

Introduction

IN 2003, TWO CZECH FILM STUDENTS, Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda, used a state grant totaling 1.5 million Czech crowns (as well as other funding) to promote the opening of a fictitious hypermarket in Prague.¹ Klusák and Remunda documented the hoax in their film *Český sen* (The Czech Dream), which became a box office hit when it reached Czech theaters in 2004. While the media and politicians condemned the film for wasting public money, Czech filmgoers flocked to see it. Remarkably, *Český sen* played in Czech theaters for over a year. While the novelty of its genre, billed as a reality show on film, captured Czechs' attention, it was arguably the absurdity of its story that truly captivated them.

Klusák and Remunda employed the services of a top advertising agency, visited style consultants at Hugo Boss for their makeovers as “directors” of the hypermarket, and invested in psychometric tests aimed at gauging consumer preferences. For two weeks in May 2003, the opening of the supposed hypermarket was advertised via a teaser advertising campaign with brightly colored slogans on billboards such

1. Three-quarters of costs were covered by placing advertisers' logos in the film's credits. The remainder of the funding came from the Fund for the Support and Development of Czech Cinematography, Czech Television, and the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (www.czech-dream.com).

as “Don’t Go There,” “Don’t Spend Your Money,” “Don’t Stand in Line,” “Opening May 31st at 10 A.M.!—Where? You’ll find out soon,” and a chorus-sung jingle with sarcastic lyrics like “If you don’t have the cash, get a loan and scream, ‘I want to fulfill my dream!’” In Klusák and Remunda’s words, the strategy was built on “suspense” and “mystery.”² TV spots as well as two hundred thousand flyers advertising ridiculously low prices further tantalized Czech consumers. The lures worked. On May 31, 2003, more than a thousand people—young, old, fit, and disabled—showed up at the Letany fairgrounds in Prague for the hypermarket’s grand opening. The advertisements had promised a “surprise” for everyone who came on opening day, and that is indeed what they got. What from a distance appeared to be the front of the hypermarket painted in the eye-catching colors of its advertisements was in actuality just a ten-meter-high, one-hundred-meter-wide billboard sitting in a green field. After realizing that they had been tricked, the “customers” had a variety of reactions. Some cursed the student filmmakers. A few even threw stones at the store’s faux facade. Several chuckled at the well-executed ruse. Others noted the irony in having been duped. As one would-be “customer” commented, “I thought the era of lies was over, but it’s not.”

While most obviously, this film is a treatise on consumerism gone wild, its meanings—for Czechs as well as for other Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) citizenries more broadly—go much further. The timing of this scam coincided with the Czech government’s campaign for a “yes” vote on accession to the European Union (EU). In *Český sen*’s closing sequence, Klusák and Remunda signal this wider significance by inserting a short segment on Czech politicians’ campaign to convince Czechs to vote favorably on EU accession, thereby intimating that marketers and politicians vying for Czechs’ purchasing and political verve similarly exploit an array of verbal and visual ploys. For Czechs, the film’s connotations speak not only to the continuities between marketers’ and politicians’ manipulation of consumers’ and citizens’ minds but also to the parallels between slogans of the socialist past and those of the postsocialist present. Albeit in different guise, the “propaganda” associated with the socialist past exists in the present.

In *Český sen*, the convergence of more than one thousand “cus-

2. Taken from an interview with the filmmakers posted on the film’s English-language Web site (<http://www.czech-dream.com>).

tomers” at a market’s opening day and film shots of many running across the Letany grounds toward its supposed entryway is testimony enough to Czechs’ enthusiasm for the market. But, while *Český sen* is about Czechs’ mania for a particular market, it might also be read as a parable about Czechs’ fervor for and encounter with capitalism. Seventy-seven percent of Czechs voted in favor of EU accession—to becoming in effect a part of Europe’s common market. In 1989, a mere fourteen years earlier, Czechs had radically changed course, rejecting the Communist Party’s command economy regime in favor of a free-market economy. These processes of marketization are not unique to the Czech Republic; many countries across the CEE region have followed a similar path. However, Czechs’ attitudes toward their socialist economic past (negative) and their anticipated capitalist future (positive) have been more pronounced than the attitudes of their CEE counterparts (Rose 2001; Rose and Haerpfer 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1998). While *Český sen* shows Czechs rushing toward an imagined market located in a Prague field, the race toward the market more broadly understood is an underlying subtext. *Český sen* reminds Czechs about the power not only of ideas but also of those notions that fallaciously buttress the market. Even some of the hypermarket’s prospective customers in the film acknowledge this irony, which thus cannot escape the audience’s notice. *Český sen* compels Czechs to think about the market’s meaning for them and more profoundly to reflect on how easily they can be convinced of its “dream.”

As I watched *Český sen* in the Světozor Theater, located just off Prague’s Wenceslas Square, during the summer of 2005, I was struck by the realization that Czechs were engaged in recognizing the market not merely as a set of practices involving the trading, buying, and selling of goods and services but also as a constructed image or set of ideas. For more than a decade, my scholarly attentions have focused largely on questions of marketization and in particular on its meaning in the Czech context and in the postsocialist world more generally. My engagement, informed by my feminist inclinations, has been somewhat more limited, centering principally on marketization’s implications for women. Nonetheless, my understanding of the ideological workings of the market is certainly akin to the insights wonderfully embodied in *Český sen*.

