. Domestic labor remains primarily the province of women, although the emergent class hierarchy gives upper-class women the prerogative of hiring lower-class women to perform such tasks. Czech female managers, however, never verbally acknowledge this continued gendering of the responsibilities of housework, remaining silent about this contradiction. According to Mary Romero's work on the "housework dilemma," linking "the oppression of housework" to its "unpaid status" enables professional women to "deny that the burden of sexism has been shifted to another woman" (1992:168).

In the second strategy, Czech female managers radically revise the division of labor in their households<sup>11</sup> in favor of a more gender-equitable division.<sup>12</sup> This tactic constitutes a remarkable destabilization of the long-standing status quo. In theoretical terms, this development appears to be largely consistent with Rae Lesser Blumberg's (1984, 1988) theory of gender stratification, in which relative male/female economic power is the principal determinant of intrahousehold stratification. Put more plainly, the greater women's economic power, the greater their say in household matters. The managers I interviewed conceived of this modification as a result of market demands rather than any exercise in gendered power. This interpretation enables them again to avoid the conceptual contradictions between gendered constraints and the market's supposed lack of restraint.

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11. The underlying assumption here is that the household contains cohabitators such as a husband or partner and/or children.

12. One additional rationalization of reproductive labor may be at work here, involving Czech women more generally opting out of childbearing or limiting themselves to only one child in the new market economy. As of 1990, the average age at first birth in Czechoslovakia was 22.5 years; by 2000, this figure had increased to 25. Over the same period, the fertility rate dropped from an estimated 1.9 to 1.14 (Czech Statistical Office 2004). Such dramatic shifts very likely constitute a response to the turmoil of economic transition but also may be part of a broader pattern of child postponement found in Europe more broadly. This type of rationalization was not so readily apparent among the twenty-six women I interviewed. However, as of 1990, all of the female managers in this study were twenty-four years of age or older, and most were at least thirty years old. Thus, for most of these women, marketization may not have had a tremendous effect on their childbearing decisions because such decisions had already been made before the outset of transition. Nonetheless, it remains possible—indeed, probable—that this rationalization is occurring for a younger cohort of female success stories.

For the Czech Republic, services such as cleaning, babysitting, and food delivery/take-out are a novelty, unavailable prior to 1989. Today, those households with adequate financial resources can pay members of an emerging class of service providers to take over many household tasks, such as child care and meal preparation. As thirty-five-year-old marketing manager Irma affirmed, “Financial security and the like makes such things not so miserably difficult.” The growing array of services “can now make life a little easier,” said thirty-five-year-old HR manager Sofia. In many ways, Sofia exemplifies how high-status Czech women are adapting to the free market by allocating many of their domestic duties to lower-status women. During the late 1990s, Sofia divorced her husband of ten years. At the time of the interview, Sofia had been involved with another man for a year and a half, and he had moved in with her and her eleven-year-old daughter ten months earlier. Sofia and her partner were working hard to compromise on the distribution of household labor. For example, her partner takes more responsibility in the kitchen since he enjoys cooking. They grocery shop together, although Sofia attributes this cooperation primarily to his ownership of the car. Her retired parents help considerably with the care of their granddaughter, taking her to and from school, for instance. Sofia bears responsibility for a wide assortment of household tasks, including vacuuming, dusting, mopping, laundry, and more general cleanup. She also assumes much of the responsibility for caring for her daughter—for example, helping with her homework. In the throes of pursuing an MBA while working full time, Sofia believed that it was “impossible to balance everything.” In 2000, therefore, Sofia and her boyfriend hired a woman to clean their home once a month: “I don’t have this woman so that I can lay out in the yard and get a tan. I have this woman because I have other work that I also must do. And this work she can’t do for me, nor anyone else, but that work [in the home] she can do for me.” Sofia hopes to eventually increase the cleaning woman’s visits to twice a month. She believes that such a move would be sensible but that her boyfriend would require some cajoling. The rationality of this transformation of reproductive into productive labor is less apparent for her partner and arguably for Czech men in general, who have reaped the advantages of reproductive work’s gendering.

