Recalcitrant Women: Internationalism and the Redefinition of Welfare Limits in the Czechoslovak-Vietnamese Labor Exchange Program

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Ms. H. arrived in Czechoslovakia in August 1981 at age 22 to work in a canning and distillery factory.[1] As the Czechoslovak-Vietnamese labor exchange program's rules required, she went for a comprehensive medical checkup shortly upon arrival. Because, as she put it, "the goodbyes had been beautiful," she alerted the interpreter who accompanied her group to the doctor's office that she had missed her period, wanting him to ask the doctor "to focus more thoroughly on that area." She knew that pregnancy meant an immediate return, so her plan was to obtain an abortion. However, no pregnancy was diagnosed, so she started her work at a conveyor belt, straightening up improperly placed bottles. Yet, some two months later, it turned out that she was indeed pregnant. Moreover, the pregnancy was high risk and she was hospitalized. Three months later the director of the canning company came to the hospital and "dragged her, wearing only a hospital dressing gown" to a gynecologist who was willing to write an expert opinion claiming that Ms. H. was fit to fly back to Vietnam. The director secured a plane ticket for Ms. H., who was devastated. She feared that returning as a single mother would mean that her own mother and perhaps even her sister would lose their jobs; because her father was an invalid, due to an injury sustained in the American War, the family would be destined for a life of penury, not to mention the subject of moral disapproval from their community. However, several people, Vietnamese and Czech, came to Ms. H.'s rescue. A complicated series of events ensued, at the end of which she stayed in Czechoslovakia, gave birth to a daughter, and, with the help of her benefactors, secured housing and a job as a seamstress for a posh Prague dressmaker.

While the resolution of Ms. H.'s story was unique, the initial circumstances were not. Hundreds of Vietnamese female workers who arrived in Czechoslovakia between 1981 and 1989 found themselves pregnant, and most of them fought to stay and finish their contracts. In this article I examine the issue of

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1. Ms. H., in discussion with the author, 8 June 2010, Prague. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement

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Vietnamese workers' pregnancies and show how that issue became an arena of contention between the Czechoslovak and Vietnamese governments. Representatives of the two states conceptualized workers' pregnancies in starkly different ways: whereas the Vietnamese state treated the pregnancies as an issue of labor rights, the Czechoslovak state vacillated between approaching them as a health issue and treating them as a disciplinary infringement. I argue that the struggle over the definition of these pregnancies, and thus, over the appropriate treatment of (pregnant) Vietnamese workers, was part and parcel of the changes the program underwent in the 1980s. These changes turned it from a program largely animated by internationalist concerns into one conceived in important ways as a market exchange between the two countries.

While some scholarship sees former state socialist regimes as primarily defined by coercion and the inefficiencies of their command economies, other authors have noted the centrality of welfare to these regimes, in both the original sense of the word, as "wellbeing," and in the more technocratic sense, as the system of benefits designed to achieve that goal.[2] Laszlo Bruszt, writing just before the collapse of the Soviet-backed regime in Hungary, argued that "from the sixties onward the state has acknowledged 'taking care' of society as a duty, and it has made a 'commitment' to continually improving the standard of living."[3] Konrad Jarausch coined the term *welfare dictatorship* in order to capture both the coercive nature and the "ideological goals of socialism, and the vision of an egalitarian society" in the GDR.[4] In her historical ethnography of the changes in the Hungarian welfare system, Lynne Haney has argued that, through their welfare policies, "states ascribe meaning to a variety of social roles; they define 'appropriate' behavior of workers, parents, spouses, and family members . . . [and] engage in a considerable amount of boundary work, interpreting the terms of inclusion and setting the borders surrounding social institutions."[5]

I use the Czechoslovak-Vietnamese labor exchange program, specifically the policies enacted in regard to pregnant workers, as a prism through which to examine the changes in the Czechoslovak state's commitment to be the

2. For the former, see, e.g., Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945–1989* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Nigel Swain, *Hungary: The Rise and Fall of Feasible Socialism* (London, 1992); Jonathan R. Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge, Eng., 2007).

3. Laszlo Bruszt, "'Without Us but For Us'? Political Orientation in Hungary in the Period of Late Paternalism," *Social Research* 55, nos. 1–2 (Spring/Summer 1988): 51.

4. Konrad H. Jarausch, "Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship," in Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York, 1999), 60. Cf. Eszter Bartha's use of the same label in her "Welfare Dictatorship, the Working Class and the Change of Regimes in East Germany and Hungary," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 9 (November 2011): 1591–1610. This approach contrasts sharply with that of Andrew Roberts, who has argued for precisely the opposite, i.e., for nomenclature that would indicate a *lack* of connection between the former state socialist regimes and the wider socialist movement. Andrew Roberts, "The State of Socialism: A Note on Terminology," *Slavic Review* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 349–66.

5. Lynne Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley, 2002), 240.

provider of care. I trace how the terms of inclusion changed when this pledge came into conflict with another of its commitments—namely, to socialist internationalism. The plight of pregnant Vietnamese workers was part of the process through which Czechoslovakia was redefining the limits of care it saw itself obligated to provide. Therefore, the Czechoslovak state—embodied, in this case, in the Labor Ministry clerks who administered the program and negotiated on the state's behalf with Vietnamese state representatives—not only defined the appropriate roles for female Vietnamese workers but also redefined its own social role.

