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POLIS

Journal of Political Analysis and Theory

ISSN: 1582-4969

Edited and published by
the Centre for Political Analysis

Correspondence address:
Mosoiu Traian Str., no. 71, Room IV/2
400091, Cluj-Napoca,
Romania

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Journal of Political Analysis and Theory

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articles

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIZATION. A Literature Review with Special Emphasis on Central and Eastern European Former Communist Bloc

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Abstract

This study is a literature review of eleven representative works on gender and democratization, having as the main topic women's political participation during the postcommunist transformations in Central and Eastern European countries. The selected contributions include comparative studies, theoretical and empirical analyzes, compilations of essays with different individual directions of research and collections of essays following a common framework of analysis. All tackle multiple case studies, offering an overview of women's situation in politics in the postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe. The review identifies four main topics of analysis: 1. Private vs. public and the politics of reproduction; 2. The impact of democratization on gender relations; 3. Women's representation in political action; 4. Women's role in democratization.

Key words: women, political participation, democratization, Central and Eastern Europe, postcommunism.

Introduction¹

Beginning with the early 1990s, after the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, a stream of studies on gender and democratization has appeared. This article is a literature review of eleven contributions among the most

¹ This paper was supported by the Program "Cercetatori competitivi pe plan european in domeniul stiintelor umaniste si socio-economice. Rețea de cercetare mutiregionala (CCPE)". Contract nr.: POSDRU/159/1.5/S/140863.

representative for the literature on gender and democratization in Central and Eastern European countries of the former communist bloc. It is centered particularly on the topic of women's political participation during democratization. The studies considered are both single and multiple edited and authored works (books, chapters in books and articles). They include comparative studies, theoretical and empirical analyzes, compilations of essays with different individual directions of research and collections of essays following a common framework. They were addressed in diachronic order. We took into consideration only framework literature, which tackle multiple case studies, offering an overview of the Central and Eastern Europe postcommunist spaces.

Some of the studies confine to the Central and Eastern Europe region of the former communist bloc, offering an intra-region perspective – i.e. Funk & Mueller eds. 1993, Einhorn 1994, Rueschemeyer ed. 1994 and 1998, Sperling in Randall & Waylen eds. 1998, Gal & Kligman eds. 2000a, Gal and Kligman 2000b, Matland & Montgomery 2003, Rueschemeyer in Wolchik & Curry eds. 2011. They are all cases of transformation from communist regime. The others are inter-regional studies, offering a comparative perspective between different types of democratizations, from both authoritarian and communist rule – i.e. Waylen 1994, Jaquette & Wolchik eds. 1998, Waylen 2007.

All the selected works deal with countries which are part of the 'third wave' of democratizations (Huntington 1991), (whether they are postauthoritarian or postcommunist²) although the used terminology is different, as well as the length of the period assessed.

Given that we chose both works from the early 1990s and others more recent (post 2000), some of them tackle only the transition period, whilst others examine the consolidation phases as well. Regarding terminology, one important remark stands from the

² As we focus on Central and Eastern Europe, they are mostly postcommunist cases, and only three studies (Waylen 1994, Jaquette and Wolchik eds. 1998, Waylen 2007) discuss postauthoritarian democratizations. They were selected for a broader perspective of our topic.

outset: most works use the term *transition* - Funk & Mueller eds. 1993; Einhorn 1994; Waylen 1994 and 2007; Rueschemeyer ed. 1994 and 1998; Sperling in Randall & Waylen eds. 1998; Ruechemeyer in Wolchik & Curry eds. 2011, others use both *transition* and *transformation* - Jaquette & Wolchik eds. 1998, while others use only *transformation* - Gal & Kligman eds. 2000a, Gal & Kligman 2000b; Matland & Montgomery 2003. Another remarkable terminological differentiation is between those works using the term *communism* (and/or various derivations from it, as postcommunism, former communist etc.) - Rueschemeyer ed. 1994 and 1998; Jaquette & Wolchik eds. 1998; Matland & Montgomery 2003; Ruechemeyer in Wolchik & Curry eds. 2011, those preferring *socialism* - (respectively postsocialism, state socialism) - Einhorn 1994; Waylen 1994 and 2007, and those using both - Funk & Mueller eds. 2003; Gal & Kligman eds. 2000a, Gal & Kligman 2000b. In discussing the enumerated cases, we kept for each one their original terminology.

There are other significant studies for the literature of gender and democratization, and precisely on women's political participation in democratization, which examine single cases of postcommunist democratization in various phases, or ones focused mostly on conceptual issues of gendered political participation and democratization. They are not of less interest, but for reasons of brevity, given the limit of this article they could not make the object of our study.

Therefore, the selected studies cover the fields of comparative politics, democratization, political participation and representation from a gendered perspective, thus being broadly representative for the larger literature on postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe. Consequently, they are required readings for anyone interested in these fields.