In this book, I explore how free-market economics as a discourse penetrated postsocialist spaces—specifically, the Czech Republic—and

how political elites discursively mobilized the free market to legitimate a new economic order in the decade following socialism's overthrow. This discourse manifests as a grand narrative—a metanarrative—in which capitalism vanquishes communism and frees the “captive” populace.³ In the most fundamental sense, it is a constructed story about good conquering evil. In this compelling metastory, the neoliberal market is the ever-moral hero and the state the almost-always-immoral villain. The free market fights the impoverishing (communist) state for economic growth and ultimately prosperity. In Czech neoliberals' telling of the tale, no compromises in the form of market socialism, reform communism, or a socialist market economy are viable. Only a neoliberal market can truly free the populace from its communist confinement, allowing citizens to leave an uncivilized place and return to the civilized world—that is, Europe. To reach this tale's triumphal end, however, those held captive must help with their own release. This entails forsaking their “bad,” irrational behaviors (irresponsibility and dependence) and assuming “good,” rational behaviors (self-reliance, personal responsibility, and independence). According to Czech political leaders, Czechs' national character as a talented, able and clever people renders this adaptation possible. In return, the people can end the punishing deprivations of their socialist past and reap the copious rewards of a capitalist present and future.

At the time of this tale's telling, free-market economics is globally hegemonic. At this historical moment, the “invisible hand” of the free market is deemed the most economically functional route, and state intervention is seen as dysfunction. This metastory is further set in a space with a distinct past, marked by nearly half a century of state socialism—the Czech Republic. In its postsocialist present, this place has encountered fewer tribulations and more triumphs than other post-socialist countries have in restructuring its economy. In this particular time and place, this meta-tale has taken root, with national and international political elites actively contributing to its cultivation. Their careful and crafty nurturance has resulted in a strong, steady, and ultimately quite convincing metastory.

3. Although the capitalist conqueror is dressed in neoliberal guise and communism is only partly clothed in socialist attire, this does not detract from the overarching storyline.

At its core, however, this book focuses on how a postsocialist populace interprets this conveyed “dream” of the free market in which capitalism now promises a “radiant future.” More concretely, the book concerns how seventy-four Czech female managers and factory workers stay true to its transposed logic despite the incongruities between their “reality” and the “dream.” Regardless of the inclusivity of the market metanarrative’s promise, many scholars expected that women and workers would walk away from the free market empty-handed—capitalism’s losers—much like the would-be customers in *Český sen*. In fact, Czech female managers have found their way in, reaping the market’s promised gains. Czech female factory workers, in contrast, have remained outside, with the free market’s rewards out of their reach. Experientially, these two groups of women have traveled very different postsocialist paths. Yet interpretively, in their personal postsocialist parables, members of both groups conclude that their path ends with liberation. For the managers, this release from socialism’s strictures is immediate and ubiquitous, affecting every facet of their lives as workers, citizens, wives/partners, and mothers. In trading their socialist misbehaviors for a “market” mode of comportment, they count themselves among transition’s success stories. The factory workers’ losses are just as profound as the managers’ gains—if not more so. In the postsocialist era, the workers have been pushed to Czech society’s economic and social margins. However, they interpret these deprivations as temporary; their descendants will partake in capitalism’s promised bounty. In their understandings, the “radiant future” will belong to their children and grandchildren.

The conclusion of *Český sen* makes apparent the mismatch between reality and dream. The filmmakers admit the hoax, and there is no escaping the knowledge that a billboard and some scaffolding do not make a hypermarket. In contrast, the free market’s propagators acknowledge no such ruse; they will not discredit the “dream” of capitalism. Moreover, no credible alternative seems available. For this postsocialist populace, socialism is now their nightmare, and capitalism has become their dream. Consequently, female managers and factory workers strive interpretively—either altering their own experiences or modifying elements of the market metanarrative—to preserve their faith in capitalism and to avoid a Kafkaesque state of being. In so doing, they both empower and disempower themselves, sometimes quite unwittingly.

Market, Meaning, and (Meta)Narrative

An important precondition for the analysis presented in this book is that the market is not solely construed as the trading, buying, and selling of goods and services. In contrast to this market realist conceptualization, scholars have argued that the market also functions as a mental model informed by particular cultural and political referents (Carrier 1997; Dilley 1992). I locate my theoretical take on the market largely in the latter theoretical camp, as do other scholars who conceptualize the market as a discursive form. I extend the theoretical and empirical agenda of market modelers and discourse analysts in considering the workings of the free market as a discourse in the postsocialist milieu (Dilley 1992). I suggest, however, that the market does not merely represent an ideological manifestation expressed via discourse but also takes shape as a narrative—more specifically, as a metanarrative.⁴ Metanarratives are not only grand or all-encompassing stories but are distinct from other narratives in their naturalization; this naturalization occurs when social phenomena are naturalized (Somers 2001). Put more simply, when stories are grounded in “that which is designated as ‘given’—unchanging, spontaneous, voluntary, natural, God-given, law-like”—they achieve metanarrative stature (Somers 1999:144). Thus, when narratives go meta, they derive an authority that is profoundly difficult to dislodge. However, as Elliot Mishler asserts, metanarratives “conceal patterns of domination and submission” (1995:115).

