

# OLD ENTITLEMENTS AND NEW DEPENDENCIES: FAMILY VERSUS STATE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

*Rebecca Nash, the Henley Centre, London*

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## Introduction

In 1995 the Czech government put in place a multi-tiered system of social “support” (*podpora*) and “care” (*péče*) for low-income families. These new terms denoted reform of “socialist paternalism” and previous redistributive family awards and benefits for all families. Social policy makers introduced these terms and simultaneously placed greater emphasis in policy documents on individual responsibility. Yet while new policy language suggests a radical change in relations between the state and families, for many Czechs, family life during the socialist era was not characterized by wholesale reliance on the state but by what I call a productive dependence.

In this paper I argue that ethnographic studies of welfare reform in East Central Europe must take into account how socialist-era ideologies of family life inform people’s experiences with new family policies. I draw on ethnographic work in family offices and the collection of family histories to demonstrate that post-1989 expectations of families to tend to themselves did not represent a break from the socialist era. Well-established ‘go-it-alone’ values had the effect of complementing and reinforcing new state ethics of self-care. Autonomy had already been established through notions of work for the family set in opposition to the state. Inversely, more recent engagements with means- and income-tested policies often elicited strong criticisms of what was cast as utter, and unfamiliar, dependencies. On the one hand autonomy and individual

responsibility framed stories of socialist-era family activities. Yet on the other, dependence on society and the state, and perceived unwillingness to provide for one’s own, emerged during my fieldwork discussions as contemporary trends and, paradoxically, as the product of “post-paternalistic” family policy.

## I Took Care of Myself, No One Helped Me

Czechs do not remember life during the socialist era as a time of taking indiscriminately and freely from the state, and they recognized social distinctions between claims categories. Receipt of certain services was connected to familial roles and relations. Although family benefits were “universal/ across-the-board” (*plošné*), children were the primary beneficiaries. As one family policymaker explained, “it didn’t matter if the family was wealthy or poor, each child had a *nárok* to the benefit—they were only differentiated according to age. If the child was young he received more, if he was older he received less.” In some cases, such as the child benefits, a *nárok* was interpreted as a natural “right” (*právo*). Klára Pittnerová, a resident in a Home for Mothers where I did fieldwork, defined a *nárok* as “something (*něco*) that belongs to you.” During the socialist era, across-the-board family policy did the claiming for Czech households. Today, clients in the local support and care offices must do their own claiming by filing a request (*žádost*; to claim: *požadovat*). Today, a *nárok* is the state’s verification that a client’s claim is

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justified. The *nárok* is no longer promised to all, it is no longer an inherent right; although, those who “take” benefits, such as Klára, believed that postsocialist benefits were “theirs.”

As automatic as socialist-era *nároks* might first appear, they were in practice contingent on family circumstances and, in the views of some, left up to arbitrary bureaucratic decisions.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Heroldová was married but childless when she applied for an apartment, so she did not have a *nárok* to move from her one-room basement apartment to the three-plus-one apartment where she and her family still lived in 2000. She and her husband waited for two and a half years, from 1975 to 1978, for their apartment, and by that time they had one young son and were expecting a second baby. Awards from the state were not guaranteed. When a claimant qualified for benefits on paper and in propaganda, they were more successful at having their requests filled when they had personal connections and contacts in their respective national committees. And even within the seemingly wide parameters of an across-the-board family policy, distinctions developed between recipient categories.

When I began my fieldwork, I presumed that across-the-board family awards and distrust of the state had led Czechs not to differentiate between those receiving state funds. I carelessly asked family members what kinds of “support” (*podpora*) they previously received and was surprised to hear them insist, “nothing,” absolutely nothing—they never received *support*. On the one hand, this denial of having ever been “supported” by the socialist state may be due in part to the recoding of past experiences in light of newer ideologies of individual responsibility. Today the most basic tier of income-based funding for families is called “support,” and although the majority of households were eligible for it in 2000, it required the filing of complex

paperwork and verification of deservingness. Some of those eligible did not bother. This suggests that stories of the socialist era were being mediated by growing contact with and awareness of dependent persons in the present. On the other hand, however, distrust and anger toward the previous regime were remembered well. That state had mythologized its generosity while keeping Czechs and Slovaks at low standards of living. Czechs did not feel that they had been especially helped by the state; rather, they had had to help themselves. My questions about socialist-era state “support” evoked memories and stories of not having been supported.