A brief thematic analysis of the main ideas and concepts presented throughout the selected literature revealed the importance of four main topics or themes: (1) private versus public and the politics of reproduction, (2) the impact of democratization on gender relations, (3) women's representation in political action and (4) women's role in

democratic consolidation. Thus, the next sections will describe each theme as seen through the works of the authors selected as being relevant for the topic of women's participation in the process of democratization.

Private versus public and the politics of reproduction

The first collection of essays, *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union* (Funk & Mueller eds. 1993) on the topic of gender and democratization included a broad spectrum of subjects such as nationalism, economic transformation, women and the state, and women's gains and losses at the fall of communism. The volume brought together contributions from thirty three authors, both eastern and western feminists.

Although the articles reveal the experiences of different countries, important common traces can be noticed, as the exposure of women's difficult situation in both communist and post-communist periods. The descriptions of women's situation during communism remove any doubt about the effects of the communist equalitarian rhetoric on women's lives. It shows that not only communism did not improve women's lives, but it even worsens them. Women's interests were subordinated to both economic and demographic needs, considered a 'political' priority.

A significant problem identified by most authors was the conflict between public and private, lived in the region along the same lines of the dichotomy state/family. As regards reproductive rights and social services, topics which are usually covered by the literature on women in communism and postcommunism (and which are tackled by other works reviewed here), one can realize that when abortion was available, it was the main form of contraception, and when child-care services were provided, it was because women were forced to work, regardless of their preference. Therefore, the so-called 'emancipation' of women during communism, was associated by women themselves with the double and even triple burden day, having to work as men did, and besides, having the major responsibility for child-care, consumer goods supply, and housekeeping (Funk & Mueller eds. 1993, p. 310). This can offer an explanation to the lack of interest for

participation in public life and politics at the beginning of the transition period.

What is so well pointed out in the contribution on Czech and Slovak Republics is valid also for the other countries in the region: 'on a socio-political level, the private sphere provided asylum from the many senseless aspects of the totalitarian system. In its extreme forms, the psychological attitude was that our children have meaning for us even if nothing else here does' (Funk & Mueller eds. 1993, p. 91). On the same line, regarding Poland, it is mentioned that women considered children and not their careers as the most important goal in life (Funk & Mueller eds. 1993, p. 254).

At the time this volume was published, perhaps it had also value of historical documentation for the scholars interested in women's political participation, but unfamiliar with women's experience's under communism. Such experiences, which have also led women in the region to understand equality and women's rights differently, for instance, to 'define liberation as the right not to work' (Funk & Mueller eds. 1993, p. 274), determined Eastern feminists to define different priorities. They were contrary to those in the West, as for example the right to stay at home and take care of children.

Despite the divergence between Eastern and Western feminists, emerged as a result of different women's life experiences in the two regions, Funk & Mueller's volume is a proof of possible successful cooperation. Being a collaborative work, there are, however, a few shortcomings which are commonly found in works of this kind: the chapters are uneven in both content and language quality. Another weakness is the unbalanced coverage of the countries (eight chapters are dedicated to the women in the former German Democratic Republic, while only two chapters deal with the women in Russia). Moreover, some perhaps more sensitive topics are discussed by taking into consideration only a few countries (lesbians), while other subjects are common to all chapters (reproductive rights). However, the volume represents a pathfinder and an important contribution to the literature on gender politics in postcommunism.

In addition, Barbara Einhorn's article *Gender Issues in Transition: The East Central European Experience* (1994) analyzes the relevance of gender issues for the transition from state socialism to democracy in the East and Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union. It examines the marginalized situation of gender issues during the state socialism and the implications of their lack of attention in the early 90s, at the beginnings of the transition period. The article is constructed around five main topics, each one discussed in a specific part. In the first one, women's disappearance from the political stage at the first democratic elections after 1989 is being questioned. It also questions whether it was such a dramatic change as would appear at first sight, considering that in practice the impressive levels of women in the state socialist period parliaments 'often meant tokenism of the worst kind' (Einhorn 1994, p. 122). The second part prospects the possible impact of the transition on women's employment in the medium and long term, given that in short term it caused a high level of female unemployment. The third part looks at the ideology and the family: from women designated as workers and mothers in the state socialist rhetoric, to women as only mothers, in a return to earlier patriarchal models.

In trying to answer the question 'where are all the women?' the author affirms that many women see the opportunity to escape of the double burden of mothers and full-time workers which they had under state socialism as a relief, preferring to dedicate to family and children. The author also explains the relationship between the public and the private sphere during state socialism (essentially different form that in Western Europe) and family's fundamental role. Family during that period is described as 'source of dignity and creativity in a society characterized by alienated labour processes. There was a tendency to idealize it. (...) The family was also regarded as fostering solidarity in an atomized society. It united the "we" of non-existent or embryo civil society against "them" in state power' (Einhorn 1994, p. 127). A similar interpretation for this issue is given in Funk and Mueller's coedited work, previously examined. In the conclusive paragraph of this part of the article, the author

affirms that in such new scenario, with women choosing the role of mothers, they are in danger of losing citizenship rights in the public sphere³. She exemplifies this point with the case of reproductive rights, restricted by several democratic parliaments (Einhorn 1994, p. 129-130).

