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Traveling Feminist Thought: Difference and Transculturation in Central and Eastern European Feminism

More than fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, people in post–state socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are critically assessing power relations in the new systems and communities of which they are now members. For example, popular critical discourses have developed about the unequal terms of membership that Eastern European countries face as newcomers in the European Union. In Russia, Belarus, and elsewhere, some denounce the effect of Western cultural and educational influences on their society. Feminism, as a set of activist practices and as an international academic community, has also attracted critical scrutiny from people within and outside of feminist communities. There is a broad spectrum of positions on feminism's usefulness in Central and Eastern European societies. Opinions range from sympathetic to the markedly hostile equation of feminism with communist totalitarianism. In this article, I am concerned more narrowly with how feminist scholars judge feminism within post–state socialist countries. Their analyses offer important examinations of power relations more generally within the global academic political economy, and it is significant that they force us to confront how these power relations operate in the discipline of women's and gender studies specifically.

Numerous CEE scholars and sympathetic outsiders have written and discussed the relationship of feminism in CEE to so-called Western feminism.[1] One current running through many analyses is a critique of a perceived hegemony of Western feminism over Eastern feminism.[2] Many

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their many excellent insights and useful suggestions.

[1] See, e.g., Havelkova 1996; Watson 2001; Einhorn and Sever 2003; Blagojević 2004, 2006; Kašić 2004; Slavova 2006.

[2] These terms are not necessarily explicitly defined in the literature on the East-West divide in feminism, as it has been repeatedly phrased. Nevertheless, Western feminism seems to refer to feminist theory and scholarship generated in North America and Western Europe. However, the writings of women of color, third-world feminists within the American academy,

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scholars, especially those living and working in Central and Eastern Europe, have underscored the uneven relationship of power and opportunity between feminist scholars in the West and those in the East. They have highlighted the following features in this unequal relationship: theory is modeled on Western realities; English is the dominant language in research and at conferences; less research money is available to CEE scholars than to their Western counterparts; and greater institutional funding in the West means that CEE scholars are positioned as guests of Western institutions, even at conferences held in their own region. In addition, the most prestigious journals publish only in English and look more favorably on research that follows Anglo-American conventions of argumentation and that cites Western scholarship (Busheikin 1997). Years after Laura Busheikin (1997), Slavenka Drakulić (1992), and Jiřina Šiklová (1993) launched their critiques, Marina Blagojević argued that these persistent conditions mean that CEE scholars act as "transmitters" of Western knowledge and theory instead of as agents of new knowledge (Blagojević 2004, 2006). Within this discourse on Western feminist hegemony over CEE, there have been differences in emphasis, tone, and focus over a fifteen-year span. These differences perhaps reflect the uneven pace of ideas flowing through CEE from elsewhere, especially in the 1990s. They may also reflect generational differences and the nature or density of intellectual networks that CEE scholars have with Western academics. However, various themes within the critique have appeared in recent publications and have been articulated at recent conferences, signaling a degree of consistency in the perception of a problem labeled in one instance as the East-West divide (see Frunză and Văcărescu 2004).[3]

In the first part of this article, I review some of the many legitimate

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and black American feminists do not seem to be consistently considered part of the category *Western feminist*. This literature uses the terms *Eastern European*, *postcommunist*, and *post–state socialist* to designate people and feminist ideas generated in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe and sometimes includes Central Asia and other parts of the former Soviet states. Later in the article I question the logic and usefulness of both categories. However, since the literature I am discussing frames the issue in relation to these terms, I employ them. And although I am skeptical of the usefulness or appropriateness of these geographical categories, I refrain from placing them in quotation marks in order to avoid distracting the reader.

[3] In earlier publications, for instance, many scholars criticized Western feminists for suggesting in different ways that CEE societies and feminism were underdeveloped. For examples of such critiques, see Funk and Mueller (1993a), Busheikin (1997), and Watson (1997). In more recent articles, such as those by Blagojević (2006) and Slavova (2006), the emphasis is on the conditions by which CEE scholars might produce knowledge independent of the hegemonic influence of Western (feminist) theory.

arguments scholars have made about the East-West divide. Admittedly, some of the disadvantages against which CEE scholars struggle are a consequence of policies related to their own governments and universities (for instance, little money at public CEE universities for travel, conferences, or adequate salaries). However, as I argue in this article, some of the uneven power relations CEE scholars experience within Western feminism are by-products of present institutional arrangements within women's and gender studies in North America. And, somewhat ironically, these uneven power relations are reproduced by the conceptual inadequacies of the liberal pluralist model of difference rather than solved by it.

I argue that creating space for the articulation of CEE gender difference, a solution promoted by many CEE and Western feminists alike, fails to recognize the traveling character of ideas and the way in which ideas are transformed in specific locations.[4] Thus, in the final part of the article, I argue that transculturation (see Pratt 1992) better describes the ways in which feminist thought functions as a traveling discourse and yet is always articulated in very particular, localized ways. Understanding how various discourses and institutions, both patriarchal and feminist, circulate transnationally and are manifest in particular local contexts is crucial for understanding the true complexity of power relations within the discipline of women's and gender studies in a global era. And, ultimately, understanding the transculturation of feminist theory can enable us to create more nuanced theory.

A feminist core and periphery?