Grandmother Vodrážková (Kateřina) responded to my questions sharply, “I didn’t get any support from the state; I had to work for myself.” She had a hard life and identified neither the socialist nor the postsocialist eras as easier to live through. Yet in her recollections of state provisions for families, she saw herself as less dependent than some and as self-sufficient. She explained that “support” was not for “normal” Czech families, but for those she called “the unpowerful.” Given the distrust of “the powerful” (politicians, bureaucrats) during the socialist era, the unpowerful should not be interpreted here as undeserving or immoral. Most Czechs would probably agree that Grandmother Vodrážková herself was unpowerful. She moved to Prague from Moravia in the early-to-mid 1950s, escaping what other family members implied was an abusive marriage and raising a child on her own by taking a series of labor-intensive jobs. Her acquisition of an apartment was thanks to a family member (Uncle Pavel) tied in to influential administrators at her national committee office. She did not think of the apartment and subsequent child benefits for her son Ondřej as “support,” but as earned through hard work—and deserved because she had looked out for herself and done what needed to be done to get by.

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<sup>1</sup> And, as Milada Bartošová’s (1978) history of social policy makes clear, socialist family policy had income-based criteria in place until 1968.

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Although Mrs. Boudová and her husband obtained a large sum of money from the state in 1970 to build their family home, she also emphasized how hard she worked. “I seldom got anything for free,” she recalled bitterly;

[that loan] was all the state did for us, and building that house was absolute madness because there was nothing....When we collected material it was unbelievable, because beforehand I had to call around Prague for building material and when I learned that someone had what we needed I got into the car and went there with money or some documents [showing what the materials were for]. My husband went to the site where we were building, where the truck we had was parked; he started it and drove to where I was waiting. He got there about an hour after me. During that time, I had tried to hold on to the cement or whatever (laugh)...and before he arrived he would get stopped [by authorities] and questioned as to what he was doing. Transportation could not be counted on—that is why we bought a truck. We were glad that we had our own things (*že jsme zvládli své vlastní věci*). So that’s how we collected our materials....It was quite a sight....

Mrs. Boudová described the building of her home in Prague much in the way that cottage owners depicted gathering and accumulating materials for weekend building and chores in the country. Her case demonstrates, moreover, that despite qualifying for a sizeable loan and (unlike many) accumulating enough resources to build a freestanding, “family house” (*rodinný domek*) in Prague, she felt that she had not been supported by the state. Mrs. Boudová was resentful because of how much energy she and her husband put into the project. In fact, as the example of the transport of building materials reveals, Mrs. Boudová and her husband’s interactions

with state authorities as regards the construction of their home were more of an obstacle than a support.

It is important to note that “support” as a benefits category existed only minimally during the socialist era, and formal legislation for state social support was not passed until 1995. Rather, the socialist state denied that material differences between households were a social problem to be addressed. “Classic social work” with, or “care” (*péče*) for, at-risk children and a negligible amount of institutional aid for single mothers made official networks for the disadvantaged nearly invisible and structurally insignificant. The director of the Prague Home for Mothers, Jitka Králová, explained to me her own frustration with the system of social support during the early 1970s, when she went through a painful divorce. “I work in this field because I personally and privately experience-ed what it is like to have a divorce and be isolated with a child. It was such a negative experience, so I said, I will study social work. I don’t want anyone to go through what I went through,” she told me. Indeed, support for the “unpowerful” was almost non-existent, and a set of class distinctions based on familial resources operated during the socialist era. The few homes for mothers with children (and without families on which to lean) established during that period were the result of careful maneuvering on the part of few individuals, like Jitka, who were outraged by the absence of care for struggling parents and families. The mothers in the homes fell into the “unpowerful” category to which Grandmother Vodrážková referred. Because she had an apartment and a somewhat influential family member, however, Grandmother Vodrážková as a single mother did not categorize herself as unpowerful and state supported. Although all families with children qualified for universal benefits and various other state distributions, one supported oneself rather than relying on the state. Parents with children were simultaneously entitled and left to their own devices.