Other important issues approached are issues the woman, the family and the nation, enumerating women's reproductive 'duties' in several Central and Eastern European countries before 1989 and considering the way in which women's reproductive roles have still being hitched to nationalism in the early 1990s. This certainly affected women's right to self-determination. Also an important aspect to be highlighted is the discussion around 'the ultimate expression' (Einhorn 1994, p. 131) of women's subjugation to extreme nationalist objectives. This is particularly relevant for instance in the case of systematic rape of Bosnian women during the war in the ex-Yugoslavia. Finally, the East-West feminist communication difficulties are correctly noticed,⁴ by exemplifying with the case of East and West Germany.

Although well structured and providing significant data regarding gender issues in transition, a small negligence can be noticed reading the article. Reproductive rights, together with social welfare and economic rights are enumerated among women's losses in the beginning of the transition period. The author does not mention which countries precisely takes into consideration when she refers to reproductive rights, but it cannot be said the same about all former state socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. For instance, in Romanian women's case, reproductive rights were the first rights to be claimed and obtained after the breakdown of the old regime. We shall move now to the second theme of the reviewed literature.

³ On the same line, in the Introduction, referring to the return to earlier patriarchal models of the family, the author remarks that: 'whilst current discourse attaches positive values to women's return to primary responsibility for the private sphere, it is likely in the medium term that this will result in a loss for women of citizenship rights in the public sphere' (Einhorn B 1994, p. 121).

⁴ See also Funk N & Mueller B (eds.) 1993.

The impact of democratization on gender relations

This theme is prevalent in Waylen's *Women and democratization: Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics* (1994), yet being touched upon on all other works assessed. Georgina Waylen creates a gendered analysis of democratization. She considers, on one side, broadly comparative and theoretically informed work as the best approach for the study of democratization, rather than abstracting separate cases. On the other side, she stipulates that any analysis of democratization which fails to incorporate a gendered perspective, will be flawed. Therefore, 'the study of comparative politics can only be improved by creating a framework for analyzing the interplay between gender relations and democratization' (Waylen 1994, p. 327).

The article is composed by six sections: an introductory part; a part that investigates the orthodox literature on democratization, which makes very little mention of women and the author tries to find out why this omission occurs; two parts regarding Latin America, one on transition politics and another on gender relations in competitive party politics; a part examining transition politics in Central and Eastern Europe, and finally, the conclusive part.

One of the main premises of this article is that popular movements play an important role in the transition to democracy. As women often participate on the basis of the politicization of their roles, a gendered analysis of these movements is therefore considered essential. From the attempt to develop a framework for analyzing the role played by women in the process of transition and the impact of democratization on gender relations, four key questions come out. The first one is set around women's choice to organize themselves, in different contexts such as Latin America and Eastern Europe. The second question examines the nature of these movements. The third question analyzes the external context, considering the interaction between women's political activities and the process of transition. The fourth question is focused on the outcomes of the transition and it asks about the impact of democratization on gender relations.

It is rightly claimed that such approach can be used to explain the different processes and outcomes of transition in Latin America and Eastern Europe. In other words, such questions can explain the important role played by the women's movements in the former and the minimal role in the latter. Moreover, the author considers that this work does two things: contributes to the knowledge about the role of women in an important political process, and helps to "gender" the study of political science. Waylen's impeccably written and very well structured article is a noteworthy contribution for the broader literature on women's political participation in democratization, and particularly for the role of women in transitions.

On the same vein, the volume *Women in the Politics of Postcommunist Eastern Europe. Revised and Expanded Edition* edited by Marilyn Rueschemeyer (1998) is centered on the Eastern and Central European women's trajectory on the political stage, during the various phases of 'transition from communism to a market economy and a multiparty political system (Rueschemeyer 1998, p. 3). The analysis includes fifteen case studies (Russia, Poland, Western Germany, Eastern Germany, Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Romania, Former Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania). In addition to the first edition (1994) three new authors extend this version with chapters on Russia, Serbia, and Croatia.

The purpose of the book is to understand political institutions' relations with the developments brought by transition and women's situation in the new social and political orders. It is mentioned that the situation of women during Communism in Eastern Europe varied significantly across the region and within each country (Rueschemeyer, ed. 1998, p. 4). Thus, the transition could not be seen as a single process with few variations, as the editor considers that women were differently influenced, both directly and indirectly, by the ways communism ended, and the transition took place. 'All societies in Eastern Europe strive for economic development, but whether abortion or the role of the church or of ethnicity is of major

concern varies from country to country' (Rueschemeyer, ed. 1998, p. 7).