In the East-West divide discourse, people remark on the challenge of trying to identify and theorize gender issues important to post–state socialist societies in the shadow of an already well-established feminist legacy from North America and Western Europe. Scholars argue that the feminist movement in the West has been taken as *the* feminist movement for a variety of reasons. For example, the feminist movement has been conceptualized and charted almost exclusively in terms of nation-states. Con-

[4] Edward Said's (2000) collected essays include an early essay he wrote on traveling theory. Using the example of Georg Lukács's theory of reification, Said examines how theories are adapted in response to the object to which they are applied and to the historical context in which they are used. While I disagree with his tendency to see an origin to theories and perceive mutations of it as compromises to it, his essay describes nicely how theories are particularized as they travel.

sequently, feminist activism within transnational imperialist structures such as the Soviet communist system did not readily fall within the analytical purview of scholars.[5] In addition, there remains a dearth of historical data because state socialist governments did not sanction research on women's activism or gender issues.[6] The effect, however, has been an eclipse of CEE feminist movements even in European and comparative studies on the women's movement.

In addition, critics of Western feminism argue that Western scholars presume the generalizability (or universality) of concepts such as the public-private divide, feminism, and political activism. Consequently, when the social reality of CEE societies deviates from established theories, Western scholars tend to judge these societies as underdeveloped rather than question the applicability of the theory.[7] Hana Havelkova writes, "the tensions in the dialogue between Western and East European women are rooted in the direct application of Western feminist theory to post-communist reality, which leads to the false assumption that East European women are second-class citizens and that they are conservative" (Havelkova 1996, 243). Šiklová (1993) also argues that women's activism takes a different form in Eastern Europe and has been unfairly (and ignorantly) labeled as nonexistent or conservative by Western feminists and scholars. In fact, what has been labeled as apathy toward politics might in actuality be a politically savvy rejection of what many women perceive as illegitimate political systems in Eastern Europe (see also Busheikin 1997). More recently, Kornelia Slavova (2006) has suggested that the universalist pretenses of Western feminist theory, not political apathy among CEE women, are to blame for the popular backlash against feminism in the region.

Barbara Einhorn and Charlotte Sever (2003) argue that Western theories of civil society, for instance, fail to acknowledge the particular form of gender-related activism that developed in CEE during and after state socialism. Existing theories cannot account for the way certain pockets of the private sphere functioned as rare windows of escape from otherwise

[5] For instance, Gisela Bock's otherwise impressive book *Women in European History* (2002) does not include discussion of CEE even though it takes Europe as its focus. Another example is Richard Evans (1977). For further discussion of problems in historical accounts of CEE women's movements, see also de Haan, Daskalova, and Loutfi (2006), de Haan (2007, 2008), and Loutfi (2008).

[6] These factors limit the coverage of CEE feminisms in Karen Offen's *European Feminisms, 1700–1950* (2000) despite her gesture to consider CEE feminism movements in this historical study.

[7] See, for example, critiques offered by Funk and Mueller's introduction (1993b), Watson (2001), Nartova (2004), and Weiner (2004).

pervasive state control. In addition, it was in cooperation with men that women dismantled the state socialist system. Slavova argues that for these reasons, CEE women do not feel the same resentment toward men that Western women do (see also Šiklová 1993). Thus, critics argue that as a consequence of important political, historical, and regional differences between post–state socialist countries and Western democracies, key concepts in feminist theory must be reexamined rather than assumed when applied to Eastern realities (see Funk and Mueller 1993a; Einhorn and Sever 2003; Funk 2004).[8]

Peggy Watson offers a particularly pessimistic reading of the effect of Western feminism on CEE societies. She suggests that not only does feminist scholarship fail to explain social phenomena adequately, but it may actually be complicit in creating social cleavages where none previously existed. Further, feminism may contribute to the contemporary rise of masculinism in Eastern Europe. She writes,

> How should we frame this issue, in an unprecedented context of change where for all women that are unemployed, unemployment is new? Is the marker of "acceptability" and fairness in this situation the 50 percent figure, where unemployment levels of women are equal to those of men? If so, then I would say that feminism becomes in some inevitable measure accomplice to the political processes behind the suffering endured by the women described above; if not, then a broader feminist critique of both the means and the ends of transition is overdue. . . . Paradoxically, to focus exclusively on an idea of gender in postcommunism which compares "men" on one side and "women" on the other—is to endorse the underlying terms of transition, terms which themselves are productive of masculinism. (Watson 2001, 46)

Watson accuses feminist scholars of ignoring other salient social categories like class in their analyses of Eastern Europe and thereby mystifying the real social factors that limit democracy in these societies.[9] Thus, feminism

[8] Scholars have argued that this principle applies to theories about emancipation, equality, civil society, and the gendering of and division between the public and private sphere, to name just a few (see Gal and Kligman 2000; Funk 2004; Slavova 2006).