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We can see that universal “family benefits” (*přídavky*) and “care” services (*péče*) operated according to a system of “relative merit” (Gal and Kligman 2000:77) during the socialist era in Czechoslovakia, much like the manifold range of unstigmatized and stigmatized public provisions in western states: “Universal cash transfers that make no distinctions within the relevant population of recipients have often been, in the history of Western welfare, less stigmatizing than aid for which recipients must reach some criterion of minimum income or ill health” (Gal and Kligman 2000:77). In their memories and reflections on the universalized system, Czechs categorize certain receiving persons as needier than others when they did not have personal resources (the “unpowerful”); while benefits designated for children and mothers—and housing allotments in Mrs. Boudová and Grandmother Vodrážková’s cases—were taken for granted and deserved when family members were thought to be looking out for themselves and turning to one another. Recalling their experiences building a home and raising children during the socialist era, these two and others like them remembered their efforts to make do. “No one helped me, I had to do it all myself,” they insisted.

### **Family versus State**

It is useful to study some of the Czech publications written from the early-to-mid 1990s about what women’s lives were like during the socialist era; these publications contribute to ideologies of the family. The value of family to Czech women often surfaced in response to the derogatory coverage of western feminism in larger cities like Prague and Brno and as an explanation by leading Czech gender studies scholars for why Czech women were different from “western” women and why it was inappropriate to apply feminist concepts (patriarchy, the subordination of women at home and work) to the Czech setting (see Nash 2002). This literature was one of the principle academic outlets evoking a family versus state opposition in the immediate

post-1989 period. This literature also unmasked the shortcomings of socialist-era gender ideologies.

Here I focus on the work of three scholars who, particularly in the early-to-mid 1990s, were called on most frequently in public settings (media, academia, international women’s conferences) to represent “Czech women.” These are sociologist Marie Čermáková, philosopher Hana Havelková, and former dissident and sociologist Jiřina Šiklová. Much like the family history interviews, their writing turns to past experiences when explaining social relations in the present. These publications join examples of “unsupportive” family care in making the point that a particular ethic of self-interest as regards family life, one which these authors claim is not familiar to western feminists, opposed the efforts of a homogenizing socialist state. In all of these cases, Czechs draw on the family as the site of individuality and self-realization.

Havelková interprets “patriarchy” as the control of women by men, and as a guiding concern of feminism in the United States and Western Europe. But she rejects “the separation of women’s problems from the problems of the citizen” (1993b:89) in the Czech case. Patriarchy, she explains, should not be understood as “paternalism.” While Havelková admits that paternalistic state supervision harmed Czechs throughout the previous era, in homes and households men and women lived as one. Thus challenging “patriarchal” control in the postsocialist era was uncalled for because men and women were accustomed to being equally subordinated by the communist party and the state. They had acted as partners to fight and resist this external influence, or “common enemy” (see Čermáková 1995:82). “It was the family, or rather the household, where many people put to use their inventive potential and their desire to do things their own way, without having to observe some official regulation” (Havelková 1993a:68). Havelková reminded her readers that the identification of women as separate or unlike men was more antagonistic and, she

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suggested, could cause more harm than good in the early stages of social transformation. For this reason, and also because of the range of formal benefits families were once automatically entitled to, Šiklová wrote that in the early 1990s “[m]arriage and family are still the most attractive option for women” (1993:73). Although the socialist state had denied the pursuit of individual interests, moral subjectivity and a sense of what was right and wrong developed among family and close friends (Havelková 1993a:68) and family was “the last bastion of personal freedom” (Havelková 1993b:92).