It looks common to all countries described that new political and economic conditions emerged in the early transition years did not bring about an improvement for women's lives. Moreover, women together with the lowest socioeconomic strata were among the most affected by the transition. The social and economic support they had before disappeared or was threatened in the shift from communist regime towards democracy. During the communist period, state provided for free services as health, education and child care, even if they varied in quality. In the early 1990s, states were too poor to sustain the previous services, women represented the largest percentage of the unemployed, they had more difficulties to find jobs once they have lost them, and in politics they were dramatically underrepresented. Besides, the few women parliamentarians were hesitant in representing women.

Together with the editor, it is safe to affirm that one can only hope that the economic and political choices still to be made, and that new market economy would improve the life of the people at least in the long run. Thus being aware also that the economic and social policies of such period would have profound effects on women's lives in the future decades.

The anthology edited by Rueschemeyer represented an innovative achievement at the time the first edition was published, providing a unique collection of information about the political status and the economic conditions of women in individual postcommunist societies. Although it was not structured on purpose as a comparative approach, it offers a comparative perspective: on the one side, through the differences which can be noticed among the countries examined within the single chapters, while on the other, by reading the anthology as a whole from a comparative point of view. A possible shortcoming could be that some of the authors discuss extensively issues regarding women in the labor market, providing and analyzing data about employment, which are not of less

importance regarding women and transition, but which could easily distract the reader from the main theme of the book, which is women's political participation (Miethe, 2000).

Another important work highlighting the impact of democratization on gender relations is *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism* (2000a), coedited by Susan Gal and Gail Kligman. The volume is a compilation of fourteen essays and it represents a large multidisciplinary research on gender in postsocialist transformations, conducted with scholars from Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe, the United States and New Zealand. This project contains methodologically different studies and involved the contribution of political scientists, sociologists, economists, cultural historians, psychologists, and legal theorists.

The issues under examination are drawn from Poland, Romania, Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia and the Czech and Slovak Republics. The aspect added to the topic of the impact of democratization, which is in fact common to all cases assessed, is related to the perception of women as a political category, under various aspects of private, social and public life. The focus is on: the politics of reproduction, gender relations in everyday life, and most importantly for our present paper, the struggle for representation in political action. This final aspect contains very concrete assessments of: Polish gender relations in the 1990s, the discourses regarding parental leave in Hungary, women in nongovernmental organizations in Romania, Bulgarian women's discourses, Belgrade SOS Hotline for violence victims and Serbian media representations of genders in times of war and crisis.

In regard to certain gender aspects, like employment differentiation, the authors across the volume talk about continuities with the past.⁵ Concerning the political arena, instead, it is the easiest to remark the discontinuity, political power being reshaped. In such

⁵ Hence, the extended discussion regarding the rejection of the concept of *transition* because of its teleological connotations, in Gal S and Kligman G 2000b .

transformations, women's presence in political top positions, as parliaments for instance, fell dramatically. In the early 1990s first elections they almost disappeared from the decision making positions. Despite women's absence in politics, the examples from Poland and Romania point out a continuation of an active public life, through their activity in nongovernmental organizations. Nevertheless, this form of common action is described also as problematic, because of the reemergence of presocialist traditions, allocating to women a solely domestic role.

The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay (2000b) continues and extends Gal and Kligman's introduction to the volume they have coedited, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism* (Gal & Kligman, 2000a). They consider this second book 'a companion volume to the original collaborative work' (Gal & Kligman 2000b, p. 7). If the former is a compilation of empirical case studies, the latter is a much needed theoretical analysis, providing a framework for both volumes. It does, however, stand on its own as a conceptual and historical approach of the postcommunist transformations from a gender perspective.

The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay, by Gal and Kligman (2000b) provides a critical analysis of the role of gender in reshaping politics, economy and social relations, and also a critical examination of states and markets' influence on gender relations during the transformations brought by the collapse of communism. The essay is developed departing from two questions considered as crucial: 'How are gender relations and ideas about gender shaping political and economic change in the region? And what forms of gender inequality are emerging as a result?' (Gal & Kligman 2000b, p. 3). Throughout the essay the authors make for the most part references to Poland, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech and Slovak Republics and East Germany, considered to have much in common, beyond their geographical contiguities. They also refer to western states, making a comparison of East Central European gender relations with those of

western welfare states, and also with the pre-socialist past, attaining both cross-regional and historical comparisons.

The important topics assessed in this work and relevant for our study include a detailed gendered description of the socialist states' official discourses and quotidian life practices, in order to set a background for the study of the post socialist period. The focus is on gender as an analytic category, and the teleological assumptions involved by the term transition are rejected.⁶ Throughout the book, the term used to refer to the process of changes which have occurred after socialism will be *transformation*, which rejects teleology and recognizes continuities with the past, in contrast to transition.