During moments of social turmoil, narratives become “at least partly externalized,” making them all the more ready for both their propagators and protagonists to enact (Hart 1992:635). Instrumentally, these narratives can become a mobilizational resource for political leaders who manipulate them to persuade their addressees to adhere to a desired course of action (Hart 1992). In the aftermath of the CEE citizenries’ revolutionary retaliation against the socialist state in the late 1980s, the market metanarrative came to the fore in much of the region as a formidable resource for political leaders. Free-market economics underpins a potent, publicly espoused metastory aimed at convincing CEE citizenries of the merits of the free market. The metanarrative embodies a very particular rather than universal set of values that,

4. Thompson claims that “ideologies tend to assume a narrative form” (1984:11).

treated as natural and thus taken for granted, go unexamined. While counternarratives can undermine such stories, this event is unlikely in the postsocialist milieu (Mishler 1995). Socialism's collapse has created an ideological void. For CEE populaces, the communist counternarrative has been discredited, leaving the metanarrative of the free market not only hegemonic but unrivaled. In an otherwise uncertain and ambiguous postsocialist world, the free market has been "elevated to the touchstone of certainty" (Dilley 1992:22).

Furthermore, the market is not something "out there" but rather is integrated into the very self, often unconsciously. The principal way in which humans are understood to make sense of their lived experiences is through narratives (Jameson 1981; Kane 2000; Mishler 1986; Personal Narratives Group 1989; Somers 1994). As Laurel Richardson explains, "People make sense of their lives through the stories that are available to them, and they attempt to fit their lives into the available stories. People live by stories" (1990:129). Individuals effectively seek to integrate their experiences, past and present, by invoking prevailing stories—public, social, and/or cultural (Somers and Gibson 1994). In addition, individuals not only appropriate narratives in the act of sense making but also articulate their resulting reasoning in narrative fashion. In other words, people cognitively and orally engage their world through stories (Richardson 1990). Out of this synthesis of lived experience with available stories emerges who individuals are and what they do. As Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson elaborate, to do otherwise "would fundamentally violate their sense of being at that time and place" (1994:67).

Two types of stories lie at the empirical core of this book: a metanarrative about the free market of public currency, and seventy-four personal narratives. I look at how a portion of the CEE populace—twenty-six Czech female managers and forty-eight Czech female factory workers—engage with a constricted narrative universe dominated by the story of a free-market economic order. I demonstrate how these two groups of women have anchored their experiences—what has happened and is happening to them—to this metanarrative. Most apparently, this book describes the role of a metanarrative about the market in a postsocialist space. More importantly, it speaks to how a publicly articulated narrative's structure and context can empower the story so that it defines "what is possible and intelligible" (Chase 2005:667). The delimiting capacity of such a story, however, can transpire in radically different ways.

I explore the market's meanings from the vantage points of two overlapping groups of its supposed losers: workers and women. While the metastory of the free market is told to all, many scholars never expected it to become a reality for all. In the systemic trade-off between socialism and capitalism, many—but not all—stood to gain, to win in terms of power and prosperity. Some people were expected to slip in their social and/or economic foothold, becoming losers in this economic game guided by a wholly different set of rules than those of the previous forty years. The anticipated losers included women and workers as well as pensioners and a multitude of others, including former state bureaucrats, peasant farmers, the disabled, and the unemployed (Greskovits 1998; Matějů 1995, 1996; Pollert 1999; Róna-Tas 1996; Sachs 1993). Many imagined that such losers, angered by a “radiant future” that they were denied, would challenge the move toward the free market with “radical collective protest, anomic movements, massive strikes, and political violence” (Greskovits 1998:69; see also Ágh 1991; Jowitt 1992; Sachs and Lipton 1990). However, during the 1990s, this expected backlash from women and workers across the postsocialist world never ensued. Why not?

Many scholars certainly have attempted to explain the quiescence of women and workers in the postsocialist world. Such explanations generally have attributed this inhibition along gender and class lines to institutional and ideological holdovers from the socialist past. These accounts have evolved largely separately, with little attention to the linkages between axes of difference such as gender and class. Substantial tensions among gender scholars of postsocialism are founded in this disregard for the potential overlay either among the assumed losers (e.g., women and workers) or between the supposed losers and the alleged winners (e.g., women and managers). The difficulties of treating these various social groupings marked as losers as discrete and homogeneous have gone virtually unrecognized among scholars principally preoccupied with the class dimensions of economic reform. This mutually exclusive regard with respect to gender and class engenders ambiguities in both bodies of literature. The question of how to discern “loss” further confounds these literatures.