Havelková and Šiklová were reluctant to identify differences between men and women in the family, but they wrote often in the early 1990s about the gendered realities of Czech politics. Both agreed political activity was corrupt and that the communist party had been thought of as a male domain. Unlike “western feminists,” then, Czech women did not perceive of political engagement as a way to improve their lives but as something to be avoided (Šiklová 1993; Čermáková 1995:77). For example, Šiklová writes “Women in socialism never allowed themselves to be manipulated to the extent that men did, which I regard as fortunate. Women took refuge in their ‘double burden,’ in motherhood and in care for young children” (1993:79). Šiklová might seem to be contradicting Havelková’s insistence that, because they were united in a common dislike of the regime, Czechs did not recognize gendered oppositions between men and women. But both authors agree that family was a site of resistance. It was the “one free institution” (despite the state’s engagement in family policy) and these gender studies scholars turned to the socialist period to inform their readers that marriage, having children, and family activities were a source of identity building and not women’s “subordination”—what had also been a keyword in socialist propaganda. In the words of sociologists of the family Ivo Možný and Ladislav Rabušic, marriage during the socialist era, unlike

politics and the economy, was “perhaps the only free market even before the institution of a market economy” (1999:101).

Throughout their writing, Havelková, Šiklová, and Čermáková challenge what they understand to be a western feminist preoccupation with earning the “right” to work outside the home. These authors did not conceive of work as the realization of individuality, they said, because women had been forced to work by the socialist state. In her research throughout the 1990s, Čermáková paid close attention to women’s inequality, discrimination in the workplace, and inequity in women’s wages and access to education. Still, she reasons that these imbalances should be attributed to women’s preference for family over work and their willingness to sacrifice for the good of society (1995:76-77).

Since the Czech economic downturn in 1997 and rising unemployment in the late 1990s and 2000, the work of these gender studies scholars has grown more critical of women’s unequal position in public and private in the Czech Republic, what they consider to be offensive images of women in advertising, and the harmfulness of minimal political representation by women. Younger generations of gender studies students and writers, moreover, freely use words like “patriarchy,” even calling themselves “feminists” (*feministky*). In the early 1990s, however, Havelková, Šiklová and Čermáková drew on memories of the socialist era to counteract what they understood as the imperialistic framework and inappropriateness of western feminism. And within their writing, we can identify the narrative construction of family as a safe haven, “islands” as the head of a foster care NGO described them, and as a unique site of individuality during the socialist era.

There is much to be learned from discussions of family life during the socialist era—particularly these understandings of family as a source of women’s identity rather than the source of women’s oppression and subordination. The personal

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value of the family to many Czechs, and its necessity for material security, underscores similarities between socialist and capitalist family ideologies, particularly ideas about the stigma of dependence on public services. I now address the ways in which principles conceived of as “socialist” transformed into postsocialist categories of productive and unproductive dependency.

### **Family and 1989: Ending the Free Market, Beginning Socialism**

In the Prague “care” office where I conducted fieldwork, benefits accountants often explained to “claimants” (*žadatelky*) that there were limits on what the state would provide. For example, if a female client would not reveal the father of her child(ren) she was informed that a “fictive child support” of 1,000 crowns would be deducted from her living minimum benefits. If the client protested that the deduction would result in no living minimum funds, the benefits accountant responded, “that is your problem” (*to je váš problem*). A stress on “your” (*váš*) indicated that the client needed to look after herself and pursue the father’s financial contribution (rather than the state’s). Only after the father refused to pay or had been unsuccessfully sought after by the mother, court, and police would the state make up the difference in monthly income. To give another example, if a client forgot a document or necessary verification (of residence, pregnancy, other state benefits received) she heard, “that is your mistake” (*to je vaše chyba*) or, “it’s your issue to handle” (*to je vaše věc*). The state was no longer “ours” (*náš*) to plunder; family concerns were “yours” (*váš*).