This redefinition of the caretaker role was in part a result of the economic reforms spurred by Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika. In Czechoslovakia, however, the economic restructuring began later and proceeded more timidly than in other countries, and as a result labor shortages, which continued to be ubiquitous well into the late 1980s, were arguably the main driving force behind the program in its last phase.[6] When it came to its policies toward pregnant Vietnamese workers, concerns about labor shortages collided with the state's gender and welfare policies. In this, the program reflected a more general tension, one that constituted a pressing challenge to and a core feature of the regime. This was the tension between the pressures to increase (or at least maintain) productivity, which was hindered by the endemic labor shortages, and increase fertility, as Czechoslovakia, like other countries in the region, faced some of the lowest birthrates in the world.[7]

The Czechoslovak-Vietnamese labor exchange program was implicated directly and visibly in the concerns over productivity, and indirectly and less visibly in the concerns over fertility. The program helped plug holes in the labor market while facilitating the implementation of policies that sought to incentivize Czechoslovak women to bear more children. However, the success of the strategy was predicated upon the Czechoslovak state's defining and treating Vietnamese women in dramatically different ways than it did female citizens. Czechoslovak women were exhorted to be heroic workers and proud mothers.[8] Vietnamese women were expected to be just the former.

Yet this unequal treatment of Vietnamese female workers was, paradoxically, connected with the gender policies that the Czechoslovak state was pursuing vis-à-vis female Czechoslovak citizens. As in other socialist states, women were "buffeted back and forth between policies encouraging their participation in the wage-labor workforce, and the roller coaster of pronatalist policies."[9] In Czechoslovakia the outcome of this wrestling with the "woman

6. On the Czechoslovak economy in the 1980s, see, e.g., Martin Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy 1948–1988: The Battle for Economic Reform* (Cambridge, Eng., 1989); Michal Pullmann, *Konec experimentu: Přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu* (Prague, 2011); David Stark and László Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 1998).

7. Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women? Experiences from Eastern Europe* (Boston, 1974), 141.

8. Martha Lampland, "Biographies of Liberation: Testimonials to Labor in Socialist Hungary," in Sonia Kruks, Rayna Rapp, and Marilyn Blatt Young, eds., *Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism* (New York, 1989), 312.

9. Lampland, "Biographies of Liberation," 314.

question" was the replacement of one ideal of socialist womanhood with "a variety of approved models, which [varied] according to a woman's age and stage in the life cycle."[10] In other words, although the expectation that women would be model workers, active citizens, and good mothers remained, they were no longer expected to fulfill all these roles simultaneously. This schema of women's roles in a socialist society made the requirement that Vietnamese workers not become pregnant while working in Czechoslovakia appear reasonable because their stays were defined as strictly short-term, temporary affairs and only a single stage in the life cycle.[11]

Labor Exchange as an Exercise in Socialist Internationalism

The term *internationalism* was ubiquitous in state socialist discourse. Citizens came into contact with it through the slogan "Proletarians of all countries, unite!"—the motto found on both banners on high-rise buildings and the title page of the main daily newspaper, *Rudé právo*. The slogan, which provides a dramatic culmination to "The Communist Manifesto," was based on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's argument that because "the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption" and in the process "stripped the worker of all national character," the overthrow of capitalism, too, had to be a global affair that depended on the cooperation of workers worldwide.[12] As an explicit idea, internationalism was formulated in the First International, where it was conceived of as a movement to counter colonialism and imperialism.[13] However, the organization's cohesion suffered due to disagreements over the extent to which the movement "should ally itself to individual national struggles," as "the question of competing priorities of national self-determination and socialism was intensely debated."[14]

These tensions remained present in the understanding and use of the idea of internationalism in the context of state socialism. For political scientists, internationalism was a cynical "euphemism for the Brezhnev doctrine," that is to say, a rhetorical trick used by the Soviet Union to justify its interventions in the political affairs of central and eastern European countries when

10. Sharon L. Wolchik, "Elite Strategy toward Women in Czechoslovakia: Liberation or Mobilization," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 14, nos. 2–3 (Summer/Autumn 1981): 140.

11. The socialist state was able to enforce the rotation principle much more easily than its nonsocialist counterparts in the management of their own guest worker programs. See, e.g., Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880–1980*, trans. William Templer (Ann Arbor, 1991); Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge, Eng., 2007).

12. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York, 1978), 476, 482. The word *internationalism* does not actually appear in the pamphlet, however.

13. Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, 2001), 115. Some critics argue, however, that when it came to the more controversial issues of their time, Marx and Engels espoused rather nationalist stances. See, e.g., Bertram D. Wolfe, "Nationalism and Internationalism in Marx and Engels," *American Slavic and Eastern European Review* 17, no. 4 (1958): 403–17.