Other topics of note include: an assessment of how discourses about reproduction constitute the relationship between states and their subjects; investigations on how gender relations and ideas about gender difference constrain the economic restructuring of the region, in the framework of an extended analysis of the changing public/private distinction over time. Also, examinations of how the policy formulation and the economic process are affected by gender are crucial to a better understanding of the role of women in democratization, as well as an assessment of the role of civil society, nongovernmental organizations, emphasizing their capacity to set the public discourse into women's favour and influence legislation.

Across the volume, authors give a particular attention to the historical and cultural dimensions of gender and to how practices and policies were shaped by gender, from a comparative perspective between East and West. Gail and Kligman succeed to create a gendered conceptual framework for the interpretation and understanding of the social and political transformations after socialism, and they illustrate how variables such as 'feminine', 'masculine', 'private' and 'public' are dependent of the historical and political contexts. Therefore, demonstrating that gender has a

⁶ An entire discussion about the disadvantages of using the term transition is developed in Gal, S and Kligman, G 2000b, pp. 10-12.

constitutive role in the political and economic changes, it results that a gendered perspective is necessary in order to understand the postsocialist transformations.

Both volumes, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism* and *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay* can therefore be considered classic works for the studies of gender and political transformations, and also important contributions to the broader literature on postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe.

Women's representation in political action

Another important aspect of the question of the women's participation in processes of democratization, common to most of the works reviewed, is related to the assessment of the impact of political change brought by women's political action. This topic is, however, central to Valerie Sperling's (1998) essay, 'Gender politics and the state during Russia's transition period', The period taken into discussion begins in the late 1980s and continues until the days when the essay has been written. In order to enable her to analyze some of the reasons for a social movement's success or failure, the author uses a multi-dimensional concept, *the political opportunity structure*.⁷

Sperling rightly identifies four areas of change in the political opportunity structure for women's movement during the transition period in Russia. First, it begins by analyzing the decreasing repression and the increasing openness of the institutionalized political system directly related to the emerging women's movement. The study notes the changes in women's political representation, and the appearance of allies in position of power, followed by a description of the restrictive role of sex-based discrimination in women's movement's lobbying achievement. Moreover, the essay explores the role women had in the changes in the elite configuration that supported the Soviet and Russian political systems. Special emphasis was placed on how the eradication of the Communist Party's power monopoly destabilized the polity, affecting the

⁷ McAdam, D 1996, p. 27, cited by V Sperling in V Randall & G Waylen (eds). 1998, p. 143.

openness and the implementation capacity of new political institutions, which, in turn, affected the political opportunity structure for the women's movement. The study shows quite clearly how the 'political opportunity structure' for Russia's women's movement has been completely transformed from the one in the pre-Gorbachev era. The most important change seems to be the legalization of NGOs, useful in building a civil society, albeit, with quite a limited power.

Valerie Sperlings' contribution represents an original approach, showing the importance of using the multi-dimensional concept of political opportunity structure for the analysis of social movements. At the same time, it offers a detailed description about the effects of the political transformations in Russia on women's political participation, synthesizing essential evidence for broader further examinations of the topic.

Another important collection of essays examining women's roles in the political transitions is the volume *Women and Democracy: Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe* (1998), edited by Jane S. Jaquette and Sharon L. Wolchik. Some chapters deal with postauthoritarian countries from Latin America (Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Peru) and others deal with postcommunist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria). The case studies are not explicitly comparative, and this task is undertaken by the introductory chapter. The editors recognize significant similarities and differences between the two regions, and inside the same region, from one country to another. Among the most remarkable contrasts between the two regions is that the Central and Eastern Europe countries came out from Soviet control, while Latin America regained popular sovereignty from their military authoritarian rulers (Jaquette & Wolchik 1998, p. 3).

However, another difference considered by editors as being perhaps the most important, since most analysts recognize it, is that 'the Latin American governments are undergoing political transitions but the Central and Eastern European societies are experiencing

simultaneous economic, social and political transformation' (Jaquette & Wolchik 1998, p. 4).

Regarding women's political experiences, the book comes to the conclusion that women had rather different trajectories in the two regions. In Latin America women were better organized and more interested in obtaining their rights, whereas women in the postcommunist societies, after living for decades under an equalitarian ideology that pretended to cancel the difference between genders, preferred to return to their traditional role and their presence on the political stage decreased considerably comparing with the communist period⁸. However, despite the quotas and the higher mobilization in Latin America, women fared better during the transition and consolidation period in most Central and Eastern European countries. For example, in 1995, women represented 10 percent of the parliamentarians in the Czech Republic, 18 percent in Slovakia, 11 percent in Hungary and 13 percent in Poland and Bulgaria, even without quotas, while they accounted for 5 percent in Brazil, 9 percent in Peru and 14 percent in Argentina - in this case due to the quota law (Jaquette & Wolchik 1998, p. 11).

