H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Linda Racioppi, Katherine O'Sullivan See, eds. *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia.* East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009. 315 pp. $34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-87013-866-9.

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Published on H-SAE (October, 2011)
Commissioned by Abby L. Drwecki

Women's Worlds Transformed: Policy, Politics, and Mobilizations in Eurasia

As Europe was celebrating twenty years from the dismantling of the Central and Eastern European communist regimes and the Soviet Union, the 2009 publication of *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia* came as a welcome contribution to the transnational feminist scholarship and a timely evaluation of the gender dimensions of the intense social, economic, and political transformations undergone by the countries of the former communist bloc. The volume edited by Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan See brings together important gendered inquiries into recent reconfigurations that emerged in areas such as political representation, citizenship rights, nation building and national identity formation, privatization, marketization and economic opportunity, and social inequality; furthermore, it addresses prominent and common trends in the ongoing discussions and policies that address gender inequality, while offering a careful mapping of the uneven terrain of gender politics, which has been shaped not only by the distinctive histories, local politics, economics, and demographics of the countries under analysis but also by their embeddedness in different geopolitical configurations as well as by their specific relationships with international and transnational organizations and forces. Written by twelve contributors, who speak from diverse geopolitical and institutional positionalities, this collection spans a variety of thematic concerns (women's labor migration, women's participation in politics, women's work, women's mobilizations for equality and women's access to rights), disciplinary angles (public policy, anthropology, political theory, historical analysis, sociology, and interdisciplinary approaches to gender politics), methodological approaches, and geographical spaces. Divided into two main sections, the volume promotes an understanding of two separated fields of geopolitical production of gender politics: the first examines Central and Eastern Europe and the second looks at Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. As the editors of the volume acknowledge themselves, given that "local, national and international/ transnational gender politics are not easily segmented," such a division might seem problematic at first sight (p. 31). Nonetheless, Racioppi and O'Sullivan See make a good case arguing that the "proximity to Western Europe" and "the potential for EU accession" are two powerful forces that impacted and ultimately differentiated the still unfolding trajectories of the two locales (p. 31). Thus, the organization of the volume responds to previous critiques that signaled the slow reaction of the international public in noticing the relevance of Central Asia to current processes of global change. In setting the two side by side, Racioppi and O'Sullivan See redress the omission and bring to the fore the common social, economic, and political genealogy of communism that countries in Central and Eastern Europe share with Russia and their counterparts in Central Asia, and the Caucasus, while offering an inclusive body of literature that addresses the changes undergone by gender regimes in most of the countries of the former communist bloc.

The volume begins with an in-depth introduction that examines the political dimensions of the transitions in Eurasia, maps the current trends in formal and informal gender politics, discusses their emergence within transnational contexts, and finally, through a comparative inquiry into four cases from across the region–the Czech Republic, the Russian Federation, Georgia, and Tajikistan–identifies significant variations and similarities. Racioppi and O' Sullivan See, as editors of the volume as well as authors of the introduction, provide an excellent integrative conceptual framework for the ensuing chapters–a framework that not only guides the readers through the thematic universe of the book but also offers an analytical toolkit for a generous yet critical engagement with the individual contributions. For instance, Racioppi and O'Sullivan See's analysis of lo-

cal and transnational women's groups mobilizing in response to "the deteriorating position of women and their families" after the state retreat from the realm of social services provision counterbalances the contributors' tendency to focus their attention on legislation, public policies, or institutional analysis and enables the recognition of creative modes of action and mobilization of resources in response to social, political, cultural, and economic challenges.[1]