14. Young, *Postcolonialism*, 120.

it judged these matters to be a threat to the cause of socialism.[15] In Leonid Brezhnev's own words, the "internationalist duty" arose "when . . . forces hostile to socialism [tried] to turn the development of a given socialist country in the direction of the restoration of the capitalist system," as this became "the concern of all socialist countries."[16] Alongside this use of internationalism, which we could perhaps dub "imperial," the idea was also used in a more benign (and less politically central) fashion, for example, to imbue with meaning events such as the famous Peace Race cycling competition, which was meant to symbolize that, "whereas under Fascism, Germany had invaded and plundered Poland and Czechoslovakia, Socialism promoted peaceful encounters among nations."[17] This use of the concept was similar to the efforts of socialist organizations in western Europe which tried to cultivate a "friendly spirit and comradeship" across national borders.[18]

The ideological basis of the Czechoslovak-Vietnamese labor exchange program combined this latter aspect of internationalism with the original emphasis on the importance internationalism held for the anticolonial struggle and the cause of spreading global socialism (and eventually communism). Alois Indra, the chair of the Czechoslovak National Assembly, told the Vietnamese parliamentary delegation, for instance, "We have received your youth, workers, and technicians who came here to increase their qualifications as genuine brothers. We do not see this as something for which we claim credit but—in the spirit of proletarian internationalism—as a natural obligation we have toward a people who fought on an advanced outpost of socialism in Southeast Asia and thus have contributed to the defense of the entire community of socialist countries."[19]

The program was also based on the recognition that a "material base" had to be developed to avert the danger of newly independent nations becoming ensnarled in neocolonial economic relationships with their former colonizers

15. Karen Dawisha and Jonathan C. Valdez, "The New Internationalism in Eastern Europe," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 36, no. 4 (1987): 119–31. See also Jonathan C. Valdez, *Internationalism and the Ideology of Soviet Influence in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 1993) and William M. Reisinger, "The International Regime of Soviet–East European Economic Relations," *Slavic Review* 49, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 554–67.

16. Leonid Brezhnev, "Speech at the 5th Congress of the Polish United Workers Party," 12 November 1968, in Leonid Brezhnev, *Leninskim kursom: Rechi i stat'i; Sobranie sochinenii v 9 tomakh*, 9 vols. (Moscow, 1970–82), 2:329. Quoted in Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, 2001), 67.

17. Molly Wilkinson Johnson, "The *Friedensfahrt*: International Sports and East German Socialism in the 1950s," *The International History Review* 29, no. 1 (March 2007): 57–82. The race, known as the *Friedensfahrt, Závod míru*, and *Wyścig Pokoju* (in German, Czech, and Polish, repectively), was recognized by the International Cycling Union under the name of *Course de la Paix*.

18. See Christine Collette, "'Friendly Spirit, Comradeship, and Good-Natured Fun': Adventures in Socialist Internationalism," *International Review of History* 48, no. 2 (August 2003): 225–44; Kevin Callahan, "'Performing Inter-Nationalism' in Stuttgart in 1907: French and German Socialist Nationalism and the Political Culture of an International Socialist Congress," *International Review of History* 45, no. 1 (April 2000): 51–87.

19. Národní archiv (NA), fond (f.) 02/1, svazek (sv.) 123, archivní jednotka (a.j.) 123 ("Záznam z přijetí delegace Národního shromáždění Vietnamské demokratické republiky ve Federálním shromáždění ČSSR dne 16. května 1974," presented to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia [ÚV KSČ], 6 June 1974), bod (b.) 6.

and to aid socialism's political progress. Thus, a report from the Czechoslovak Embassy in Hanoi approvingly quoted the following comments made by a Hungarian diplomat discussing Hungarian aid to Vietnam: "If there are no bricks and so forth with which to build factories and production lines, and if there is a shortage of qualified and experienced cadres, it will be impossible to make sure that progressive foreign technology is used effectively. Cultural, ideological, and political work will become ever more effective if it relies on a growing material base."[20] To this end, Czechoslovakia agreed to train workers for the Vietnamese economy in its factories and, later, vocational schools.

Vietnamese Workers in State Socialist Czechoslovakia

In 1967 the Vietnamese and Czechoslovak governments agreed, at the former's request, that 2,100 Vietnamese citizens, classified as "trainees" (*praktikanti*), would arrive for training of three to five years.[21] The trainees included both engineers and skilled blue-collar workers, who worked closely with Czechs and Slovaks in factories to develop skills that the Vietnamese government identified as important.[22] In the treaty through which the program was set up, the Czechoslovak state agreed to cover all expenses except the cost of transportation to Czechoslovakia.[23] This phase of the program was characterized by the Czechoslovak administrators' intense care and concern (albeit of the distinctly state socialist, paternalist sort) for the trainees' wellbeing and the efficacy of their training. The former is evident, for instance, from the tasking of the Institute for People's Nutrition (Ústav pro výživu lidu) with the creation of a menu for the incoming trainees in which "food [would] at first correspond more to the Vietnamese culinary customs and only later shift to our food, so that the trainees do not experience difficulties when they transition to companies and eat in company cafeterias."[24] Evidence of the latter can be seen in the adjustments the Czechoslovak administrators made to the program in order

20. Foreign Affairs Ministry (MZV), "Záznam z rozhovoru III. tajemníka s. R. Šmída se III. tajemníkem ZÚ MLR s. K. Lainczekem dne 26. 2. 1973." MZV: 3. teritoriální odbor, 145/117, 1973.