This long-standing arrangement where mothers, wives, and partners have done the bulk of the household labor has taken little away from men. Scenarios such as Sofia’s possess a financial cost. While these

women try to play up social gains such as more quality time for their families, some men continue to struggle to come to terms with the perceived financial sacrifice. In HÁta's case, her husband was less resistant to the monetary outlay:

When I began to have more responsibility at work, I realized that it isn't in my power to balance [work and family] so that I might at least have some weekend because I worked from morning to night every day. On Saturday morning I went shopping, started to cook. In the afternoon I did the laundry, hung the clothes out to dry, and on Sunday I spent the entire afternoon at the ironing board because a man needs one or two shirts a day. And I said, "This isn't a life," because I felt like I'm tired. I went to work on Mondays completely worn out. Then we bought a cottage so that on Friday evenings perhaps we would go to the cottage. And, at home, I no longer really did anything in the household. That didn't work.

In 1994, HÁta and her husband hired someone to clean their home and to do the ironing once a week. Her husband yielded easily. Never willing to participate physically in the maintenance of their home, this financial concession, according to HÁta, was a form of "help," albeit "minimal." For HÁta, having the maid is a "great relief." "Without her, I think that it would be very difficult to coordinate everything together because to be a perfect mother, a perfect employee or employer or boss, to have everything at home perfectly clean—it's nonsense!"

While many Czech female managers have attempted to cope with their domestic demands by hiring help in the form of cleaning women, nannies, and/or babysitters, several opted for an alternative approach that entails a pragmatic allocation of household duties among all household members. Emílie is married with two sons, ages nine and eleven. She began working as an administrative assistant in 1995 at a branch of a multinational enterprise that manufactures medical products. She wanted to work part time, but when she went to an employment agency was told that doing so would be a "problem." An invalid, widowed male neighbor offered to help by taking her children to and from school and babysitting after school until she returned home. He also ironed and vacuumed. Eventually however, Emílie grew uncomfortable with this arrangement:

My sons see that while they don't do anything at home, there is an external person coming to the flat and cleaning the flat. And I felt it's not a very good example for them. So I wasn't so comfortable with that. And then he was sick, he had some problem again, this gentleman, and he told me that he doesn't want to continue because he should relax more. . . . He was at least one and half a year or something like that coming to our flat. And then since he stopped, the sons were already big enough, and I thought, "Jesus Christ, why should I hire an external lady to come cleaning when I have two sons who can do the vacuum cleaning themselves?" So I discussed with them, and that's how it all started. And I told to my sons, "Look, if we get an external person"—because they knew that we had to pay to that gentleman—"I have to give part of my salary to that lady so it will influence the family budget." And I told them, "Look, you want the in-line skates or whatever? We will not be able to go for a vacation every year to the seaside or something like that." And I told them that if each of us will do a small part. . . . We are four people in the family, and we have a small flat, and if we divide the job it's fair enough. And they agreed that it's fair enough. I have to say the elder son is much more willing to help. The younger son, he's still got some problems . . . but the elder one is quite reliable, and now I even increase the level, I even ask them to switch on the washing machine, I put in the powder and everything there, so they switch it on and when the washing machine is done they can even hang the clothes. So we are one step further. So I am trying to—I don't want to make cleaning ladies out of them, of course, but I want them to understand that something happens in between, as I say, from the time that you take a dirty shirt and put it in the bathroom until it appears, by some miracle, again washed and ironed, folded properly, in your shelf. So, I want them to understand that something is there and somebody has to do these things, and I really think it's very good for life.<sup>13</sup>

Emilie's heavy emphasis on responsibility weaves in one of the market metanarrative's main threads. She claims that while her husband is

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13. During this portion of the interview, Emilie spoke English; these are her words.