[9] Watson collapses activists, journalists, and scholars into an umbrella category of transnational (or Western) feminists that fails to acknowledge the many feminist approaches (e.g., Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's notion of transnational feminist practice [1994] and postcolonial and poststructural feminist theory) that see gender as coconstituitive with other categories such as class, nation, and race. Her generalizations also overlook scholars working in the region who use an intersectional approach (see, e.g., Ghodsee 2005).

does not resonate with local women and is in danger of "endorsing the wider political inequalities that adhere in the West" (Watson 2001, 46).[10]

Finally, Slavova provides an illustration of what she sees as the lack of applicability of Western feminism to Eastern Europe. In the following passage Slavova describes the difficulties of teaching Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in Bulgaria, which result from the fact that Friedan's reality in the West is so markedly alien to the priorities and experiences of her Bulgarian students. She writes,

> One such example of failing to transmit Western knowledge across cultures is Betty Friedan's feminist agenda in her work, *The Feminine Mystique*, which has been heralded as having paved the way for the contemporary feminist movement. When I teach this book, my Bulgarian students complain that the concerns of middle-class suburban housewives, that are articulated in the outcry "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home," in other words, "I want a career," sound outdated and irrelevant. . . . Of course, Friedan's conclusion that being a housewife creates a "sense of emptiness and non-existence" is important in historical terms, but, from the perspective of women in Eastern Europe, it provides thin ground for them to identify with. (Slavova 2006, 248)

Using Friedan to stand for Western feminism past and present, Slavova argues that the divergent histories of Eastern and Western women mean that Western feminist ideas are not easily applied to CEE. Instead of experiencing suburban domesticity, prior to 1989 CEE women were expected to work by a socialist state that claimed to have already emancipated them. Slavova argues that, as a consequence, work is not a privilege for which CEE women are motivated to fight and that for many, "women's emancipation" (feminism) is still discredited by its association with communist state ideology. In this reading of Friedan, Slavova presumes Eastern Europe and the West to be distinct cultural and political spaces. For Slavova and many other CEE critics, these differences amount to a gulf between feminists East and West.

[10] See also Kristen Ghodsee (2004) for a similar criticism of cultural feminist nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Eastern Europe. Ghodsee argues that such NGOs ignore the neoliberal causes of inequalities and misery by privileging gender differences and cultural explanations. They thus provide an inaccurate reading of the true social context, alienate Eastern European women, and misdirect the energies of middle-class women, which could be used to more effectively examine the neoliberal policies that also contribute to social problems in countries like Bulgaria.

However, one might note that there has also been a backlash against mainstream feminism in the West, not unlike the one Slavova describes in Bulgaria. Furthermore, Friedan's disillusioned housewife is as incomprehensible to many Western university students today and to non-middle-class white Americans as she is to Slavova's Bulgarian students. Thus, although Slavova directs us to see geography as most salient, her example nevertheless helps us to recognize the way in which numerous other social categories, such as generation and historical era, may determine feminist alliances or how feminist ideas are understood.[11]

My aim in this section has not been to provide a comprehensive review of scholarship on gender and the CEE region. It has been to summarize key themes in a particular discourse about the unequal relationship between North American and Western European feminist scholars, on the one hand, and CEE feminist scholars, on the other. Critics within the CEE region argue that despite a widespread critique of universalizing theories among Western academics, many scholars still produce and apply conceptual frameworks with little sensitivity to the historical-social specificity of theory. Implicit in the critiques made by many feminists about the force Western feminism has in CEE is a point also made by standpoint theorists: inattention to one's social-historical context in theorizing is a privilege of the powerful.[12] Their relative (even if unacknowledged) privilege can lead theorists to overgeneralize from their particular context or vantage point.

Because I see many of the problems identified in the East-West feminist divide discourse as important, real, and pernicious, in the following sections I consider conceptual frameworks and institutional practices that contribute to the uneven power relations CEE feminist scholars experience. I question the accuracy and usefulness of an emphasis on difference that runs through this discourse. I also try to account for how difference may have come to be taken as the obvious solution to the problem of inequality within the international feminist scholarly community before turning my attention to the concept of transculturation.

[11] I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for her useful suggestion to develop this point further.

[12] Indeed, numerous CEE scholars writing about the need to develop a particular Eastern European feminism explicitly draw on standpoint theory (citing Nancy Hartsock and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in particular) to elaborate and support their arguments. I shall discuss the idea of an Eastern European standpoint in greater detail later in the article.

Difference: An imperfect solution to Western hegemony

In the discourse about the East-West divide in feminism described in the previous section, the most commonly proposed solution has been a call for CEE women and feminists to articulate the difference of their experience. This solution of letting Eastern European women articulate their difference has taken the form of numerous anthologies on gender/women in postcommunist societies, women in Eastern and Central Europe, or gender and the (post) East/West divide. Typically, they have been organized around national subcategories and feature essays with titles such as "Traditions of Patriotism, Questions of Gender: The Case of Poland" (Hauser 1995), "Women and Politics in Democratic Hungary" (Rédai 2004), or "Women in Romania" (Harsanyi 1993). The essays in anthologies of this kind usually acknowledge the difficulties involved in trying to generalize about women in the region or in post–state socialist systems. They also acknowledge that there are many differences that exist between countries and between parts of the CEE region, and they acknowledge that there is a diversity of experience within a single country. But despite the difficulties of generalizing, most anthologies in fact do generalize about culture and gender, using the categories of nation-state and region.