21. NA, "Usnesení vlády Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 15. března 1967, č. 74 o zabezpečení odborného školení a praxe občanů Vietnamské demokratické republiky v ČSSR."

22. Interview, 15 April 2011, Hanoi. According to this informant, the workers were skilled, had some factory experience (as did the engineers), and were assigned to jobs and industrial areas that corresponded to their qualifications, which is exactly how the program was supposed to work. In the late 1960s, training was supposed to happen exclusively on the job; however, the very last group was sent to vocational schools, foreshadowing the 1970s apprenticeship form of the program.

23. NA, f. 02/1, sv. 11, a.j. 12, b. 7, "Dohoda o hospodářské a technické pomoci vlády Československé socialistické republiky Vietnamské demokratické republice," signed in Hanoi on 28 September 1966. Part of Předsednictvo Ústředního výboru KSČ; Číslo pořadu 7, K bodu: "Dodatečná informace ke zprávě o pobytu čs. stranické a vládní delegace ve VDR," 7 October 1966; NA, "Zpráva k návrhu usnesení vlády o zabezpečení odborného školení a praxe občanů Vietnamské demokratické republiky v ČSSR," 25 February 1967.

24. NA, "Informace o průběhu příprav k zajištění přijetí vietnamských praktikantů v ČSSR," report by the State Planning Commission chairman (and deputy prime minister) to the prime minister, dated 20 June 1967.

to improve the outcomes of Vietnamese citizens' training, culminating in the decision to send the last group to vocational schools (despite the fact that this meant increased costs for the Czechoslovak state).[25]

In the early 1970s the Vietnamese government approached its Czechoslovak counterpart with a request to expand the program. The result was a treaty, signed on 8 April 1974, under which more than 5,000 Vietnamese citizens arrived in Czechoslovakia during the 1970s.[26] They spent the first two and a half to three years as apprentices in vocational schools, and another two to two and a half years as qualified laborers working for the companies that had sponsored the vocational schools.[27] Since it was the Czechoslovak state that paid for everything, throughout the first two phases (1967–1980) Czechoslovak officials expected to be "in the red."[28] In their reports, Labor Ministry clerks estimated that Czechoslovakia would, through the factory work of Vietnamese vocational school graduates, recover about two-thirds of the financial resources it put in. Indirect evidence suggests that, contrary to these initial expectations, Czechoslovakia eventually ended up at least "breaking even."[29] A more thorough consideration of the implications of this point is beyond the scope of this article, but for my current purposes it will suffice to note that Czechoslovak officials were not aware of the potential fiscal advantages of this form of the program at the time they agreed to it, and thus its introduction was not influenced by profit motives. In these earlier phases the Czechoslovak leadership conceptualized the program squarely as one of internationalist assistance and generally tried hard to accommodate the Vietnamese government's wishes as to the industrial areas in which the workers were to be trained, which meant that it was the Vietnamese state's

25. MZV, 145/112, 1973–74, "VDR—přehled styků," letter from Dr. Josef Šiktanc, the head of international relations department at the Federal Labor and Social Affairs Ministry, to the Federal Foreign Affairs Ministry's third territorial department, dated 14 March 1973.

26. NA, "Dohoda mezi vládou Československé socialistické republiky a vládou Vietnamské demokratické republiky o odborné přípravě občanů Vietnamské demokratické republiky v československých organizacích" signed in Hanoi on 8 April 1974.

27. For the most part, the trainees' curriculum was identical to the curriculum followed by Czechoslovak apprentices, although Vietnamese apprentices were grouped in the same class during theoretical instruction due lower language proficiency. Interview with a former vocational school principal, 1 February 2011. On the institutional level, the Vietnamese apprentices' education was not overseen by the education ministries but by the republic-level labor ministries. While not a frequent occurrence, sometimes apprentices who excelled in vocational schools were able to take the school-leaving exam (*maturita*) or even attend technical universities on a part-time basis alongside their factory jobs. See, e.g., Labor Ministry Archive (MPSV), letter from MOTOR České Budějovice to the Vietnamese Embassy, dated 12 August 1987.

28. NA, "Jednorázové vybavení občanů VDR prádlem, oděvem, obuví a drobnými osobními potřebami." Appendix 4 to "Návrh: Dohoda mezi vládou Československé socialistické republiky a vládou Vietnamské demokratické republiky o zabezpečení odborné přípravy občanů Vietnamské demokratické republiky v československých organizacích."