Women Dis/Content

Throughout the 1990s, gender scholars of postsocialism debated extensively whether women were the losers of CEE economic (and political)

transitions.⁵ This dispute fractured most visibly along geographic lines—West versus East.⁶ Western scholars, for the most part, portrayed CEE women as the losers, claiming that reform processes further diminished these women's "already tenuous hold on resources" (Molyneux 1994:293; see also Einhorn 1993; Einstein 1996; LaFont 2001; Moghadam 1993, 1996; Spencer 1996; Watson 1993). At the same time, many CEE scholars charged their Western counterparts with producing a homogenized rendition of the victimized "CEE woman." Furthermore, they challenged Western scholars' valuations of women's gains (e.g., self-determination) as well as losses (e.g., guaranteed employment) (Čermáková 1995; Havelková 1993, 1996; Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000; Šiklová 1994, 1998, 2000; Štast'ná 1995; Szalai 2000; Tóth 1993; Věšínová-Kalivodová 1998).

For some Western scholars, such as those with Marxist/socialist feminist leanings, the incursion of capitalism into the formerly socialist world was enough to cause alarm. In their understandings, the source of women's oppression lay in part if not in entirety in capitalism; socialism, in stark contrast, was seen as an emancipating force. They looked with envy on the high levels of female labor force activity attained in the socialist states, fostered and facilitated by an array of social protections accorded to mothers and families. For example, in socialist Czechoslovakia,⁷ women made up 46.2 percent of the total active working population in 1980 (Kroupová 1991). They also received twenty-eight weeks

5. *Transition* is a term frequently invoked in reference to the systemic changes transpiring throughout the postsocialist world in the aftermath of state socialism's overthrow. Many scholars have suggested that the word problematically presumes a particular teleology (i.e., from Communist Party rule to democracy, from planned to free-market economy) and embodies an implicit set of values (i.e., modernity). Some have wondered whether the label *transformation* better captures the processes of change in the CEE region. Both of these terms, however, remain in currency, and they are often used as though they were interchangeable. In my use of these labels, I subscribe to the contingency and open-endedness of change in the postsocialist world.

6. My intent is not to essentialize "West" and "East." They are merely heuristic devices useful in illuminating differences. They are in no way absolute distinctions; variabilities within and commonalities between them prevail.

7. Czechoslovakia was a single nation between 1918 and 1993. On January 1, 1993, the country split into two independent states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. My references to the country as Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic shift accordingly.

of maternity leave after the birth of a child and 90 percent of their net wages during this period. The state subsequently provided a family allowance and protected leave from their jobs until the child reached the age of three.⁸ These “achievements” were crucial facets of long-pursued feminist agendas in the West. The collapse of Communist Party power in the CEE countries was thus read as a major setback for women.

Other Western scholars based their apprehension less in the distinctions between socialism and capitalism’s relationship to women’s subordination and more in the particular variant of capitalism making inroads into CEE—that is, a capitalism of neoliberal predisposition. As Barbara Einhorn describes, the “dominant neo-liberal paradigm” posits that the market is the “sole and sufficient regulator of economic and social development” (1995:2). Many Western scholars saw this relinquishment of the economy to the “invisible hand” of the market as placing CEE women’s needs and interests in jeopardy. Their assumptions were not unfounded; a considerable body of scholarship, commonly known as women in development or gender and development literature, had already evinced neoliberalism’s largely negative effects on female populaces, most especially in Latin America and Africa but also beyond (Beneria and Feldman 1992; Deere et al. 1990; Sparr 1994). In the minds of many of these scholars, neoliberalism, with its globalizing propensity, had trespassed the borders of yet another world, the Second World, to the detriment of its female populace, a by-now-predictable victim. And a reliance on gender-disaggregated statistical measures and an observance of social policy reforms offered empirical confirmation of the parallels in the shape of deepening gender divisions in the economic sphere, the feminization of poverty, and the deterioration of women’s reproductive and legal rights (Dijkstra 1997; Dölling 1991; Einhorn 1993; Einstein 1996; Kiss 1991; Moghadam 1993; Nesporova 1999; Paukert 1995; Stamatel 1997; UNICEF 1999).

In the swell of triumphalist proclamations about the free market and its benefits for all citizens, regardless of their gender, these Western gender scholars of postsocialism were largely lone voices of dissent. With the underbelly of the free market exposed, they awaited CEE

8. For further details on social protections provided by CEE socialist states, see Hübner, Maier, and Rudolph 1993; UNICEF 1999.

women's expressions of dissent. To these observers' surprise, however, CEE women appeared passive. Several Western scholars explained this lack of "feminist consciousness" as rooted in feminism's leftist associations with communism as well as the socialist state's attack on feminism (Funk 1993; Goldfarb 1997; Heitlinger 1996). Some observers further suggested that under socialism, the state/society opposition eclipsed the man/woman dichotomy (Snitow 1993; Verdery 1994). While CEE social scientists have generated similar explanations with respect to feminism's connotations in the region and the overshadowing of gender identities by a state/society opposition under socialism, many have not agreed with Western scholars' assessments of CEE women's post-1989 status.