This meaningful shift in focus from “our state” to “your family” suggests that postsocialist family ideologies have moved from an emphasis on communal to individual/family units. The state no longer declares itself supreme caretaker; rather, Czechs must look out for themselves and their families. As I have sought to demonstrate at greater length in my dissertation, however, this is something that

family members were doing throughout the socialist era. Be it in the form of weekend retreats, household construction, ingenious support networks, or defining one’s identity and self-worth through family relations, family members never presumed otherwise. For this reason, I argue, many narratives of self-sufficiency—such as the gender studies work outlined earlier—complemented the state’s withdrawal of public responsibility for family well-being after 1989. Prior official rhetorics of intimacy between the state and family, many argued, was never achieved or made significant as Czechs maneuvered their lives and worked to retain a distinction between their households, on one hand, and work and political influence on the other.

Czechs responded critically to capitalist family policies toward lower-class Czechs as if those policies were creating a socialist lower class. This was a socialism never realized during the socialist era because, in the post-1989 era, the state generously redistributed public resources and actually cared for (needier) families with children. State administrators and more materially secure family members interpreted those who were “taking” as over-supported by new provisions. If one were to presume that Czechs had faith in the prior redistributive ideology these criticisms might be surprising. Yet my informants, particularly older Czechs, were often quick to emphasize their sacrifice and self-care during the socialist era. New dependencies were perceived through denials that they were dependent in the past. Contemporary disparagement of those who “take” suggests rather that the socialist experience often led Czechs to believe that they could not count on the state as some do today. This perception of reliance on the state is, moreover, shaping the development of class distinctions which builds on the previous category of “unpowerful.” While all Czechs are “dependent” in some combined form (on the family, on the state, on both), productive dependents stigmatize those whom they

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perceive as unproductive for both drawing on the state and, seemingly, not working.

### **Why Work When You Can Live Off of Benefits?**

Most Czechs receive public funds from the state in some form. Given the legacy of the role of social policy in everyday life and an abiding social safety net, I believe it is more useful to interpret new Czech recipient categories in terms of a manifold range of relationships between individuals, households, and the state, rather than as a binary between the self-reliant and the disadvantaged. Nevertheless, an opposition is developing in the Czech Republic between those who are “self-sufficient” (*sám za sebe*) and those who are not (in Czech, *sociální slabší*, the socially weaker, or unpowerful as Grandmother Vodrážková put it).

Unless themselves recipients, many of the families in Prague with whom I worked were unfamiliar with elaborate benefits criteria. When I inquired about who Czechs felt the state should be aiding, most agreed, “the socially weakest need help from the state;” “the state should help poor mothers;” “I don’t know how [the weakest] manage, the state should help them.” But in their responses, my interviewees also established restrictions on how much the state could and should do for the growing numbers of poor. The conditions of public care for the poor were informed by understandings of whether or not those who “take” also work. If not, responses sounded a line familiar to American ears when Czechs argued, “it’s better to make people contribute to society, to work, than to pay them support,” or “the social network is too plentiful.”

Nowhere was the expectation that benefits recipients should work—and the moral evaluation of those who did not—more evident than among employees within the “social network” itself (the benefits accountants, family court judges, social workers in the Home for Mothers). These employees, almost all of whom were women, administered the new income- and

means-tested criteria and commented openly about their effects. In the case of the benefits office, clients’ employment status structured employees’ willingness or refusal to seek greater funding on their behalf. When clients lived under the living minimum and still worked, were on parental leave, or had no luck finding work through an “unemployment office” (*pracák*) they usually had a claim to financial aid, and the accountants processed the application and authorized the distribution of benefits. Accountants were often saddened when someone hovered just above the living minimum and remained ineligible. For example, when a seemingly deserving client left with no further benefits in hand, the accountants would explain delicately, “*Má smůlu*.” “She is down on her luck.” If a client was unemployed and had not registered at a *pracák* he or she was not eligible for further state benefits. The client might, however, be able to negotiate a “one-time-only” award (*jednorázovka*) or, alternately, an in-kind benefit.