In addition, various Western journals, including the American-based *Signs* (2004) and the British-based *Feminist Review* (Nikolić-Ristanović 2004), have used Eastern Europe as the organizing logic for clustering articles or have earmarked special editions for Eastern European issues. One might read such publishing practices as a gesture whereby Western feminists extend an invitation to Eastern European feminists to articulate their experience and, in particular, their differences from the West.[13]

Such a solution to the problem of Western feminist hegemony has intuitive appeal. If a group is underrepresented in the community of feminist scholars, then one logical response is to create opportunities for members of that group to explain their particular experiences and perspectives. Nevertheless, the disadvantages of this strategy for rectifying inequality may outweigh the benefits. Biljana Kašić (2004, 479) cautions against what she calls "feminist paradigms of authenticity and difference" when she writes, "we should, therefore, be cautious of both the global

[13] The cluster of articles in *Signs* (2004) devoted to Eastern European issues differs from other such publications insofar as all the articles, save one, are written by non–Eastern European feminist scholars. In this respect, this special feature does not invite Eastern European scholars to act as specialists of their cultures. However, it does reproduce the general pattern in other ways. For instance, it privileges the differences between East and West (treating these categories as coherent).

feminist paradigms of 'authenticity' and difference concerning feminists from the 'East' . . . and the paradigm which argues for the ongoing need for more equal feminist exchange with the 'mainstream' despite commodified perceptions of marginality. This refers to the perception that exists among feminists from both the West and the East, which is partially based on the long absence of feminist theoretical production from almost all former socialist countries" (Kašić 2004, 479).

In this passage, Kašić affirms Blagojević's assessment quoted earlier in this article of a dearth of feminist theorizing from former state socialist countries. However, Kašić expresses skepticism about the usefulness of emphasizing authenticity and difference as a solution to the lack of voice for feminists in the CEE region despite the commodification of marginality. Kašić's skepticism echoes numerous left-wing critical analyses of multicultural policies that showcase ethnic and cultural differences in order to empower minority groups.[14] Critics of multicultural policy argue that by showcasing the particularity and difference of nondominant cultures in the name of respect, many multicultural policies preserve cultural hierarchies. These multicultural displays of the Other leave the dominant culture (which does not display its folk costumes or exotic food and traditions) as unmarked and universal. Building from these critiques, one could argue that special issues of and features in journals and anthologies devoted to the Eastern European experience, like the "ethnic" events in multicultural festivals, invite excluded groups to engage with the majority on the condition that they display their difference. Yet the very structure of these encounters reinstates the Other as different from what is normal or mainstream and articulates their experience as exceptional. It also maintains a power imbalance, since the Other functions as a guest of sorts in the house of the dominant group. At the same time, white Western feminists, for instance, do not face the same reward structure to write about (testify to) their difference. Indeed, the situatedness of their identities goes unmarked, and their knowledge claims usually remain decontextualized. In this way, the liberal pluralism model in feminism seems to reproduce, rather than to destabilize, a margin and center.

Ien Ang charges that feminism manages difference with the same unfortunate model of liberal pluralism as the state. She writes,

> As a woman of Chinese descent, I suddenly find myself in a position in which I can turn my "difference" into intellectual and political capital, where "white" feminists invite me to raise my "voice," *qua*

[14] See, e.g., Gordon and Newfield 1996; Hage 1998; Ang 2003; Cerwonka 2004.

> a non-white woman, and make myself heard. Anna Yeatman suggests that voices such as mine are needed to contest the old exclusions of the established feminist order, and that they will win non-white women authorship and authority within a renewed, less exclusionary feminism. In this sense, feminism acts like a nation; just like Australia, it no longer subscribes to a policy of assimilation but wants to be multicultural.
>
> Feminism functions as a nation which "other" women are invited to join without disrupting the ultimate integrity of the nation. But this politics of inclusion is born of a liberal pluralism which can only be entertained by those who have the *power* to include. (Ang 2003, 190, 203)

Ang argues that the invitation to marginalized people to speak about their experience is ultimately not a progressive move. The invitation to raise one's voice in the end still maintains Anglo-European (Western) feminism as the norm and thus maintains its primacy. Marginalized peoples can participate but are rewarded most for simply displaying difference, which, in turn, is celebrated by an open-minded, tolerant, mainstream feminism. It is understandable that many CEE feminists would see the articulation of their difference as the best option for participating more centrally in international feminist discourse; after all, these special features of journals represent an important opportunity given that difference has been designated within the liberal pluralist model of feminism as the primary epistemological space out of which CEE women can write.[15]

The geocultural difference of CEE feminists in effect takes its place alongside other forms of difference within feminism, such as racial, class, cultural, and sexual difference. On one level, these groups challenge the power and universalism of the subject position of white Western feminists. But to the extent to which feminists from these groups are invited to speak their difference in these "special" spaces (anthologies devoted to articulating CEE issues as bounded and discrete from other regions of

[15] Blagojević writes that, too often, scholars in Central and Eastern Europe are quoted by Western scholars as informants (i.e., their experience is highlighted) rather than as scholarly experts on the various topics about which they write (Blagojević 2006). This tendency strikes me as a logical by-product of the difference strategy for redressing power imbalances among feminists. We also see in some feminists from the region an understandable sense of ownership of authority and knowledge about the CEE region when an outsider poaches from the main arena of knowledge that CEE scholars have been invited to occupy. See Funk (1993) for an interesting illustration of this dynamic of ownership and authority between CEE feminists and outsiders.

the world, special issues of journals, special panels at conferences, etc.), the universalism of hegemonic feminism is in the end never destabilized. Thus, although there is undeniable value in the critique of inequalities within academic feminism, the liberal pluralist solution of inviting CEE feminists to speak their difference ends up unwittingly reproducing the very hierarchies it sets out to dismantle.