While Western scholars readily observed a scenario of loss for CEE women, this depiction was less obvious to CEE social scientists, many of whom fervently contested their Western counterparts' predictions and conclusions. This refutation came most vehemently from Czech scholars. Czech sociologist Jaroslava Štast'ná, for example, declared, "Since 1989, Western social scientists have largely driven debate and have transferred—often uncritically—their concerns and concepts of the role of gender in Western society into the context of Eastern and Central Europe" (1995:24). While Štast'ná's contention is perhaps the most forthright, her challenge was not novel: CEE social scientists' rebuffs of Western scholars date back to the early 1990s. For example, at a 1991 United Nations seminar on the impacts of political and economic reform on women's status in CEE, Hungarian political scientist Maria Lado declared,

The pessimistic views on [CEE] women's prospects were based on historical and economic projections of situations completely unlike the current transition from a centrally planned economy to a market one. . . . [I]t is an over simplification to assume that the changes would have only a negative impact on the lives and economic activities of women. (United Nations 1992:46)

Similarly, Czech philosopher Hana Havelková described a "diagnosis" of CEE women's postsocialist situation based on Western women's "theoretical and practical experience" as resulting in "an underestimating of the specific historical experience of women in Eastern Europe"

(1993:64–65). In the same volume, Hungarian sociologist Olga Tóth rebuked Western scholars for their “pity” and “trembling compassion”; in Tóth’s view, these sentiments stemmed from Western scholars’ “distortions” and misunderstandings about CEE women’s contemporary realities (1993:213). Czech sociologist Jiřina Šiklová deemed Western scholars “insensitive” for behaving as though they “already know everything” (1993:10). Romanian sociologist Laura Grünberg (2000) described this as trying to build an “Eastern” house “with Western bricks.” Šiklová also articulated similar sentiments about miscalculations in Western scholars’ readings of CEE women’s postsocialist story:

From the point of view of Western social scientists, the post communist block appears as an undifferentiated whole. But it is not homogenous. There always were and there still are big differences between the countries which are now collected under the term post communist. The economic and political situations in these states differ in essential ways, depending on the traditions and on the conditions of the country before World War II (1939), on how closely and for how long the country was economically and politically tied to the former Soviet Union, and on the ethnic and religious make-up of the country, both past and present. (1994:3)

Essentially, CEE social scientists have perceived Western scholars as producing a one-dimensional, overly simplified rendition of the victimized CEE woman. This formulation left CEE scholars uneasy. Western scholars seemed to layer false universalizations about women’s experiences—globally, by assuming a similar terrain (theoretically and practically) between East and West; regionally, by treating the CEE nations as historically undifferentiated; and locally, by disregarding the salience of other social differences besides gender (e.g., class, ethnicity).

While CEE social scientists’ efforts to draw attention to CEE women’s “differences” signal several shortcomings in Western scholarship on CEE women, this type of challenge to Western scholarship has emerged on other fronts as well: from Western women of color, particularly African Americans, and from non-Western, Third World scholars, often referred to as postcolonial (Flew et al. 1999; Minh-ha 1989; Mohanty 1988; Ong 1988; Sangari and Vaid 1989). Both have charged Western scholars with inadequately attending to the historical, cultural,

and social variability of women's experiences, resulting in the inaccurate composites of "women of color" and "Third World women."⁹ Like the "Central and East European woman," the "woman of color" and the "Third World woman" are solely victims of wider structures of exploitation such as capitalism. This assumption has riled CEE social scientists. Štast'ná proposed that CEE women may turn out not to be the losers in the transition from socialism to capitalism but contended that it has yet to be established because a "thorough and systematic" analysis of the gender dimensions of this shift remains to be done (1995:26). Like others before them, CEE social scientists seek to (re)measure loss as well as potential gain against the "constitutive complexities" of CEE women's lifeworlds to accurately comprehend the market's meaning in postsocialist venues, especially for its women (Mohanty 1988:53–54).

Clashing modes of interpretation ultimately underlie these tensions between East and West. Relying on various quantifiable indicators, Western scholars glean loss. And indeed, the status of CEE women relative to their male counterparts has changed in ways more inauspicious than not. These losses are, however, read as absolute—static, irrespective of place. For CEE social scientists, in contrast, the losses are relative—fluid, respective of place. Where Western scholars appear to have missed the mark is in understanding the meanings of these gendered outcomes as this capitalism of neoliberal predisposition was planted in postsocialist soils with distinct blends of historical, cultural, and social components. Nonetheless, while so many CEE social scientists have invested considerable energy in disputing Western scholars' pessimistic readings, they have put forth little substantive evidence. More recently, however, several Western scholars seem to be heeding these calls for contextualizing CEE women's free-market encounter (Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b; Haney 2002). And this contemporary scholarship, still small but growing, generates richly variegated accounts of CEE women's experiences in the economic transition from socialism to capitalism. Kristen Ghodsee (2005), for example, illuminates how Bulgarian women employed in the tourism sector actually became winners in

9. Women of color have been more inclined to accentuate the social, while postcolonial Third World scholars have tended to place greater emphasis on the historical and the cultural.

Bulgaria's transition to a market economy primarily by using their cultural capital in strategic fashion.¹⁰ These latest accounts suggest that multiple scenarios are at play in the CEE countries, rather than merely a single scenario of loss.