The interregional comparison developed in this volume is both innovative and daring, extending at the same time the field of women's political participation and the broader comparative literature on democratization from a gendered perspective. A possible shortcoming of this otherwise very well written and structured work could be that across the volume the contributors do not focus on the same variables in all chapters. Chapters on Latin America deal mostly with the history of women's groups, while those analyzing Central and Eastern European cases use in their contributions data on employment, education and voting behaviour.

Women's role in democratization

⁸ Despite the larger number of women in politics during communism, it is well known that it was a merely role playing participation and women were actually excluded from the real decision making centers.

Besides the first three major themes emerged from our literature review, one last aspect we intend to assess is the role of women in processes of democratization. One of the main works focused specifically on this topic is the volume edited by Matland and Montgomery (2003) - *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe*. The work sets out to analyze the trends in women's political participation in the last decade of the twentieth century, period that the authors call as 'democratic consolidation' (Matland & Montgomery, eds. 2003, p. 2). Kathleen Montgomery specifies in the Introduction that with this term they intend to set their work apart from earlier studies that have focused on the period that includes the breakdown of the old order and the coming on of multi-party elections, e.g. Einhorn 1993; Funk and Mueller 1993; Waylen 1994; Jaquette and Wolchick 1998 (Matland & Montgomery, eds. 2003, p. 2).

One of the main objectives of this book is to extend the understanding about the factors that help and hinder women's representation during periods of political, social and economic transformation. This purpose is achieved through an original approach of an intra-region comparison. The volume includes the contribution of scholars from Eastern and Western Europe and North America and is structured in sixteen chapters dedicated to twelve case studies of eleven states from the post-communist region (Germany, Lithuania, Hungary, Ukraine, Russia, Macedonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Croatia and Bulgaria). Each of the individual chapters pursues the theoretical framework developed by the editors and each one of the case studies tackle the same dependent variable: the proportion of women in the lower or only chamber of the national legislature (with the exception of a chapter on Russian regional legislatures). This approach brings unity to the volume, and makes it different from previous edited books on women's participation in post-communist politics, in which each individual chapter has its own direction of research. However,

despite its coherent structure, the different quality of the chapters⁹ can be easily noticed. Some chapters are more analytical, while others are more descriptive.

The data provided by the individual chapters show that there are some variations across the analyzed countries regarding women's political participation, yet in all discussed cases, women are still considerably underrepresented. The editors identify in the selected countries common factors that influence the number of women in parliament, as: type of electoral systems - it is proved that women fare better in countries with proportional representation with large magnitude multi-member constituencies; a high electoral threshold and affirmative action, as quotas (Matland & Montgomery 2003, pp. 9-10); party characteristics (programmatic parties better than clientelistic parties); ideology; quality of women's organization and degree of mobilization.

A topic that could have been discussed more extensively by both editors and contributors is the importance of the incumbency as a determinant factor for the elections results¹⁰. On the one side, incumbents represent usually the largest number of winning candidates and traditionally they are men. On the other side, women did not fight against incumbents in the 1990s elections and nonetheless, they had the worst results.

The study represents an undeniable well-built groundwork, which contributed to the extension of literature on women's representation, and also to the study of legislatures, recruitment, and to the broader literature of the empirical political science. Moreover, it increases the knowledge on gender politics in societies that are deeply transforming, socially, politically and economically, and represents a significant basis for departure to further studies in this field.

⁹ This remark was also made by Ishiyama J in: 'Book Review: Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe', *Party Politics*, January 2006, vol. 12 no. 1, p. 156. Viewed: 20 March 2014, <http://ppq.sagepub.com/content/12/1/155>.

¹⁰ This lack of emphasis is also mentioned by Phyllis Hutton Raabe in 'Book reviews', *Feminist Economics*, January 2008, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 149, Viewed: 26 March 2014, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

Another important contribution to the topic of women's participation in consolidating democracy is Georgina Waylen's (2007) book *Engendering Transitions: Women's Mobilization, Institutions, and Gender Outcomes*. Its aim is to engender the study of democratization¹¹, considered by the author as 'one of the most important political phenomena of the twentieth century' (Waylen 2007, p. v). Therefore, she tries to understand under what circumstances democratization can produce positive gender outcomes. In doing so, she uses eight countries as case studies, all of them part of the so called 'third-wave' of democratization. The case studies of transitions from authoritarianism are from Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and El Salvador), with the exception of South Africa, and the case studies of transitions from state socialism are from Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland). Peru and Russia are used as comparator cases and their transitions are considered 'in the "grey zone" of those hybrid regimes that are neither fully authoritarian nor fully democratic polities' (Waylen 2007, p. vi). The book is structured in four parts. The first part sets the framework in which to examine the various outcomes of different gendered transition paths. The outcomes are expressed in terms of descriptive and substantive representation and certain key gender policies. The other three parts are analyzing women's mobilization, electoral arena and policy outcomes.