In addition, the solution of difference within feminism reflects a larger epistemic and institutional logic that Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (2002) argue is foundational to U.S. women's studies. Women's studies shares some important characteristics of American studies and area studies, disciplines developed in the shadow of the Cold War. Specifically, all three disciplines organize their specialized knowledge around national difference, with particular attention paid to the United States (a practice often referred to as U.S. exceptionalism). In American studies and in women's studies, this epistemic framework was adjusted to accommodate, but was not fundamentally altered by, the question of difference. Kaplan and Grewal explain,

> Just as ethnic studies raised the question of the "Third World" within the "First World," and questioned the racial paradigms of American Studies, U.S. Women's Studies added gender to the demand for equality and civil rights. By the 1970s and '80s, both popular and academic feminism concerned itself with cultural, racial, and sexual difference. However, most Women's Studies departments retained a U.S. framework even in area and development studies. This trajectory is no accident. The Cold War roots of Women's Studies have not been fully examined. . . . The nationalist biases that permeate U.S. Women's Studies are most obvious in the "Women and Development" paradigm, of course, but they also can be seen just as powerfully in the "women of color" paradigm, among others. (Kaplan and Grewal 2002, 70)

The authors add that despite the popularization of international and global women's studies, "U.S. agendas of nation and imperialism still pervade the curriculum and research" (Kaplan and Grewal 2002, 71). Thus, in the institutional logic of U.S. women's studies (and no doubt much of women's studies in Western Europe), knowledge about "other" women is almost always organized around national differences and/or essentializing themes (e.g., violence against women or sati in India, trafficking of Eastern European women, and race and African American women). Such inclusions are typically found in courses with titles such as

"Women and Development," "Global Feminism," or "Women of Color" in U.S. curricula. Conceptual writing of non-U.S. and non–Western European feminists is rarely included in feminist theory courses or introduction to women's studies courses, although their experience might be included in the latter (in the form of fiction or testimony, for instance).

These framing devices for the discipline mean that when new groups (be it Eastern European women or another group) are accepted into the discipline in a gesture of inclusion or as a corrective to ethnocentrism, their inclusion in fact does not disrupt the centrality of American/Western women. Courses, journals, or comparative studies might include a myriad of new groups, but organizing their inclusion around national, regional, and cultural difference simply expands the taxonomy; it does not change the relations of power.

Beyond the East-West binary

In her critique of constructions of Yugoslavian difference, Vida Penezic argues that the political and cultural differences between East and West do not necessarily translate into stark political, cultural, and gendered differences, as is commonly presumed. Although political leaders in the West and in the Soviet bloc emphasized the difference (and inferiority) of life on the other side of the Berlin Wall, we would be unwise to accept such ideological polemics as an accurate account (see also Gal and Kligman 2000, 6). Penezic writes, "the blocs' boundaries (borders) were not impermeable: popular and other cultural products, people, political and financial interests, and such like, constantly seeped through, ensuring the continued presence of the other bloc on each of their soils. . . . This constant seepage, together with other globalizing trends, has worked toward creating (or, rather, maintaining?) a common cultural space which frequently (under the cold-war paradigm) went unrecognized" (1995, 70–71).

As Penezic notes, East and West were not necessarily hermetically sealed. And there was and is a great deal of diversity among Soviet bloc countries in terms of their histories prior to World War II, languages, customs, and religions. There were also significant differences in terms of style of state socialism and how open they were to influences from the West. The contemporary common sense about the impermeability of the two blocs oversimplifies and misrepresents the complex ways in which ideas circulated well before the present era of globalization.

For instance, numerous nineteenth-century feminists in Eastern Europe

read and were highly influenced by John Stuart Mill. Hungarian women in the 1960s read and debated Simone de Beauvoir. Žarana Papic's intellectual and activist life (1949–2002) is illustrative. She was one of the founders of the feminist movement in the former Yugoslavia. In the first part of her career, she was inspired by Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. She also organized international conferences of women from the West and the East. The first was held in Yugoslavia in 1978 and included Hélène Cixous as well as numerous other feminists from Italy, Poland, Hungary, and Germany (see de Haan, Daskalova, and Loutfi 2006). Papic's feminist organizing and intellectual interests illustrate the complex ways in which influence and sympathies were organized between East and West well before the end of the Soviet system in CEE. In addition, since she was a part of the national intellectual elite, Papic's life suggests how other factors, such as social class and status, shaped the extent and nature of CEE feminists' access to Western ideas and feminist communities. Thus, for instance, some women in Serbia in the 1970s may have had more in common with women in France than they had either with lower-class women in their own societies or with women in Belarus, a country with a very different form of state socialism. If we only or even mainly focus on *the* CEE experience (or *the* Romanian, Hungarian, or Polish experience) in feminist scholarship, we unwittingly reproduce the highly political assumption that the East-West border was/is a fundamental marker of difference for how women's and men's lives are gendered. And by uncritically continuing to use national and/or regional categories for their analyses of gender, feminists uncritically reproduce the Cold War paradigms that continue to haunt academic knowledge production and institutionalization.