Worker Dissent or Consent

While the postsocialist status of CEE women has been hotly debated, there has been no comparable contestation among scholars about the status of workers in the postsocialist world. All observers would concede that for the most part, any “worker’s paradise”—communism’s promise—was now undeniably out of workers’ reach (Kubicek 2004). In addition, most observers expected that workers would exert the greatest resistance to capitalism’s incursion (Crowley and Ost 2001; Greskovits 1998). Nonetheless, the working class in the CEE countries (as well as more globally) was marked as a class in “dissolution” and thus received less scholarly attention in the early 1990s outside of predictions of worker protest (Stenning 2005b:988). While Simon Clarke and his coauthors (1993) would worriedly ask *What about the Workers?* their postsocialist plight was largely overshadowed by a preoccupation with the emergence of “new” classes—more specifically, with the task of quantifying and categorizing these groups (Böröcz and Róna-Tas 1995; Evans and Mills 1999; Eyal, Szélenyi, and Townsley 1998; Słomczynski and Shabad 1997; Szelényi 1995; Szelényi and Szelényi 1995). Furthermore, this disregard for the working class following socialism’s demise has extended well beyond academic literatures. CEE public discourse contains little discussion of the working class’s postsocialist circumstances (Kideckel 2002). Only when the anticipated social explosion from workers failed to materialize by the mid- to late 1990s did interest rejuvenate somewhat in workers, in the working class, and in workers’ political inactivity.¹¹

10. Cultural capital (also known as human capital) refers to an individual’s education, skills, and experience. It also includes, as Ghodsee explains, the “acquisition of ‘good taste.’ . . . This kind of cultural capital is also referred to as symbolic capital, because an individual’s public ‘performance’ of these discerning tastes symbolizes personal ‘success’ to others in her social milieu” (2005:13).

11. A few exceptions to this pattern of worker inactivity in the CEE region have occurred—for example, Romanian miners in the Jiu Valley (Kideckel 2002).

Scholars have offered a range of explanations for workers' lack of dissent. David Ost (1995) attributes worker passivity in the postsocialist world to a mix of factors, including a communist history of antagonisms rooted in a state/society opposition rather than class difference, anticommunist and Cold War ideologies, personal experience as illegal workers in the West,¹² and the discrediting of socialism. Béla Greskovits (1998) points to a lack of structural, institutional, and cultural correlates for collective action. According to Stephen Crowley (1998), the "interdependencies" between management and workers with respect to the distribution of goods and services foster worker quiescence. Sarah Ashwin (1999) contends that conflict manifests primarily within enterprises as a consequence of structural barriers to workers' mobilization as well as of the relational dynamics operating between enterprises and labor unions. She also contends that workers perceive enterprises as allies, united in their mutual interest to survive. In a comparison of labor weakness across the postsocialist world, Stephen Crowley and David Ost conclude that the "crisis of socialist ideas itself is a key factor," as is the "rise of a pro-market narrative" (2001:229–30).

The Macro, the Micro, and Modernization Theory

Much of the literature on the implications of capitalism's entry into CEE spaces has offered up a bleak portrayal of a suffering and struggling working class passively responding to its marginalization and exclusion (Emigh and Szélenyi 2001; Kideckel 2002; Stenning 2005a, 2005b). However, as Alison Stenning rightly contends, this is a partial depiction in which the "lived experiences of class" for workers in the postsocialist era are underinvestigated (2005b:988). In many ways, this deficit reflects a wider trend present in much of the 1990s literature on CEE transitions, in which theorizing the macro dimensions of the CEE countries' new economic order achieved primacy. Toward the end of 1990s, a number of scholars sought to alleviate this shortfall by directing their attentions at transition's "micro worlds" (Berdahl, Bunzl, and Lampland 2000; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Hann 2002). As Michael Burawoy and

12. According to Ost, such experience meant that "capitalism appeared as a system in which labor has no rights yet gets good pay for a hard day's work" (1995:193).

Katherine Verdery claim, “A focus on the day-to-day realities of post-socialism reveals a more ambiguous account of the transformation announced with such fanfare” (1999:6). Indeed, such investigations into the everyday complicate the assumed future proffered by economists; these scrutinies of the micro worlds of postsocialist populaces reveal transition’s often unintended and unexpected consequences. These works have not only highlighted a critical dimension of economic transition that was largely ignored during its initial decade but have also countered portraits of passive victimization by finding emergent, innovative modes of resistance in CEE citizenries’ responses. These works serve as valuable new methodological departure points for an analysis of the market’s meaning as individuals experience it. Recent trends in gender and postsocialist scholarship also reflect the influence of this bottom-up approach to looking at transition (e.g., Ghodsee 2005; Haney 2002); however, its relevance is certainly more widespread.

Accountings of the postsocialist predicaments of both women and workers largely reflect loss and passivity. These characterizations have tended to treat loss as an objective rather than subjective state of being. For example, rising female unemployment and workers’ social marginalization are construed as losses. Indeed, these outcomes are readily observable and in absolute terms are losses. However, undergirding many of these early readings of women’s and workers’ postsocialist plummet were a set of assumptions about CEE transitions that were reminiscent of many of the fundamental tenets of modernization theory.¹³ Accordingly, many observers presumed the CEE states to be transitioning from a lesser to a more advanced stage and ultimately to be progressing toward a democratic and capitalist end. Many observers thus saw the losses of women and workers as an inevitability—a given—and the mobilized resistance of these two disenfranchised groups seemed a logical sequitur as the region advanced along what was presumed to be a close-ended course.