Barbara Einhorn's "Democratization, Nationalism and Citizenship: The Challenge of Gender" is the opening chapter of the first section of the book, which, as previously mentioned, is concerned with Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Interspersing a solid theoretical examination of the paradigmatic underpinnings of citizenship within the socialist and liberal models with an analysis of emerging nationalist and free-market discourses throughout the CEE, Einhorn demonstrates the incompatibility between EU's neoliberal capitalist economic agenda and its stated commitments to gender equality/equal opportunity and gender mainstreaming. Her analysis tempers celebratory impetuses in response to widely circulated constructions of the European Union as an unproblematic agent of democratization and economic growth. Einhorn concludes that the EU represents a system within which it is "structurally unlikely that gender equity can be adequately addressed" as it "prioritizes the market and economic development over gender-equitable political representation," reduces "civil society activism to a form of social provision," and naturalizes the step backward "from the assumption of full-time paid work for women as an accepted societal norm, to a situation where much of women's work is socially necessary but unpaid and rendered invisible" (p. 58).

Einhorn's argument stands in analytical tension with the angle that Amanda Sloat develops in the second chapter of the collection, "The Influence of European Union Legislation on Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe." Similarly to Einhorn's analyses, Sloat opts for the scale of the CEE as the unit of analysis for her research. Her examination of gender equality effects produced by EU pressures for legislative harmonization and CEE compliance with the *acquis communautaire* is grounded in a multi-method engagement with statistical data, interviews, and a comparative analysis of gender sensitive legislation pre- and post-1989 in two national contexts: Romania's legislative framework for maternity leave and Czech Republic's legislative practices in relation to the burden of proof in sex discrimination cases. Sloat discusses new forms of discrimination and patriarchal attitudes emerging within complex assemblages of political and socioeconomic transition. In spite of an impressively layered methodology, the language that the author chooses to render her findings positions the EU as a sole emancipatory force, and thus overlooks the different histories, trajectories, strategies, goals, local initiatives, instances of negotiation, and resistances that the accessing countries brought into processes that preceded the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements. (Examples of language that articulates the EU as the agent of change and the CEE countries as passive recipients of reforms are: "aspirant governments were obliged to implement all social, economic, and legal "chapters" of EU legislation" (p. 70); "These directives eliminated the majority of discriminatory provisions remaining from socialist period. They also introduced some novel measures.... The Maastricht Treaty (1992) obliged member states to promote equality between the sexes and to ensure equal pay for equal work" (p. 71); and "The major impact of the introduction of European equality legislation has been providing social actors with a more precise definition of equal opportunity provisions, as the EU forced the creation of non-discrimination frameworks that predominantly male governments might otherwise have neglected" (p. 81).

Eniko Magyari-Vincze's "Public Policies as Vehicles of Social Exclusion: The Case of Romani Women's Access to Reproductive Health in Romania" concludes the section dedicated to the analysis of gender politics in Central and Eastern European countries. Magyari-Vincze's chapter offers a compelling intersectional analysis of discourses and practices of ethnic, gender and class discrimination that block the access of Romani women to "(reproductive) health care of good quality" and render them likely to "become victims of racist fertility control" (p. 105).

Through multi-method research consisting of discourse analysis of policies of reproductive health, participant observation, interviews and informal discussion, film documentation, and multi-site ethnography in the Boyash Gypsy community in the city of Orastie and among local health care providers (medical community nurses, family doctors, and gynecologists), Magyari-Vincze uncovers the local, national, civil society, and transnational mechanisms that shape health care policy and in conjunction with hidden and overt cultural racism reproduce social inequality and violate Romani women's rights. Qualifying her research as "anthropology of policy," the author concludes the chapter with a series of policy recommendations for governmental agencies, the Ministry of Health, public health providers, and NGOs. Notably, Magyary-Vincze states that in order to increase

Romani women's de facto access to health care resources, policymaking concerning Roma, and Romani women in particular, should urgently start incorporating "Romani women's perspectives and experiences" (p. 104).