Author's purpose is to go beyond existing literature on gender and transitions, which she categorizes as 'theoretically driven single country case studies and thematic edited collections that examines case studies from one or two regions' (Waylen 2007, p. vii), considered to be falling within two of the four streams of the comparative politics cycle (Mazur 2006, p. 16, cited in Waylen 2007, p. vii). Waylen's aspiration is to contribute to a third stream, of hypothesis testing using two or more cases and comparative method, and to help to the understanding of patterns that could contribute to a fourth stream, that leads to theory building. Her book brings an

¹¹ This volume can be seen as an extension of Waylen's article (1994) discussed above.

essential contribution for the literature of democratization from a gendered perspective, tackling the relationship between gender and transition from a comparative perspective, at local and international level, both inter and intra-regions, and both in transitions from authoritarianism and from state socialism.

Moreover, the findings outlined in this book can suggest on which topics the future research in this field should focus more. The author highlights in the conclusive chapter of the book three main directions of development in this sense: first, regarding the implications of the gender and transitions literature for the democratization literature, second, a more comprehensive integration of socio-economic constraints into gendered analyses of transitions, and finally, the importance of the external factors, as the international context proved to have a direct impact on the institutional arena. 'For example, the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* has been one of the most significant constitutional/legal changes to occur in East Central Europe with big implications for gender rights. But external factors are not constant and the international climate changed during the period of the "third wave" and after' (Waylen 2007, pp. 205-206).

The last work that adds to the main theme of this article is Marilyn Rueschemeyer's chapter 'Women's Participation in Postcommunist Politics', comprised in Sharon Wolchik's and Jane Curry's coedited volume *Central and East European Politics: From Communism to Democracy* (2011). The volume itself does not focus on women particularly, Marilyn Rueschemeyer's chapter being the single contribution on this topic.

The selected chapter examines women's interests in politics, women's descriptive and substantive representation as elected political leaders and their relation to a variety of constituencies, mainly women's organizations, in the new conditions for political participation emerged after the fall of communism.

The study begins with a brief overview on the communist period and its legacies for women's political participation and it continues with

transition's effects on women's participation, the consequences that political system's structural conditions - as various electoral arrangements and political parties' positions - had on women's representation among elected representatives, and other factors that advance women in politics.

The author affirms that decreased women's political participation in early transition years is in a large part caused by the new problems they faced (known already from the findings of other studies revised above), such as discontinuation of social supports and rising unemployment among women. 'People who lose economically and socially also lose political voice' (Rueschemeyer in Wolchik & Curry eds. 2011, p. 113). The reduction of social services, such as child care, allows less time for work and even less for politics. Thus, unemployment worsens other problems and hinders social and political participation (Rueschemeyer in Wolchik & Curry eds. 2011, p. 113). The developments in the arena of organized politics, the reemergence of nationalism and the politicization of ethnic identification (these last two associated with more traditional conceptions of gender relations) are also considered to be determinant for women's low political participation.

A common feature, identified for women in politics in the region, especially in the early transition years, is that women in decision making positions did not represent and promote women's interests. The explanation that the author suggests for this situation is that "women have not been very successful in rising to positions of leadership when they have pushed for clearly female causes".¹²

The author points out that women's interests in various groups and in parliament too, are not unitary. There are important differentiations between those who have the experience of the international feminist environment, focused on women's role in the

¹² Birch, S, 'Women and Political Representation in Contemporary Ukraine' (paper presented at Conference on Women's Political Representation in Eastern Europe, Bergen, Norway, 1999), cited in M Rueschemeyer 'Women's Participation in Postcommunist Politics' in S Wolchik and J Curry, 2011, p. 115.

economy and their liberation from domestic tasks, and those who do not have that international experience, centered on their roles as mothers and keepers of the home and traditions.

Although providing a well-documented and updated overview on women's political participation in postcommunism, the study has two potential weaknesses. The first one, regards the study taken as a whole, being too much descriptive and too little analytical. The second one, regards the expression, which often is too general. Certain issues are discussed regarding a group of countries or an individual country in the region, while other issues are taken into consideration from other countries.¹³ Therefore, the expressions frequently used of 'Central and Eastern Europe' or 'Central and East European Countries' can be perceived as too general, and precludes the reader to identify precisely the countries. The more so as the author herself states that there are differences regarding women among the countries of the region.