The modernization approach applied to CEE transitions has not gone unchallenged; a number of scholars have suggested that social changes in the postsocialist world are better understood as path-dependent on institutional and ideological legacies from the past and are

13. As Blokker points out, classical modernization theory was developed in the 1940s and 1950s but was “thoroughly discredited” by the 1970s (2005:504). However, some of its assumptions have reemerged in studies of postsocialism.

therefore *sui generis* (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley 1998; Gal and Kligman 2000a; Kennedy 2002; Stark and Bruszt 1998; Verdery 1996). This alternative is a far more contextually contingent, open-ended route that can simultaneously embody regress and progress (Burawoy and Verdery 1999). The true promise of this approach lies in its power to decipher postsocialism's paradoxes—for example, the passivity of women and workers. By understanding the specificities of the past, those of the present, and their interplay, postsocialism's incoherences become coherent. This call for sensitivity to context certainly manifests in more recent scholarship on women's and workers' immobilization with an array of institutional and ideological remnants from the past identified as explanatory factors. Overall, however, these literatures have problematically assumed rather than questioned loss. In other words, their principal task has been to account for objectively deemed loss without exploring its conceptual meaning in the CEE milieu.

Subjectivity: Standpoint as Starting Point

Whether and how individuals understand their experiences as losses and, perhaps even more importantly, act on them relies on contextually contingent, subjectively constructed sensibilities. While this book offers yet another explanation for women's and workers' apparent consent to a capitalist course, this work's novelty lies in part in its destabilization of "loss." In reconsidering marketization as it is lived, I consider how losses (and gains) are subjectively recognized. I further shift the focus away from the past to consider the workings of an ideological manifestation of the postsocialist present—that is, a metanarrative about the market. This book is theoretically founded in an understanding of social life as storied and one in which the narrated self involves drawing on, often unconsciously, narratives that are seldom of individuals' own invention. Further influencing the stories individuals tell are their social locations—for example, gender and class (Veroff et al. 1993). At the center of this book are two groups—factory workers and managers—that constitute opposing poles on transition's socioeconomic spectrum of winners and losers. Managers, viewed as the major players in the postsocialist pursuit of profitability, stood to reap transition's winnings both symbolically and materially. In sharp contrast, in a world where

“workers’ states” have collapsed, workers had much to lose (Crowley and Ost 2001). Complicating this simple dichotomy is gender: all of the subjects in this study are women. Are female factory workers then doubly losers? And, in contrast, are female managers only qualified winners?

This book is significantly influenced by feminist standpoint theory, which advocates using women’s experiences as a starting point for inquiry (Harding 1991; Harsock 1987; Smith 1987). This perspective is premised on the notion that knowledge is socially situated. While feminist standpoint theory grants primacy to women’s experiences, standpoint theory’s invocation extends much further, encouraging inquiries whose point of departure is from the standpoint of those marginalized, thereby permitting insights into the workings of societal inequalities. I start, in part, from gender’s periphery. Other particularly relevant influences include postcolonial and African American feminist scholarship, which have argued that gender’s interplay with other social locations such as class and race complicates a ready characterization of women as solely dominated (Collins 1990; Mohanty 1988; Ong 1988; Spellman 1988). In the intersection of these axes of difference, women can simultaneously be oppressor and oppressed (e.g., as white women) or multiply marginalized (e.g., as women of color). In the case of the postsocialist CEE countries, existing literature on workers and/or women, albeit somewhat suggestive, does little to make visible the way in which the interplay of various social hierarchies dictates the “appropriate stories to tell and the reasons for telling them” (Orbuch 1997:467). In this book, I make evident these connections.

Making Sense of Marketization

The market frenzy depicted in *Český sen* was not the first in the Czech Republic. With the 1989 Velvet Revolution,¹⁴ Czechs overthrew their communist regime. The eradication of the communists’ grip on power had political as well as profound economic implications. Czech citizens rejected not only the Communist Party but also its planned economics, in which the state determined the production and distribution of goods

14. The Czech media qualified the 1989 revolution as “Velvet” to connote its bloodlessness and the ensuing ease of its political reform.

and services. Czechs instead welcomed democracy and the free market. Czechs' readiness to embrace the free market and to relinquish the command economy outstripped that of most CEE citizenries (Rose 2001; Rose and Haerpfer 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1998). While some CEE populaces—reluctant to let go of the long arm of the socialist state—hesitated to reach for the market's hand, others took hold but nevertheless stumbled. For Czechs, however, the market seemed to offer a sure and steady grip. And Czechs seemed to reach back with staunch conviction in their grasp. Out of this seemingly assured and mutual embrace came the star of CEE economic transitions—the Czech Republic. For much of the 1990s, it held this stature. Nationally and internationally, the country was deemed a best-case scenario, with Czechs' seemingly strict adherence to neoliberal mandates receiving much of the credit for the success. While in the late 1990s, Czechs' conformity to neoliberal dictates came into question, the market's ideological and practical foothold in the Czech Republic appeared very solid throughout much of the decade. What would this macroeconomic success mean for marketization's supposed losers?

