Nationalities Papers, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1997

INTRODUCTION: DUAL LOYALTY: BETWEEN FEMINISM AND PATRIOTISM

Henry R. Huttenbach

Feminism and ethnicity, with their many interests, do not necessarily coexist in harmony. On the contrary, even at first glance, their respective demands for loyalty suggest a permanent underlying tension and the prospect of open conflict. It is not difficult to see why. Put simply, the interests associated with ethnicity tend to be past-oriented and traditionalist (in the sense of preserving valued customs and memories), and conservative (in the sense of avoiding any changes that may put traditions in jeopardy). In contrast, the interests expressed by the women's movement are expressly future-oriented and essentially radical, challenging, if necessary, traditions that stand in the way of the changes called for to inaugurate the rights denied women.

This bedrock of fundamental contradiction threatens to keep the aspirations of both on opposite political poles. A mutuality of goals seems practically unlikely. But, such a nexus does occasionally take place, in particular, when women's struggles coincide with those of their ethnos, when both are engaged as minorities against a common foe. As most of the essays of this issue illustrate, there are moments when there is a conjunction of the aspirations of feminists striving for gender equality with those of democratically inclined ethno-politicians in pursuit of the liberation of their nation from the grips of empire or the assertion of an equitable minority status within a nation state.

More than mere convenience is involved in such an alliance. To be sure, as any skeptic would point out, the quest for statehood is better attained if all men and women *together* energize the national liberation movement in a show of tactical solidarity. This is especially true when there might be deep divisions over the society envisioned once independence has been achieved. But there is also a strategic, longer lasting reason for a broad alliance between feminists and male ethno-politicians, when both are devoted to a *bona fide* democratic society in which women attain full recognition. Toward that end, both movements need to consolidate since they share two goals: an immediate one—independence; and a permanent one—a democratic polity, equally respectful of women as of men.

Yet, there is even more than just tactics and strategy at stake; there is also a principled social vision. For many feminists, the liberation of women from suppressive traditions, and their elevation to parity with men was (and remains) but a part of a more encompassing social goal. Their end-goal is not just to free the nation from demeaning anti-female prejudices and superstitions which underlie male domination,

0090-5992/97/010009-03

not just to expunge the caricature stereotypes about women, but also to free men of the stereotypes culture had imposed on them. It is crucial, therefore, that such feminists forge alliances with those few male ethno-politicians who harbor a similar enlightened, humanistic view of the future. It is at this juncture that men and women either find common cause or part ways. In the case of the former, male ethno-nationalists have worked side by side with women in their efforts to gain independence for their nation and to forge together a truly democratic future for their society. Thus, the spectrum of reasons for collaboration ranges from rank opportunistic to sheer utopian. It is this overlap, the degree of mutuality of interests, that is the underlying theme of this set of articles.

What almost always happens, in fact, is a collision of priorities, both political and psychological. All too often, ethnonationalism is a vehicle for the perpetuation of male dominance values, embedded in traditional institutions such as family and religion. All too often, women have had to struggle simultaneously for their goals—both modest and radical—against entrenched ethnic values that, ironically, they too, harbored. The rupture from inflexible attitudes that subordinated women to men often meant a break with family and church, risking highly valued and treasured human relationships and revered religious beliefs. Most feminists, of course, are not rabid anarchists and absolutist secularists. Their task, as they see it, is to *humanize* their society, not destroy it. The majority ardently desire to remain within their ethnic community, espousing the hope that they can, in a single stroke, break the shackles of inequality while preserving the communal attachments to their ethnos.

What made this poignantly difficult if not impossible in Central and Eastern Europe was, and remains, the context of multi-nationality. Not only did feminists have to contend with their own ethnic surroundings, but they also had to consider the imperial setting of their ethnos. Sometimes the dominant culture fortified the anti-feminist prejudices of their own ethnos; on occasion, though, as illustrated by Freeze's article, the imperial system proved to offer a more enlightened escape from the paralyzing anti-women restrictions and inflexible prejudices of a particular minority ethnos.

As ethno-patriots, feminists had to weigh their gender loyalties against those of their ethnos as the nation struggled to find a way out of imperial bondage, onerous to both men and women. Like the men of their ethnos, women activists not only nurtured strong *positive* feelings for their culture—its language, its literature, its arts, *etc.*—they also harbored and expressed profound ethnophobic feelings for other ethnicities. Christian feminists were no less prone than their men to fall for the temptations of antisemitism. Their dislike of Gypsies, for example, stemmed from centuries of antipathies perpetuated by their own ethnic cultural community. Polish Catholic feminists, *qua* Polish patriots, could be infused with a deep animus, if not hatred, for Russians, including Russian women. Internationalism or trans-nationalism, was not an automatic attitude for feminists. Ethno-feminists could be as ethno-parochial as men with no pro-feminist sympathies. The call for patriotism was

a potential trap: for in promoting the political goals of the ethnos and all its cultural imperfections, some feminists hoped simultaneously to liberate it from the empire as well as engender it with new, enlightened, feminists values. That proved to be a pipe dream both in Russia and in Central Europe. Neither socialism in post-tsarist Russia nor nationalism in the post-Habsburg successor states ushered in a brave new world for women. Both ideologies were flawed; ethno-nationalism because of its regressive orientation to the past, and socialism, because of its dishonest, male practitioners who cruelly promised a gender-equal utopia for women, but only in a vague, distant future.

In the following articles there is neither the pretense of a complete history nor of a representative cross-section of this multi-dimensional topic. Nevertheless, the seven articles do suggest the subject's broad complexity. Geographically, they span from the sparsely populated frontier towns of Siberia (A. Rassweiler) to provincial towns (D. Cornelius). Topically, these case studies range from Azeri women in Azerbaijan adjusting to the rocky transition from a Soviet republic to an independent state in the late twentieth century (N. Tohidi); to Muslim women in communist Bulgaria (M. Neuburger); and to Orthodox Jewish women in the late nineteenth century in Orthodox Christian Tsarist Russia (C. Y. Freeze). Some articles deal in broad theoretical strokes (N. Weber), and others zero in on one personality (B. Reinfeld).

What all the articles make clear is that, despite certain similarities with the women's movements in Western Europe and in the United States, there are outweighing differences that suggest distinctly different problems and questions of methodology with respect to Eastern Europe. Though an all-European orientation is desirable, there is ample justification to study this topic—the connection between (ethno-) feminism and ethno-patriotism in Central and Eastern Europe—purely for itself. Obviously, much more than the topics presented in these pages remains to be researched. Nevertheless, one fact has been firmly established: gender studies of Eastern Europe cannot and should not be divorced from ethnic studies; they indisputably complement one another.