And indeed, these categories of East and West are slippery and inadequate when used to map power relations within women's and gender studies. At the very moment one tries to use the categories of Eastern and Western, even as ideal types, one is confronted with people or phenomena that do not fit neatly into either category. For example, CEE critics of Western feminist hegemony draw on the theories of numerous Western feminist scholars to make their argument about Western imperialism and the importance of asserting CEE difference. In various texts I reviewed for this article, scholars drew on a number of feminists, such as Alice Walker, bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Nancy Hartsock, and Judith Butler. To the extent to which Mohanty and hooks, for instance, critique hierarchies of privilege within feminism, they are very appropriate and useful reference points for feminist scholars from CEE

who want to think about how they have been affected by the larger political, economic, and cultural power structures that inform feminist communities.

However, the feminists used in support of the critique of Western feminist hegemony in CEE literature (e.g., hooks, Mohanty, Hartsock, and Butler) are either American or located professionally in American academic institutions. And given their consistent and central presence in women's studies curricula, they are clearly part of the contemporary canon in Western feminist scholarship, albeit as critics of a dominant feminist discourse (liberalism) and as representative of other approaches for feminism. Thus, although numerous CEE feminists represent themselves as outside the discourse of Western feminist theory because they are located in another part of the world, their critique of Western universalism is part of the larger (transnational) critical discourse about liberal feminist thought currently at the very center of women's and gender studies. Such complexities illustrate the problems of taking East and West as stable identities or analytical categories out of which to generate a feminist epistemology. And they illustrate how there are in fact multiple Western feminisms that contradict or contest one another.[16] In addition, the way CEE scholars use some U.S.-based feminists to represent the hegemony of Western feminism while using others to serve as theoretical support for the critique of that hegemony is a perfect illustration of the way in which people engage in a selective use of feminist ideas as a consequence of specific historical circumstances and aims.

Analysis of social processes and identities particular to Eastern Europe can certainly challenge current theoretical paradigms developed from the specific context of the United States or elsewhere. However, it can do so not because CEE feminists are theorizing from a position outside Western feminist theory or because they articulate an authentic and distinct Eastern European gender experience or identity. Rather, they might do so because they offer analyses of phenomena specific to the region that prompt us to see complications and new dimensions of existing theoretical concepts. I will briefly illustrate this point.

The commodification of CEE women in various international economies challenges contemporary theoretical models of whiteness. Given that most theories of whiteness developed out of research on European co-

[16] Of course, the difficulty of using identity categories like Eastern or Western represents a more pervasive issue in feminist scholarship. It shares the basic limitation of feminist standpoint theory insofar as it uses identity as an unproblematic and stable category for knowledge production (see Bar On [1993] and Haraway [2004] for further discussion).

lonialism and on U.S. race relations, we are inclined to see whiteness as a fairly stable marker of privilege.[17] However, the flexible "racing" of CEE women's identity potentially holds new lessons for theories of whiteness. Depending on the economy and the social hierarchies in which their identities and services are marketed, CEE women are flexibly raced as white in some cases and as something more ethnic in others. For instance, when Balkan women work in Dutch households as elder-care workers, their economic exploitation is legitimated with civilizing discourses about the patriarchal and violent cultures from which they come. This discourse is very similar to the racially overdetermined discourses used in Western multicultural societies to legitimate the exploitation of so-called ethnic women from the global South (such as Latinas in the United States or Filipinas in Canada).

However, when Eastern European women occupy other positions in the global political economy, they are raced in a markedly different way. For instance, in the global fertility market, companies such as GlobalARTusa specialize in the sale of young Eastern European women's ova to infertile women (and couples) in Western Europe. On its Web site, the whiteness of the Eastern European women is highlighted (commodified) in an effort to assure prospective buyers that they will give birth to a white child.[18] The same is true in the case of Eastern European women who meet a commercial demand among American men for Internet friendships with traditional white women and in the case of Eastern European women hired to satisfy a desire for white dancers in Korean sex clubs. In all these contexts, Eastern European women are raced in a very different way from the domestic workers located in Western Europe. One might say that they are unambivalently white or hyperwhite in these commercial markets.

The cultural and corporeal commodification of Eastern European women invites us to think productively about how the contemporary global economy and unstable political hierarchies between the global North and South shape white identity in liminal spaces like the former second world. Analyzing the processes by which Eastern European women

[17] See Ware 1992; Frankenberg 1993; Hall 1996; Delgado and Stefancic 1997; Clancy-Smith and Gouda 1998.

[18] The Web page for GlobalARTusa advertises, "our donors are young Eastern European women almost exclusively in their twenties and are recruited largely by word-of-mouth through previous donors. High percentages are college graduates or college students who are supplementing their incomes in Europe. . . . Donors are generally of Eastern European, Caucasian ancestry. (Unfortunately, for this reason GlobalARTusa is not a reliable source of eggs from black or Asian donors.)" See the Web page at http://globalartusa.com/about.cfm.

broker their bodies and identities in different global markets and across various national borders potentially allows us to see how individuals work with these flexible racial categories and cultural ascriptions in the context of global capitalism and contemporary redefinitions of Europe.