If one’s fate was uncertain, benefits accountants might explain that “the commission” would have to rule on the case. In matter of fact, “the commission” consisted of the office’s three benefits accountants and their director flipping through files, drinking tea, and complaining about so-and-so’s last-minute application for benefits. “It’s always the same,” they told me. “Right before the school year begins, and just before Christmas, they come in and say, ‘We don’t have money for books and shoes, or we don’t have money for Christmas.’” Final decisions were thus attributed to this anonymous body, “the commission,” suggesting that the clients’ requests, rights, and needs had been taken into account and treated fairly and objectively. The system appeared structured and inflexible on paper, but like the earlier socialist era, post-1989 offices were maneuverable and subject to personal connections, inter-office cooperation and competition, and employees’ mood swings.

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When a client needed to stay at home to take care of children, she was often asked why she did not go to work and leave the child with a grandparent. Or, why not get the child's father, grandparents, or other family members to work so that there were more funds for the household? When clients were out of earshot the benefits accountants and social workers asked sarcastically, "Why work when you can live off of benefits?" After a consultation with an unemployed father seeking custody of his children, social worker Nina looked at me, exasperated, "There isn't an obligation today to go to work" (*není dneska povinnost jít do práce*). The responsibility for unemployment rested on both the client and the state's shoulders. The client lacked the willingness to work, but the state no longer forced him or her to work in the first place.

The director of the Home for Mothers, Jitka, lamented over incompatible trends—desire for material goods combined with what she interpreted as a reluctance to work—developing in the residents she oversaw, but she blamed post-1989 social policies for allowing people to count on the state without taking care of themselves. There was a "cost in the lack of freedom" during the socialist era, but with a nostalgic tone she recalled that certain things like apartments and employment had been guaranteed and, she suggested, helped one tolerate life under a totalitarian regime. Too much freedom and the continued availability of funds for the poor today, though, have produced an inexplicable group living on support. Czechs had new freedoms to take, claim, and demand. Jitka said,

The state would prefer to pay social benefits and social support than motivate people to earn their own money and take themselves to some better place. The mothers here used to work themselves toward better lives; now those on support (*na podpoře*) are increasing. I don't know how it exactly works elsewhere, but here there's no time limit. People are on support forever,

their whole lives. I simply don't understand.

Jitka did not confine the socialist-era work ethic to family domains exclusively. She contrasted previous requirements to work outside of the home to reduced expectations of today's unemployed. Czechs were supported and cared for by the Home previously, but it was never for long (three years maximum) and the socialist system did not allow for the upholding of unproductive persons. She did not miss the socialist era, but had greater respect for the work ethic associated with it.

I didn't agree with communism. But at the same time I wanted to live here. Or at least I had to live here. No one could get out. So we tried to improve ourselves and stand on our own legs. And there were no exceptions—after school there was no way to get out of work. A person was obliged.

Both social worker Nina and Jitka mentioned that the "obligation" (*povinnost*) to work during the socialist era had been replaced by the right not to work—and a state that too easily allowed clients and the residents they worked with to expect many kinds of aid without working. These critical reflections and comments imply that the state was enabling new forms of dependency.

Some felt that wages were too low for working to seem necessary or beneficial. As one man put it, "if people had decent wages, they would not come in" to the state offices to file for their benefits and support supplements. At the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, policymaker Novák made the point that, actually, the state was giving too much—the amount of care benefits were too close to wages so "why work?" In his opinion, benefits accountants were *overworked* and undervalued, so they processed paperwork without fully evaluating applicants' resources and needs and, then, justifying distribution. Time for the concerns of families—both in public and

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private settings—was too limited. The system was flexible enough to cut back on automatic awards, but employees were not able to maximize its potential and to take the circumstances of each life into account because they were overwhelmed. “A person isn’t poor because he doesn’t have money,” Novák explained,

rather he is poor because he got in to a situation whereby he doesn’t have money. Lack of money is only one indicator of poverty. And if we give him money, we don’t eliminate the poverty. We only make him dependent (*závislým*).... There are a number of barriers on the system, one of which is the opinion that the living minimum is too high, and that it is contributing to the problem.