29. See point 3 of the government resolution "Usnesení vlády Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 19. prosince 1979, č. 337 o sjednání dohody s Vietnamem o odborné přípravě a dalším zvyšování kvalifikace občanů Vietnamské socialistické republiky v československých organizacích."

needs that to a significant extent shaped the program.[30] The conceptualization of the program as "internationalist assistance" exerted a powerful influence on the actions of Czechoslovak officials. When Vietnamese officials presented requests that were difficult for the Czechoslovak administrators to fulfill due to logistical constraints (chiefly, scarcity of housing), the Czechoslovak officials stressed during their internal debates that the requests stemmed from an "urgent need to build and develop [Vietnam's] national economy, and hence it [was] not possible to refuse [them]."[31] Similar statements appeared repeatedly in ministerial reports at this time.[32] Thus, during the second phase, too, concerns that can be broadly described as "socialist" and "internationalist" dominated the framing of the program and guided the manner in which it was implemented.

From roughly the mid-1970s, however, Czechoslovak officials started to debate adding another form of labor exchange program, one that would modify the present program's unambiguous focus on aid and transform it into something that would serve the interests and needs of the Czechoslovak state and industrial companies as well. The idea first appeared in the record of an April 1976 meeting of the Czechoslovak contingent of the Czechoslovak-Vietnamese Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation.[33] It then resurfaced periodically in Czechoslovak Labor Ministry documents.[34] The Vietnamese side responded to these proposals in 1980 when a qualitatively new form of the program was negotiated and brought to life in a treaty signed in November of that year.[35] On the basis of this treaty, tens of thousands of Vietnamese citizens eventually arrived in Czechoslovakia for work between 1981 and 1989.

While this latest iteration of the program, in which the workers arrived on four-year contracts, was ostensibly still built on socialist principles, for the first time the needs of the Czechoslovak state took precedence when it came to

30. NA, "Zpráva o stavu zabezpečení odborné přípravy občanů Vietnamské demokratické republiky v československých organizacích a k návrhu příslušné mezivládní Dohody," September 1973.

31. Ibid.

32. Another report said that the Vietnamese government considered the training "one of the key questions in the reconstruction and development of [Vietnam's] economy," and that "since under the current circumstances it [was] not possible to train these cadres on [Vietnam's] territory, Vietnam turned to a number of socialist countries." NA, "Zpráva o jednání federálního ministerstva práce a sociálních věcí s vládní delegací Vietnamské demokratické republiky o odborné přípravě občanů VDR v Československé socialistické republice," June 1973.

33. NA, "Informace o možnostech zaměstnávání vietnamských občanů v ČSSR a návrh dalšího postupu," received by the Presidium of the Government (Úřad předsednictva vlády) on 7 April 1976.

34. See, e.g., NA, "Informace o odborné přípravě občanů VDR," undated, likely written sometime in early fall 1976, or "Zpráva o přípravě II. zasedání Československo-vietnamského výboru pro hospodářskou a vědeckotechnickou spolupráci," presented at the 4 April 1977 meeting of ÚV KSČ.

35. MPSV, "Dohoda mezi vládou Československé socialistické republiky a vládou Vietnamské socialistické republiky o dočasném zaměstnávání kvalifikovaných pracovníků Vietnamské socialistické republiky spojeném s další odbornou přípravou v československých organizacích." The apprentice-worker model continued alongside the contract-worker model, but the latter very quickly overtook the former in size.

the industrial areas into which the workers were channeled. The Czechoslovak state, and the individual enterprises, came out ahead in financial terms as well. There were no three years of vocational school expenses to cover, only the costs of a three-month language course, an initial clothing donation, and modest annual per-worker fees that the Czechoslovak state paid to its Vietnamese counterpart.[36] In the context of endemic labor shortages, this was a bargain.

State Socialist Motherhood

State socialist regimes (like most other governments) highly valorized motherhood, which they saw as crucial to women's role in society. This valorization stemmed from the importance that the state accorded the family as the "cradle of socialization," whose purpose was to produce good socialist citizens and, of course, quite literally, future workers.[37] Indeed, the ideological valorization of motherhood accompanied another goal—the perceived imperative to reverse falling fertility rates. While some countries, notably Romania, dealt with the issue by restricting access to birth control and legal abortion, others relied more on incentives-based approaches, and in the late 1960s started to introduce various family-oriented benefits.[38]

Czechoslovak leadership, too, implemented a series of policies whose goal was to convince women to have (more) children. These policies included the extension of maternity leave at almost full pay to twenty-six weeks, which were later supplemented by maternity grants designed to provide an optional maternity leave.[39] Furthermore, by 1976 women could, once the paid maternity leave period elapsed, opt to stay on additional, unpaid maternity leaves (that is, with their jobs guaranteed to them upon return) for up to three years.[40] In 1971 the lump sum given to parents upon the birth of a child was doubled to 2,000 Czechoslovak crowns (Kčs), which represented roughly two

36. MPSV, "Zpráva ke sjednání Dohody mezi vládou Československé socialistické republiky a vládou Vietnamské socialistické republiky o dočasném zaměstnávání kvalifikovaných pracovníků Vietnamské socialistické republiky spojeném s další odbornou přípravou v československých organizacích."

37. Donna Harsch, "Society, the State, and Abortion in East Germany, 1950–1972," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 1 (February 1997): 53–84; Barbara Einhorn, "Gender Issues in Transition: The East Central European Experience," *The European Journal of Development* 6, no. 2 (December 1994): 119–40.