The second part of the collection opens with Mary Buckeley's transnational inquiry into the gender dimensions of contemporary human trafficking. Buckeley's analysis is part of thematic thread that runs throughout the section dealing with Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, namely labor migration. In the forth chapter titled "Human Trafficking in the Twenty-First Century: Implications for Russia, Europe, and the World," Buckeley provides a captivating transnational analysis of a contemporary practice that "carries serious implications for equality, security, and human rights" for Russia, as well as for Europe and the world. The discussion of the involvement of the United States in "the war against human traffickers" (p. 119) that opens the chapter is not only an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of lives and places in a global age or an introduction to the contributions of transnational NGOs; it is also an explicit acknowledgement of U.S. power and influence in the shaping of the so-called New World Order. Buckeley's analysis shows how contemporary global trafficking is shaped and enabled by poverty and income disparity, new information and communication technologies offering easier access to crime networks and corruption, and inconsistent legislation and legal enforcement resulting in a lack or weak punishment for human traffickers, etc. Buckely combines a historical survey of slavery with a multimethod examination of the contemporary human trafficking within and from Russia and Ukraine, as well as sex trafficking to Germany and the United Kingdom. Her research employs media analysis, inquiries into legislative and political processes, and a critical analysis of the debates over the legalization of prostitution in order to illuminate human trafficking in its specificity as a form of transformer mobility that is embedded within the illegal operations of sex industries, global income disparities, and the commodification of persons inherent in the business plan of capitalist enterprises with stakes for cheap labor (p. 140).

Nadezda Shvedova's chapter looks at Russia's participation in international discussions on gender equality. Her analysis of the steps taken so far by the government shows that improving the social and economic status of women takes more than a formal commitment on the part of the Russian Federation. Shvedova's examination of statistical data indicates a decrease in women's participation in labor markets, lower salaries, growing wage inequality, occupational segregation, higher rates of unemployment (p. 159), lesser returns on education for women, and a feminization of poverty (p. 158). In conjunction with "women's limited political power, their lesser economic status, the absence of political will," the author further diagnosed an increase in violence against women and the articulation of "a social climate conducive to gender stereotyping" (p. 163). Like other contributors to the volume, Shvedova concludes her analysis with a discussion of the measures that she deems necessary for redressing the inequalities that women face: better gender statistics to document and provide information about women's situation, educational efforts to denaturalize domestic violence and gender stereotypes, developing and implementing legal instruments that would complement the government's endorsement of international norms for gender equality, harmonizing wage levels, and providing greater support for child care.

While historical analysis is a methodology endorsed by authors published in the volume, most studies resort to comparative historical frameworks that delineate and counterpose two eras: the socialist and post-socialist era in Einhorn, the pre- and post-89 years, or, alternatively, under communism and throughout EU accession in Sloan, until and after the collapse of the state socialism systems in Buckle, and finally, during and after the Soviet era in Shvedova, Gunes-Ayata, Usmanova, and Fayzyllaeva. Due to its historical focus on pre-Soviet times, Timur Kocaoglu's chapter "The Past as Prologue? Challenging the Myth of the Subordinated, Docile Woman in Muslim Central Eurasia" might seem at first sight the odd piece in the collection. Kocaoglu's research dismantles the mythology that constructs the Soviet reforms as the sole forces at work for the emancipation of women in Central Asia and thus reifies Muslim Central Eurasian women as objects of Soviet modernization and emancipation. The historical recovery of the life stories of several reformist women and men active socially and politically at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, and the analysis of literary texts authored by Muslim reformists enable Kocaoglu to demonstrate that the efforts of the Muslim reformist intellectuals resulted in noteworthy gender emancipatory outcomes such "granting women the right to vote and to be elected" (p.199). According to the author, such initiatives ultimately "laid the groundwork for many of the Soviet-era policies on women's behalf" (p. 170).