“not very happy” doing household chores, he too recognizes the value of fostering such behavior in their children. Forty-nine-year-old finance manager Anna also uses the notion of responsibility in her justification of a less gendered division of housework, but with a different reference: “I also go to work, and I have work that is virtually as responsible as his—I am basically on his level. And in that case, we have to divide that which concerns our home [life].” Her twenty-year-old son still lives at home, and she deems all three members of the household responsible for its operation, basing her rationalization primarily on available time: “The one who is home must do what [housework] is necessary.”

For forty-nine-year-old HR manager Milada, the intensifying demands of her job meant less time at home. In her view, this change constituted legitimate grounds for insisting that her husband share more in the cooking and cleaning. He was reluctant to assume greater responsibility. While “teaching” him that the household is no longer solely her terrain to maintain, Milada used her sizable economic contribution to the family as her trump card, not only in justifying her abdication of some of the domestic duties but more strategically as an inducement to her husband to assume a larger portion of household chores. Miluše’s husband was “uninvolved with the household labor” prior to 1990—“he did nothing.” When she became part owner of a company producing dairy products, however, the demands on her time became so vast that she found herself unable to attend to many of the household tasks. As a result, her husband had to “take part of these concerns on his own shoulders.” The couple had been married for ten years, and the difficult adjustment provoked a marital “crisis.” Over time, however, Miluše said, he had come to understand and accept this reallocation of domestic labor.

As of 2000, a few female managers in the group interviewed had not instituted any mode of rationalizing their reproductive labor; however, many entertained ideas of its reform akin to those of Sofia, Hátá, Emilie, Anna, Milada, and Miluše. Josephina was still “considering” whether to hire a cleaning woman. Margareta had been looking to hire a cleaning woman for a while but was having difficulty finding someone trustworthy. For all of these women, the rationalization of reproductive labor had obstacles in the shape of disinclined husbands/partners, reluctant children, and unreliable domestic workers. Nonetheless, these women sought to overcome these impediments. Their rationalization of reproductive labor lent their postsocialist lives a sense of coherence. As they

fused the personal, private happenings of their everyday lives with the public metastory of the market, the links between behavior and success/failure remained intact. The disruptions of gender constraints and class privilege went largely unrecognized. In the opinions of Czech female managers, the market made a bona fide offer of freedom.

## Conclusion

The establishment of new economic, social, and political relationships will offer greater individual responsibility, freedom, and even power.

—VÁCLAV KLAUS (1990e:1)

Czech female managers defy ready ascription as have-nots or as losers in the Czech Republic's economic transformation. For them, the move toward the market has demanded that they become more self-reliant, personally responsible, and independent. In return, they have received the promised gains—status, prestige, and power—and the ultimate reward, freedom. In their interpretation, they have heeded the market metanarrative's calls. To invoke one of Heda's words, they have relinquished the "passivity" of their past. In their postsocialist present, they have embraced a behavioral repertoire that requires agency on their part. They have actively seized new opportunities and consequently have reaped hefty social and financial benefits. In their estimations, the market is the source of their empowerment. Its transformative effects touch every aspect of their lives, reconfiguring their roles not only as workers but also as citizens, wives/partners, and mothers. Making sense of their postsocialist everyday lived realities is contingent on a logic that does not exist without its illogic. Here, making market sense means marking some experiential elements as nonsense. More specifically, absent from their liberatory tale is any recognition of a social self as gendered. This inconsistency between liberation and oppression must be suppressed to maintain the sense of the metastory from which these women derive their personal sagas. Moreover, for these twenty-six women, making market sense leaves history and culture superfluous. In their interpretation, emancipation is available to all able individuals at any time and any place as long as they adhere to the free market's behavior prescriptions.

The experiences of Czech female factory workers, unlike those of

Czech female managers, are not so easily reconciled with the emancipatory promise of the market metanarrative. These workers' attempts to make sense of their postsocialist lifeworlds compel somewhat more arduous interpretive innovations than those made by female managers. Nonetheless, even for female factory workers, the market metanarrative remains a liberatory parable, albeit not immediate.