38. Éva Fodor, "The State Socialist Emancipation Project: Gender Inequality in Workplace Authority in Hungary and Austria," *Signs* 29, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 783–813. Although, as Joanna Goven points out, there was a "considerable gap between what the state claimed to provide and what was actually available." Joanna Goven, "The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism: State, Society, and the Anti-Politics of Anti-Feminism, 1948–1990" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 57. On Romania, see Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley, 1998).

39. Tomas Frejka, "Fertility Trends and Policies: Czechoslovakia in the 1970s," *Population and Development Review* 6, no. 1 (March 1980): 65–93. For single mothers and multiple births, the leave period was extended to thirty-five weeks.

40. Alena Heitlinger, "Pro-Natalist Population Policies in Czechoslovakia," *Population Studies* 30, no. 1 (March 1976): 123–35.

to four weeks of the average family income.[41] In 1973 monthly childcare allowances were increased: a family received 90 Kčs monthly if it had one child, 430 Kčs for two children, 880 Kčs for three children, and 1,280 Kčs for four or more children. These amounts constituted "a significant contribution to the family income," as in 1978 the average monthly wage in the socialist sector was 2,759 Kčs.[42] In addition, in 1973 low-interest loans were made available to newlyweds under the age of thirty. In addition to advantageous interest rates (1 percent if used to purchase a home, and 2.5 percent if used to purchase furnishings), 2,000 Kčs of the loan was written off when the couple's first child reached its first birthday, and 4,000 Kčs at the first birthday of each subsequent child.[43] Thus, by the late 1970s the Czechoslovak government was spending almost 4 percent of its annual budget on direct cash benefits to families and mothers, and an additional 7 percent on services and subsidies in kind, such as those going to day care centers, school cafeterias, children's goods purchases, or tax and rent deductions.[44] Women were also able to retire between three and seven years earlier than men, depending on the number of children they had mothered.[45] According to Tomas Frejka, this level of welfare spending amounted to "a proportion almost certainly exceeding comparable expenditures in any other developed country."[46] While some of these policies removed women from the labor force pool, others were clearly intended to encourage women to work. Together, they were supposed to make it possible for women to be both workers and mothers, even if, as noted above, women were not necessarily expected to devote themselves to both simultaneously. Moreover, because the maternity leave benefits amounted to "remuneration for women's work as mothers," the state turned mothering into a kind of paid labor.[47] Czechoslovak women were therefore valued and rewarded for both their productive and reproductive labor.

For foreign workers, however, the relationship between production and reproduction was configured very differently. The protocols (*Ujednání*) did not contain any explicit mention of the workers' possible pregnancies or parenthoods. However, pregnancy appeared in an addendum titled "*Kritéria pro posuzování zdravotní způsobilosti občanů VDR k absolvování odborné přípravy v československých organizacích*" (Criteria for the Assessment of VDR Citizens' Medical Fitness for Participation in Professional Training in Czechoslovak Organizations), in which it was listed in section (c) Contraindications, which enumerated the conditions that would prevent candidates from being consid-

41. Frejka, "Fertility Trends and Policies," 70.

42. Heitlinger, "Pro-Natalist Population Policies," 133. *Statistická ročenka Československé socialistické republiky 1980* (Prague, 1980), 23, 362.

43. Frejka, "Fertility Trends and Policies," 70, and Heitlinger, "Pro-Natalist Population Policies in Czechoslovakia," 133.

44. Alena Heitlinger, *Reproduction, Medicine and the Socialist State* (New York, 1987), 35.

45. Elaine Fultz and Silke Steinhilber, "Social Security Reform and Gender Equality: Recent Experience in Central Europe," *International Labour Review* 143, no. 3 (September 2004): 265.

46. Frejka, "Fertility Trends and Policies," 70.

47. Haney, *Inventing the Needy*, 132.

ered for the program.[48] Pregnancy was featured as a "contraindication" in all contract documents signed from the early 1970s on.[49] However, the treaties differed in how they addressed the issue of workers' potential parenthoods.

The 1967 Principles of Material Provisioning stipulated that Vietnamese citizens would receive childcare benefits for children born in Czechoslovakia or those that acquired permanent residence there (a highly unlikely scenario).[50] The monetary amount of these benefits was not specified, suggesting that it would have corresponded to the benefits awarded to Czechoslovak families (note, however, that the document predated the launch of the massive pronatalist measures). The measure also stated explicitly that no childcare benefits would be paid for children residing in Vietnam. The 1974 treaty handled the issue in an identical manner. Thus, this arrangement allowed Vietnamese workers to partake in one kind of the generous Czechoslovak family welfare benefits, at least in principle. And quite possibly only in principle: while the proportion of Vietnamese women workers between 1967 and 1973 was about one-quarter of the overall number, this translated into only some 300 women total.[51] In the 1970s wave, the proportion of women was very low. Exact statistics are unavailable, but personnel files from a major engineering company (Škoda Plzeň) show that out of 131 Vietnamese whom it had educated in its vocational schools in the late 1970s and subsequently employed in its factories, only five, that is, less than 4 percent, were women. A Czech Labor Ministry statistic for the year 1980 suggests that the general proportion may have been somewhat higher, possibly around 8 percent, but this figure still translates to only 290 women in that year.[52] Hence, for all practical purposes, the only workers to whom the childcare stipulation would have applied in the late 1960s and 1970s were Vietnamese men who fathered children with Czech or Slovak women. In such situations, however, the point was moot, as the children's mothers were automatically eligible for the benefits as citizens.