However, conducting such an analysis depends on seeing how identity is produced and negotiated in a shifting landscape of communities and vis-à-vis international flows of various kinds (see Appadurai 1996). In my example, the liminality (racial, economic, geographic, etc.) of Eastern European women might challenge us to rethink current theories of whiteness. But it does so not by presuming the stable difference of Eastern European identity but by seeing how identities and difference are produced flexibly and relationally.

Clearly our attention to the historical and cultural specificity of feminist ideas and theory requires more complex categorizations than West and East in order to properly characterize the complex routes by which ideas and power travel within the field of women's and gender studies. In the next section, I consider the process of transculturation in relation to the flow of power and ideas in feminist scholarship.

Feminist transculturation

The point of my analysis is not to trivialize the ways many Central and Eastern European feminists struggle with institutional and ideological structures that place them at a disadvantage. And I agree with the argument that theory is always already shaped by context of some sort, be it historical, cultural, gendered, and so on. However, I differ from the scholars who criticize Western feminist theory as hegemonic insofar as they treat theory as static and as something that is imported wholesale from outside by passive local recipients. I turn now to the concept of transculturation as an analytic for better understanding how feminist ideas develop in response to context.

Using the anthropological concept of transculturation, Mary Louise Pratt examines processes by which people in specific contexts engage and reshape hegemonic ideas. She writes, "ethnographers have used this term to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone" (Pratt 1992, 6). What I find useful about Pratt's notion of contact for thinking about how theories travel is that it allows

us to see various negotiations that take place at the level of ideas and identities. Such negotiations invariably are prompted by social and political circumstances and are embedded in relations of power. What Pratt calls a "contact perspective" (7) on the transculturation of ideas provides us with a means for addressing the way feminist ideas, in addition to gendered identities and processes, develop relationally among various groups and individuals. Instead of understanding the relationship of feminist ideas through a framework of difference and geographical separateness, it is more accurate and productive to understand it in terms of "copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 1992, 7).

As Susan Stanford Friedman aptly remarks, it is difficult to ever neatly demarcate what is "local" feminism and what is "global" or imported (2001, especially 26). Therefore, instead of seeing feminist theory as a totalitarian force that homogenizes and imposes itself on passive CEE subjects, we might ask how feminist ideas from elsewhere have entered these societies, under what circumstances they circulate, and how they have been creatively transformed. That is, we should consider how theory is a process of explaining and negotiating material conditions and ideas. Such an approach entails looking more closely at how ideas are formed from the material circumstances of one location (which we should not assume will necessarily correspond neatly to historically and politically contingent geopolitical borders) and then how they are appropriated and creolized in another. The analytic of transculturation helps direct our attention to the relations, borrowings, and copresences that influence feminist ideas/praxis in different contexts. For example, given how important Cold War ideology was in shaping the identities of individuals, social movements, and even disciplines on both sides of the Berlin Wall, it is surprising that scholars have not looked in more depth at how that ideology linked and produced various gendered power effects in many contexts around the world.

Susan Gal (2003) provides a number of nice examples of how certain feminist discourses were translated from English into Hungarian and describes the conditions surrounding their reception. While she limits her focus to how (mainly) U.S. feminist writings are translated and received in Hungary, her examples illustrate the complexity of how feminist ideas are selected and received when they travel. In one example, Gal discusses the translation of a series of feminist essays in the late 1990s that engage in counterarguments to economic rational choice theory. She describes how these feminist essays were better received in part because many of them employed arguments that had developed in the United States from

prewar Central European economic theories (Gal 2003, 107). Gal's example underscores how ideas travel in multiple directions and not simply from so-called core to periphery. And although people are selective in their use of imported ideas, Gal's analysis discourages us from romanticizing the process. That which is borrowed, adapted, or rejected is part of a broader set of factors and negotiations within a particular context rather than a reflection of any kind of local authenticity or truth.

Gal's description of the complex cross-fertilization of ideas between the United States and Central Europe also invites us to question the widely held assumption that the West is the origin of all feminist theory (or even that there is a clear origin to theories). As Pratt also remarks, "while the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery (the emanating glow of the civilizing mission or the cash flow of development, for example), it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis" (1992, 6; see also Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 7, 10). Pratt's words here could well be applied to feminists on both sides of the Berlin Wall who have been "habitually blind" to the influence of other groups and traditions on American/Western feminist thought.

When we look more closely at how the U.S. feminist movement has been shaped by the "presence of global forces" (Friedman 2001, 26), we see the more complex (and interesting) circuits by which feminist ideas and influence travel. It is usually assumed that American liberal feminism, for instance, is a product of Anglo-American influences alone and has spread to people in other parts of the world who passively adopt or reject it. This assumption was captured vividly in Slavova's (2006) description of the importation of Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* into Bulgaria. Nevertheless, another look at Friedan and the *The Feminine Mystique* allows us to see how identities and ideas in the metropolis of Western feminism were actually greatly shaped by politics and identities from elsewhere.