In their chapter, "Gendered Politics in Transitional Societies: A Comparative Perspective on Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, and Uzbekistan," Ayse Gunes-Ayata and Ayca Ergun undertake a comparative analysis with the aim of identifying the assemblages of factors

responsible for the post-Soviet deterioration in women's status. The research is premised on the idea that the collapse of the Soviet Union has had different impacts on each of the states analyzed and that gender represents a fundamental category of analysis for the understanding of the ongoing processes of democratization. Through an analysis of statistical data, secondary literature, and interviews with gender experts, NGO representatives, members of international organizations, politicians, and representatives of the media, the authors conclude that the dismantling of the social security systems provided by the Soviet regime affected working women, leading to a triple burden of paid employment, caretaking work for elderly and children (replacing formerly available state-provided services), and acting as "crisis managers" of households experiencing strains of instability and poverty. The authors document a restructuring of female labor markets and occupational opportunities, characterized by a general deskilling of women's labor accompanied by some skilled employment opportunities in sectors such as private business, international companies, and NGOs; a reconsolidation of traditional gender roles; a concentration of women in female-coded occupations; fewer education opportunities for women; new demographic structures resulting from migration and changes in life expectancy and fertility; and a significant drop in women's political representation as a result of the elimination of quotas. Based on their relation to four classes of factors (ethnic diversity or ethnic homogeneity; population living in urban versus rural areas; levels of employment, unemployment, and poverty; and the articulation of national identities around traditional gender roles), the countries under scrutiny are classified into two groups. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are deemed to have fostered conditions more conducive to either women's active engagement in transition and gender empowerment, due to higher ethnic diversity, more developed urbanity, and constructions of national identity that bypass gendered expectations; conversely Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are considered prone to the consolidation of patriarchal practices due to their homogeneous ethnic composition, predominant rurality, lower levels of unemployment, and the merging of stereotypical definitions of womanhood and manhood into newly fashioned patriarchal constructions of national identity.

As already mentioned, migration is a dominant analytical theme of the volume. Eleonora Fayzullaeva's chapter, "Labor Migration in Central Asia: Gender Challenges," takes a transnational approach in examining this subject through a detailed regional and historical analysis of global, national, and intra-national patterns of labor migration during and after the Soviet era. The author argues that the current trends represent "one of the most powerful social and economic consequences of political transition and market liberalization in Central Asia" (p. 259), which demonstrates that the experience of labor migration is gendered, and most importantly its gendering varies from country to country, based on specific economic and social contexts. Her research of the gender consequences of rural to urban migrations, the out-migration of Tajik male laborers versus the out-migration of female laborers from Kirgizstan, and the economic factors that transformed Kazakhstan into a destination country for migrants in Central Asia unveils the "devastating effects of the extensive migrations on the destinies of women in Central Asia " (p. 259) and signals an urgent need research for policymaking, at national and transnational level, that looks beyond the alleged positive effects of global labor migration.

The volume concludes with Zalaikho Usmanova's analysis of old, new, and emerging gender roles and gender identities in contemporary Tajikistan. Entitled "The Complexity and Multiplicity of Gender Identities in Central Asia: The Case of Tajikistan," the chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the political, economic, and social changes that, according to the author, have impacted negatively the participation of women in the public sphere. Usmanova's findings concur with the findings of the other contributors to the volume; however, her analysis takes a step further and delves into a close investigation of the so-called reemerging traditional gender roles. Ousmanova demonstrates that spaces like the *mahalla*s, which are usually considered to deprive women of agency, are in fact much more complicated in their influence on gender formations.[2] During the last decade and within the constraints of traditional, cultural, and religious values women have negotiated positions of increased participation and influence in local power structures and public life, as mothers and heads of households, as female clergy, and as spiritual leaders.