48. Other contraindications included tuberculosis, venereal diseases, serious forms of neurosis, serious post-traumatic conditions, deformities, serious asthenic conditions, serious heart disease, liver disease, tumors, serious visual impairment (more than six diopters), hearing defects, leprosy, the presence of *Shigella* bacteria, and some other bacterial infections.

49. Documents pertaining to the 1967 wave did not contain the same detailed medical list, but praktikanti candidates who arrived pregnant were sent home. NA, "Zpráva předsedy Státní plánovací komise o opatřeních prováděných k zabezpečení odborného školení a praxe občanů VDR v Československu pro operativní poradu předsednictva vlády," dated 19 April 1967.

50. NA, "Zásady materiálního zabezpečení občanů VDR vyslaných do ČSSR na odborné školení a praxi," an addendum to Czechoslovak government resolution no. 74, 15 March 1967.

51. The first group consisted of 162 women and 314 men; the second, 101 women and 379 men. The original documents set the proportion of women at between 15 and 20 percent of the total number. "Zpráva o průběhu přípravy vietnamských praktikantů k zaškolování v československých podnicích," report by the SPK chairman, dated 29 September 1967; "Zpráva o příjezdu II. turnusu vietnamských praktikantů do ČSSR—pro operativní poradu předsednictva vlády," report by the SPK chairman to the prime minister, dated 14 December 1967; "Zpráva předsedy Státní plánovací komise."

52. MPSV, "Přehled zaměstnanosti zahraničních dělníků podle krajů a resortů ke dni 30.6.1981."

The stipulation disappeared completely from the treaty through which the apprentice-worker form of the program was extended in December 1979 which omitted the mention of benefits for children altogether.[53]

The contract-worker form of the program, ushered in by the November 1980 treaty, finally brought in much greater numbers of women. Although their proportion still hovered around 25 percent, since as the overall numbers of arriving workers were increasing so too were the absolute numbers of women and thus potential mothers. In 1981 women composed about 25 percent (or 1,926) of all Vietnamese workers; in 1982 their proportion increased to 27 percent (4,739), then fell slightly to 26 percent in 1983, which corresponded to 5,876 women in absolute numbers; and at the end of 1989 the proportion of 25 percent translated to 8,342 Vietnamese women working in Czechoslovakia.[54] In contrast to the previous twelve years, for which no information on pregnancies of Vietnamese trainee- or apprentice-workers is available (except for a few short mentions of pregnant candidates being returned to Vietnam immediately upon arrival), Vietnamese workers' pregnancies and motherhoods became a salient issue between 1980 and 1989, and the policies toward pregnant Vietnamese workers became highly relevant at this point.

The instructions accompanying the 1980 treaty stipulated that the workers would be eligible only for the lump-sum birth benefits, provided the child was born in Czechoslovakia.[55] This benefit was related to healthcare benefits regulations, the most important of which was paid sick leave. Here it is crucial to highlight the fact that the Czechoslovak state disbursed this particular benefit to Vietnamese workers according to the same, if not actually slightly more advantageous, rules than it did to Czechoslovak citizens. The latter received between 50 and 70 percent of their net wages during the first three days of sick leave, and between 60 and 90 percent thereafter, the proportion being dependent on the length of lifetime employment.[56] In the case of Vietnamese workers, their biological ages were used as a proxy for the length of their working lives, as verifying their work histories in Vietnam would have been difficult. Thus, Vietnamese workers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three received 70 percent of their net wages when sick, those between twenty-three and twenty-eight received 80 percent, and those twenty-eight and older,

53. MPSV, "Dohoda mezi vládou Československé socialistické republiky a vládou Vietnamské demokratické republiky o odborné přípravě a dalším zvyšování kvalifikace občanů Vietnamské socialistické republiky v československých organizacích," signed in Prague on 21 December 1979.

54. These figures are compiled from MPSV tabular summaries of the numbers of foreign manual workers for the relevant years. The reports were uniformly called "*Přehled zaměstnanosti zahraničních dělníků podle krajů a rezortů ke dni . . . , národnost: vietnamská*" (Overview of Foreign Workers' Employment According to Regions and Industrial Branches as of . . . , Nationality: Vietnamese); they listed the pertinent numbers of foreign workers as of June 30 and December 31 of each year.

55. These instructions were later published jointly by the Ministries of Labor and Finances in the form of a booklet to be disseminated to companies employing Vietnamese workers. MPSV, "Pokyny pro věcné, organizační a finanční zabezpečení odborné přípravy a další zvyšování kvalifikace občanů Vietnamské socialistické republiky v československých organizacích," dated June 1980; in booklet form dated 22 May 1981.

56. *Statistická ročenka*, 609.