While Friedan's narrative in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) suggests that it was the experience of being stranded in the suburbs that motivated her feminist conversion, the biographical details of Friedan's life actually belie that self-presentation. Daniel Horowitz's intellectual history (1998) maps how her choice to use liberalism to articulate a feminist vision was very much an outcome of the Cold War politics that surrounded her in early adulthood. Horowitz presents a portrait of Friedan as a well-educated Jewish woman (born Bettye Goldstein) and committed labor activist. Even after she was married and living in the New York suburbs, Friedan was an activist for issues that included renters' rights, multicultural housing, education, and antiracism. She pursued a career as a freelance writer and

commuted to New York City regularly to teach college writing. According to Horowitz, Friedan's persona of the trapped housewife in *The Feminine Mystique* was a necessary fiction constructed to distance herself from the left-wing radicalism she had previously promoted and to appeal to a mainstream audience. Horowitz argues that Friedan, all too aware of her potential vulnerability, adopted a liberal political framework for her feminist manifesto in order to avoid the kind of political harassment she witnessed in Joseph McCarthy's anticommunist campaign. In other words, the political context of the Cold War prompted Friedan to place the white suburban housewife at the center of her feminist analysis and to trade her earlier Marxism for the less embattled ideology of liberalism.

Horowitz's history of Friedan not only complicates her as a popular icon but also suggests how the genesis of what seems like the most all-American form of feminism was in fact also shaped by global forces far beyond the New York suburbs. In this case, the Marxist ideas circulating in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were also shaping the intellectual landscape of social critics like Friedan in the United States in the 1940s. And in the 1950s, the ideologies from the Soviet system were significantly affecting the forms and costs of left-wing politics in the United States. Thus, in the case of Friedan, the kind of state-sponsored persecution propagated by McCarthy in response to the political and social developments in Eastern and Central Europe (and I say Eastern and Central Europe here and not the Soviet Union because it was the threat of spreading communism that so motivated McCarthyism) perhaps constituted one of the most important reasons for *The Feminine Mystique* being written as a liberal feminist text.[19]

Attention has been given to the ways in which other social movements of the 1960s, such as the civil rights and student antiwar protest movements, shaped American feminism. However, feminists inside and outside the United States are complicit in assuming that the influence of ideas

[19] As a reader of an earlier draft of this article suggested, a very interesting analysis could and should be done on various traumas U.S. feminists like Friedan and others of her generation suffered from their experience with Marxism. This trauma is reflected in the current landscape of some U.S. feminisms. This phenomenon in the United States has commonalities with CEE feminists traumatized by their experience of Marxism under state socialism. It has led to a turning away from Marxist and neo-Marxist theories despite the fact that such theories might be particularly helpful in analyzing how neoliberal economic policy is affecting their societies. The question of how Marxism has circulated in different locations and the way its influence reverberates in feminist thought is a nice example of the transculturation of feminist ideas. However, the limited scope of this article forces me to limit the attention I can give here to this very interesting question.

and political dynamics flow in only one direction—out of the United States. While certainly there have been differences among local contexts around the world, we should not assume a priori that these differences are defined (today or during the Cold War) by national borders or by highly ideologically constructed imagined communities like the Soviet bloc and the West. These boundaries are but one, and perhaps not even the most salient, of many influencing factors shaping gender and other social hierarchies.

Conclusion

Transculturation offers an analytic for understanding the impact of transnational phenomena such as neoliberalism or patriarchal nationalism, for instance, without relinquishing the importance of particular contextual histories, politics, and meanings of a given site. In this regard, it contributes to the work of other scholars who offer critical frameworks for "transnational feminist practice" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994) or a form of "feminism without borders" (Mohanty 2003).

However, the concept of transculturation also serves as a tool for tracing specifically how feminist ideas and identities circulate and are particularized. Women's and gender studies have become more international in scope in response to pressure from university administrations and governments and the increased border crossing of faculty and students, and as a consequence of widespread use of the Internet. Today, feminism functions as one of the many "ideascapes" (Appadurai 1996, 35) that characterizes contemporary global flows as feminist ideas circulate via scholarly research and through popular culture. But as feminist scholars come in greater contact with one another (be it virtual or physical contact), the limits of women's and gender studies' dominant conceptual frameworks and institutionalization become increasingly apparent. For instance, many historical and comparative studies are still uncritically structured in terms of national and regional difference, missing much of the complexity and subtlety of how ideas and identities are constituted. Kaplan and Grewal describe the dominant paradigm for knowledge production in women's studies as the "model of information retrieval about a plurality of women around the world, a project that is both endless and arbitrary" (2002, 79). This taxonomic approach of showcasing difference is limited as an epistemology for feminist knowledge production and as a strategy for redressing inequalities within the discipline between scholars from different regions of the world. As Ang (2003) has noted, the feminist strategy of showcasing difference shares the same limitations of state multicultur-

alism for achieving social equality. Simply creating opportunities for different groups to explain their experience in the present institutional arrangements of special issues of journals, anthologies, or courses devoted to gender in other (i.e., non-Western) countries fails to change the kinds of inequalities that CEE feminists have underscored.

Transculturation as an approach to feminist knowledge production gives us a means for understanding feminism as a set of ideas and practices that has developed through contact and negotiation. It directs our attention to complex circuits of influence without losing sight of the way contact is always structured by uneven power relations. Such an analytic helps us to structure our knowledge about different groups and about feminist ideas in more sophisticated ways than under the commonsense rubrics of nation or region. And it would assist in the important task of undermining the teleological frameworks that continue to haunt feminist scholarship and activism. Thus, understanding feminist knowledge and scholarly institutions as outcomes of contact and copresence allows us to more fully appreciate how feminist ideas travel, change, and are a process through which multiple desires are negotiated.

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