The volume edited by Racioppi and O'Sullivan See has many strengths. Most notable is its wide spectrum of methodological perspectives. The authors' recourse to ethnography, depth interviewing, institutional and event case studies, archival research, meta-analysis, discourse analysis, and ultimately their assemblage of individual methods into innovative multi-method approaches enables an understanding of gender politics in Eurasia in terms of the many dimensions and variations across the region. Secondly, the thematic diversity of the nine chapters engages the reader's interest, while the different analytical foci and geographical scales of analysis allow the

reader to grapple with the connections among the past conditions as well as with the current inequalities arising from new forms of globalization. Reading the chapters side by side leads to the formulation of additional questions. For instance, Kocaolgu's historical recuperation of the Muslim reformist voices from the beginning of the twentieth century inspires an interest in genealogies of current gender politics that extend back to precommunist times. Moreover, reading Kocaoglu, Usmanova, and Magyari-Vincze's engagement with the actions and voices of real women side by side with studies featuring a rather exclusive focus on policy, legislative, and institutional analysis spurs questions about the meanings, mobilizations, and changes emerging at grassroots level within the latter contexts.

Besides the inquiries that it inspires, *Gender Politics in Eurasia* does leave certain questions unanswered. First of all, the term "transition" begs unpacking. Its implicit meaning denotes the passage from communism (always rendered as coextensive with state-run, planned economies and undemocratic governance) to free-market capitalism and democracy. The ideology of transition constructs the embracing of capitalism as an unproblematic global goal and forecloses the imagining of alternatives futures. Within the current political imaginary, this process of closure also renders the West as homogeneously wealthy, thus masking its own race and gender inequalities and obliterating, in Chandra Talpade Monhanty's terms, "how capitalist production relations are built upon the back of women workers defined as wives."[3] When the EU is portrayed unquestionably as the post-89 force of gender emancipation, what is left unaddressed is the role that the EU, alongside local governments and financial regulatory organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, played in setting the scene of the current inequalities through the imposition of austerity measures, privatization of services, and job market restructuring. Einhorn theorizes in the opening of this volume the EU's incongruous relationship with an agenda of gender equality. Following her argument, researchers have to move beyond the mere documentation of women's situation at two moments set twenty years apart in time and start theorizing the relationships between the loss of social welfare, job security, and education opportunities and the much-desired capitalism that constitutes the terminus of Eurasia's transition. In addition, the conditions of generalization in the cases where research findings are extrapolated from particular national case studies to the level of regions such as Central and Eastern Europe (Slaot's piece) or Central Asia (Kacaoglu's piece) need further clarification. Transnational feminist inquiries that stop at identifying similarities among national gender regimes run the risk of glossing over important local details and of overly general conclusions. Transnational approaches that examine transformations within national boundaries under the impact of transnational economic, cultural, and technological shifts (Magyary-Vincze's and Buckley's analyses) bypass such limitations by demonstrating that in spite of international norms for gender equality, transnational networks of nongovernmental organizations, increased global interconnectedness and the now global expansion of capitalism, have given rise to new gender identities, differences, and inequalities that according to Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan "arise from new forms of globalization as well as from older histories of colonialism and racism."[4]

Overall, *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia* provides a detailed description of the major gender inequalities experienced by the women in the region. The volume also presents analyses of legislation and policies attempting to address these issues and thus makes for engaging and useful reading for graduate students in women's studies, European studies, and public policy studies.

Notes

[1]. Joanna Regulska, Jasmina Lukic, and Darja Zavirsek, "Introduction," in *Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Jasmina Lukic, Joanna Regulska, and Darja Zavirsek (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), 1-4.

[2]. According to Usmanova, *mahalla*s are small communities consisting of up to three hundred households. They maintain traditional ways of community life and family organization.

[3]. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Women Workers and Capitalist Scripts: Ideologies of Dominations, Common Interests, and the Politics of Solidarity," in *The Socialist Feminist Project. A Contemporary Reader in Theory and Politics*, ed. Nancy Holmstrom (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 163.

[4]. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, "Introducing Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World," in *An Introduction to Women's Studies* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), xxii.

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Citation: Laura Lovin. Review of Racioppi, Linda; See, Katherine O'Sullivan, eds., *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia.* H-SAE, H-Net Reviews. October, 2011.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32164

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