Between September 1999 and October 2000, I interviewed seventy-four Czechs in an effort to provide some answer to this question. Those I interviewed were members of a generation that had spent their entire childhoods and a portion of their adult lives under Communist Party rule. In the midst of their adulthood, they suddenly faced new and unfamiliar economic terrain. All were employed in manufacturing enterprises in Prague—an industry historically and currently of massive proportions in terms of its labor inputs and productive outputs. In the aftermath of 1989, some of transition's greatest dramas played out in the manufacturing sector as its enterprises shifted from state to private ownership. As ownership configurations changed, so too did enterprises' demands for labor, pushing some groups out and pulling others in. Managers are no longer economic pawns in the socialist state's economic game, merely carrying out state dictates. Now, they are players in their own right, responsible for ensuring enterprise viability and profitability. Meanwhile, workers' privileges have largely been stripped away. While the socialist state worked hard to foster socioeconomic equality via mechanisms such as wage controls, the new market economy does not seek this end; such control mechanisms thus have largely been eliminated. A vast socioeconomic chasm consequently opened up between managers and workers. The disparities could not be much

more dramatic. Managers earn salaries that place them among the Czech Republic's top earners, a "new elite"; workers have become part of the "new poor." However, all of the managers and workers I interviewed are women.

As discussed earlier, many Western scholars construed a commonality to CEE women's postsocialist experiences, viewing the entire cohort as losers. However, in the socioeconomic shakeup of the Czech Republic, all Czechs have not landed in the same location. Some now sit at the top of the economic hierarchy, a few make up the middle strata, and a majority have ended up in the bottom tiers (Róna-Tas 1996). Does this socioeconomic footing matter for how these seventy-four women make sense of marketization with respect to their day-to-day lives? In this book, I maintain that it does so in ways that at first glance may be somewhat surprising but on closer examination prove quite understandable. I demonstrate how these female managers and workers draw on the logic of the market metanarrative to construct their own narratives. Out of this appropriative act comes an interpretation of the free market as a source of liberation for both groups. Two very different liberatory tales result, however.

Czech female managers identify as "winners." And in recounting their rise to the top, they attribute their success principally to knowing how to take advantage of their abilities. This act involves adopting a market-mandated set of behaviors—self-reliance, personal responsibility, and independence. The market's transformative power affects every aspect of their lives, reshaping their roles not only as workers but also as citizens, wives/partners, and mothers. However, making market sense means marking some experiential aspects as nonsense. For Czech female managers, this involves discounting their gender because "woman," as a social category of constraint and difference, is not readily interwoven into a metastory whose core tenet is opportunity. History and culture also appear irrelevant in their sagas of success, in which instrumental rationality constitutes a core emphasis. In the interpretation provided by these managers, liberation is available to any individual with abilities, at any time and any place, as long as one assumes the free market's behavioral requisites. For Czech female factory workers, economic vulnerability, a dependence on the state, gender-based discrimination, and exploitation by employers define their daily experiences in the postsocialist era. These women are acutely aware of their marginalization. They have not shared in the free market's promised

prosperity. This dissonance is not, however, met with a disenchantment with the free market. They construe this failing as a consequence of their own “bad” behaviors. In their interpretations, socialism has sullied them. Born and raised under capitalism, their future generations will possess the “proper” behaviors and will therefore prosper. Capitalism’s promise of a “radiant future” thus remains unbroken. Future generations will win.

Routes and Roots

This book sees the market as more than just a set of practices in which goods and services are bought and sold; the market manifests as a discourse, metanarratively expressed. And, in this manifestation, it proves of formidable force in shaping individuals’ identities and actions. Empirically, this book focuses on a specific postsocialist situation, but it speaks more broadly to the challenge posed by the descent of one of the “metanarratives of modernity,” communism, and the ascent of its counternarrative, capitalism (Dilley 1992:xi). In the Czech milieu, this development leaves capitalism’s imputed losers without an alternative. And thus, in complex and sometimes counterintuitive ways, they meld personal experience and public story together, yielding both empowering and disempowering ramifications. Here, the market’s mutability in terms of its routes and roots is made apparent, revealing both causes and consequences that are not wholly familiar.

To comprehend the present logic of Czech female managers’ and factory workers’ lives necessitates some understanding of its past order. Toward this end, in chapter 2 I outline how the socialist state’s revolutionary ideas about gender and class heavily structured these women’s lives. I devote particular attention to the salience of manufacturing in the socialist state’s pursuit of industrialization and for the proletarianization of women. I go on to illuminate how the post-1989 overhaul of the manufacturing sector mirrors a larger cosmos of transformations in the Czech economy. I then turn back to the managers and factory workers and to the methodological challenges of ascertaining where they stand—in their estimations—on this shifting economic terrain. In chapter 3, I detail how marketization took shape in the Czech Republic during the 1990s, both in practice and in ideological discourse. Here, I focus especially on the major contours of the Czech Republic’s eco-

conomic transition tale. In chapters 4 and 5, I recount the collective stories of Czech female managers' and factory workers' lifeworlds. These collective renditions are stitched together quite differently, but they weave in the same liberatory threads of the market metanarrative. Out of these mergers of personal experience with a metanarrative of public articulation, Czech female managers' and factory workers' identities and actions are constituted in ways that until now have not been fully recognized or understood. In chapter 6, I move from the immediate implications of these mergers for Czech female managers' and factory workers' empowerment and disempowerment to the larger implications of this study.