Discussion and concluding remarks

In the light of the reviewed literature, it becomes imperative to highlight several important ideas on the four main topics distinguished in this work. From a general point of view, one can notice that there is no unified discourse on the topic of women's participation in democratization. Most authors recognize both similarities and differences in their findings. More explicitly for example, the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe represented certainly a fundamental change, entire societies, economies and political systems having been transformed. While several authors drew their attention to the rupture occurred, and stressed the discontinuities, others showed that certain continuities, as mentalities, traditions, employment segregation, subsisted (taking longer to be changed than, for example, legislation). That is the reason why, for instance, Gal and Kligman reject the term transition, broadly used in both mainstream and gender literature on

¹³ Regarding the percentage of female students in tertiary education (Table 5.1) are considered 15 countries, regarding the percentage of women in Parliaments (Table 5.2), 11 countries, and concerning unemployment situation (Table 5.3), 10 countries.

democratization, which has a teleological connotation, and use instead the term transformation, which recognizes continuities with the past.

A major common feature of the works reviewed above is the trial to understand why and how the transformations occurred after the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe affected women's lives. We tried to select works focused particularly on women's political participation (descriptive and substantive representation), but as this aspect cannot be examined apart, ignoring other facets of women's lives, most of these studies take into consideration also other topics, concerning public and even private life. They tackle economic factors of influence (as un/employment), social factors (women's organizations, women movements or the causes of their lack, analyzing them through comparisons with Latin America), and structural factors, as electoral systems, political parties' organization, legislation (reproductive rights), and welfare policies.

We shall now draw some concluding remarks on the four specific topics presented in this paper and on the basis of the works discussed. Regarding the first theme - private versus public and the reproduction rights - most authors have emphasized that women's private lives were in conflict with their public ones, both during communism and after its collapse. Women's participation in the process of democratization at the beginning of the transition period was hindered by their subjective interpretation of their identity and role in society. From their experience of public involvement, they understood that rights (i.e. reproduction rights) and social services (i.e. child-care) were provided to them not necessarily for their well-being, but rather for them to be of better use to the social system in which they functioned. Therefore, in order to solve this conflict, women drew meaning from their family roles, children becoming the most important goal in life (Funk & Mueller, 1993). However, the dichotomy private/public or family/state continues to be part of women's participation to the process of democratization.

On the second topic – the impact of democratization on gender relations – several presuppositions were highlighted with the purpose of creating a framework for understanding the interplay between gender and the post-socialist transformations. It was thus emphasized that the concept of gender has a historic and cultural dimension as gender has a constitutive role in the political and economic changes (Gail & Kligman,). From this perspective, the new economic and political changes in the early period of transition to democracy failed to bring better conditions for women. On the contrary, they were negatively affected, in many ways by unemployment and loss of free services provided by the state during communism such as child-care, health and education. Moreover, regarding political life, women were considerably underrepresented.

On the third topic - women's representation in political action – departing from Sperling's description of Russian women's case and from Jaquette and Wolchik's comparative perspective on Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe, it can be synthesized that women's experiences and lives during previous regimes determined different attitudes regarding their interest in political participation and their involvement in organized actions and movements. More explicitly, in Latin American postauthoritarian democratizations, after living in regimes which consecrated women mostly to the traditional roles of mothers and wives, women were better organized and more interested in obtaining their rights, being involved in active women's movements. On the contrary, in the postcommunist Central and Eastern European societies, after living for decades under an equalitarian ideology that pretended to cancel out the difference between genders and coerced women into political activity, women preferred to return to their traditional role. Hence, their presence on the political stage decreased considerably comparing with the communist period. Where women's organizations and movements were present, they proved to be essential in shaping a new civil society and promoting women's interests.

Lastly, on the final topic we identified as important in dealing with the participation of women in processes of democratization, a wide range of factors, both at internal and external level, were largely acknowledged as determinant for women's ascent in top decision making positions, such as members of parliaments or members of the various executive bodies. On the one side, at internal level, the mentalities inherited from the period of the former political regime, women's mobilization, the electoral system, political parties system, employment and social services condition were identified as crucial factors for women's ascent in top decision making positions. On the other side, regarding the external level and geopolitical and historical conjunctures' influence, the legislative changes achieved due to European Union's accession negotiations, and specifically to the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, have been some of the most significant changes to occur concerning gender rights in East and Central European countries.

Nevertheless, women's political participation results to be effective for women as a political category only if women leaders achieve a substantive representation, advancing women's interests.

In an obvious manner, besides the common legacies of the communist period, the works discussed in this article show remarkable differences in women's situation from one country to another. Such differences seem to be present mostly because of the way each country underwent the democratization process, in terms of decision taken, legislation changes and reforms adopted. Hence, they should constitute an argument for the importance of further studies on democratization from a gendered perspective.

Given the limits of this article, we are precluded from examining other works of this field, and therefore our endeavour is by no means exhaustive. For this reason, we consider important to mention and recommend several other works representative for this field, such as: Regulska 1995; Matland 1998; Marchand & Runyan (eds.) 2000; Jaquette 2001; Jähnert & all (eds.) 2001; Moser 2001; Rueschemeyer & Wolchik (eds.) 2009.

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