Novák’s ideal use of the system of support and care by the social workers (toward whom, by the way, he was quite sympathetic) would be to pay closer attention to the unique conditions of individual persons and households. In a lengthier version of this project, I demonstrate that benefits accountants were in fact alert to possible non-financial care resources, frequently calling on or inquiring about extended family members who might assist clients. Moreover, “the commission” tried to take advantage of the flexibility offered by policies. As an author and mentor of state texts and research studies Novák felt that the expansion of individualized treatment of clientele, more thorough examinations of claims, and subsequent denial of care, were justified.

Others found primary fault in those who were being “cared for” by the state. One of the full-time “doorkeepers” (*vrátná*), Mrs. Jedličková, at the Home for Mothers was astonished by the lifestyles of the Home’s residents. We often chatted in her office as she buzzed residents in, admitted and signed in authorized guests, and connected phone calls to the upstairs living units from her switch-board. Although similar homes for mothers were founded throughout

Czechoslovakia from the 1960s onward, Mrs. Jedličková considered theirs an indicator of the inconceivable claims Czechs made on state resources. “This kind of institution didn’t exist before,” she said. “If you went to a social worker and said, ‘my husband doesn’t give me money’ she would say ‘go to work for yourself.’ People should work; before you had to have a stamp in your national identification card (*občanka*) that said you worked.” The *vrátnás* in the Home were retired women, usually in their late fifties and mid-sixties, and they worked as door minders to supplement their pensions. They led “triple burden” lives, caring for husbands, grown children who often still lived at home, and grandchildren, while also working outside the home beyond retirement age. Like most of the benefits accountants, then, these women were older than the “socially weaker” clients they worked around. While recognizing the difficult family lives the residents came from, older state employees struggled to understand how mothers could stay at home all day, even after the completion of maternity leave. This *vrátná*, for one, insisted that she had not wanted to stay at home when she had little children. She “wanted to go to work.”

### Conclusion

Czechs refer to past systems of social provisions when making sense of current reform, tortuous filing procedures, and differences between the self-sufficient and “the socially weak.” Entitlement claims span a broad section of the population. Yet in recalling their experiences with the socialist state, people such as Grandmother Vodrážková and Mrs. Boudová distanced themselves from today’s poorer classes of Czechs by insisting that they never drew on support and care. They took care of themselves; they never got anything for free. Family and gender studies narratives of sacrifice, hard work, and self-sustenance refigure the trajectory of postsocialist transition by contrasting state narratives of state-family relations (these latter narratives often trace the state’s retreat from enabling

passivity—characterizing literature on the socialist era—and a movement toward engendering responsibility in the present through policy). Instead of witnessing a radical break from state paternalism and civic laziness, the stories told by individual family members affirmed continued belief in, and value for, the family and individual responsibility—and ongoing perceived independence from public provisions.

Czechs who have moved further outside of state oversight (those who carried the state versus family opposition to the postsocialist period) viewed those struggling to make ends meet as generating individual and family dependence on the state not matched by individual effort (what I refer to in my dissertation as a productive dependency (Nash 2003)). The socialist state did not pay significant attention to the “unpowerful” (i.e., the socialist-era “socially weaker”). Today those who draw on the state are accused of creating their own struggle to survive and of perpetuating dependencies never before seen. Living minimum criteria and support eligibility mark expanding gaps and differences among Czech families and generations. Care benefits were meant to serve as a safety net for those unable to protect themselves in an unfamiliar economic environment. Within the system itself, administrators experienced the benefits as obstacles to care for the self and family, which older generations would otherwise have passed along.

It is important to examine closely when Czechs evoke an ideology of independence from the state—and an opposition of state versus family outlined by leading Czech gender studies scholars—which signifies an ability to turn to family as productive dependents and not the state (fully) in the postsocialist era. Socialism shared a discourse of individual interest now complementing ideologies of responsibility, but the growth of class differences among families suggests the creation of altogether new dependencies.

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