90 percent from the fourth day of their sick leave on; the percentages were 60, 65, and 70 percent, respectively, for the first three days.[57]

Other major types of welfare benefits (*sociální zabezpečení*) that the Czechoslovak state provided to its citizens included pensions (old-age, disability, and survivors' benefits), the family and child benefits discussed above, and benefits "to overcome adverse life circumstances."[58] As for the Vietnamese workers, the treaty documents explained that the Czechoslovak state considered all Vietnamese welfare claims, except healthcare and sick leave wage compensation, settled on account of the fees that the Czechoslovak state paid to Vietnam. These fees had three components:[59] The first was a flat annual fee of 2,400 Kčs per worker, which was to settle all present and future welfare claims, such as pensions, accidents insurance (upon return), healthcare for the workers' relatives in Vietnam, and the workers' own healthcare upon return, as well as "all other benefits that the Vietnamese state might provide to its citizens." The second was the lump sum of 1,000 Kčs per worker, billed as a recruitment fee, and finally, a monthly sum of 180 Kčs per worker earmarked for the care of workers' children to be delivered by the Vietnamese state. In other words, the Czechoslovak state paid this fee in lieu of the monthly childcare benefits it disbursed to citizen parents. The regulations further explained that the figure was based on the assumption of an average of three children per worker. Thus, the benefit came to 60 Kčs per child.

Several differences between the domestic childcare benefits and these "surrogate" benefits are readily apparent. For one thing, while the benefits that the Czechoslovak state paid to its citizens were disbursed to individuals, it paid the "surrogate" benefits to the partner state. As a result, it is not clear whether the individual workers and their families ever received these putative benefits or not. Also, while the benefits for citizens were calibrated according to the number of their children, the "surrogate" benefits were a flat per-worker fee, regardless of the actual number of children a specific worker might have had. Setting up the benefits in this way certainly made bureaucratic sense, as flat payments are easier to administer. However, the method also expressed the marginality of the Vietnamese workers when it came to the Czechoslovak state's concern for their welfare when not directly connected with their productive labor in the country. Finally, there is the glaring gap in the absolute amounts: the 880 Kčs that Czechoslovak parents of three received versus the 180 Kčs allocated to Vietnamese families of the same size. One might object that the standards of living in the two countries were very different, but the banishment of this sort of calculus, which prized, and priced, different lives differently, was one of the cherished goals and tenets of state socialist ideology in general and internationalism in particular. This suggests that while the Czechoslovak state did its best to implement socialist principles in regard to citizens' welfare internally, in international relations it applied a logic not dissimilar to that guiding the relationships between capitalist states. The introduction of these fees effectively monetized Vietnamese workers and captured,

57. "Pokyny pro věcné" (1980).
58. *Statistická ročenka*, 609–10.
59. "Zpráva ke sjednání."

perhaps better than any other indicator, the fundamental change in the logic of the program.

It could be argued that the 1980 treaty arrangement in regard to children was more generous than the previous provisions, which had excluded workers' children residing in Vietnam from all benefits as a matter of principle. That is true, yet, by setting up the "surrogate family benefits" in the way it did, the Czechoslovak state also simultaneously, consciously or not, implied that it regarded—and indeed treated—these children, and families, as being of lesser value. Moreover, an appendix to a government resolution on the employment of foreign workers stipulated that "the requests for the transfer of any part of the national product created by foreign workers to their countries of origin [were] to be rejected."[60] Claiming the right to appropriate the surplus produced by the Vietnamese workers amounts to textbook capitalist exploitation and thus to the Czechoslovak state's unabashed rejection of internationalist and socialist principles. The sharing of the products created by Vietnamese workers in Czechoslovakia being off the table, and the framework of the program being reconfigured as a de facto market exchange—even if, on paper, references to "increasing qualifications" continued to be a staple—meant that the only avenue open to the Vietnamese government was to try to push for the amelioration of specific labor conditions as its workers encountered them. The right of pregnant Vietnamese women to stay and finish their contracts was one of them.

Pregnancy as a Disciplinary Infringement

If things had worked according to the Czechoslovak state's wishes, pregnancy would have been identified during pre-departure medical checkups and no Vietnamese women would have ever arrived pregnant or become pregnant while in Czechoslovakia. When Vietnamese workers did arrive or become pregnant, the general policy was to return them home as soon as possible. Since the Czechoslovak side was responsible for travel costs, its administrators saw such premature returns as financial losses for the state. Consequently, at the end of 1982 the Czechoslovak government pushed through a rule according to which Vietnam became liable for the costs of such "extraordinary departures," and thereafter it deducted the money for them from the fees it paid to Vietnam.[61]

60. MPSV, "Zásady a podmínky pro dočasné zaměstnávání zahraničních občanů v čs. organizacích spojené s odbornou přípravou po roce 1980," appendix to "Usnesení vlády Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 15. května 1980, č. 172 o zásadách pro dočasné zaměstnávání zahraničních občanů spojené s odbornou přípravou v československých organizacích po roce 1980."

61. MPSV, "Prováděcí protokol o spolupráci mezi Československou socialistickou republikou a Vietnamskou socialistikou republikou v oblasti odborné přípravy a dalšího zvyšování kvalifikace vietnamských občanů v československých organizacích v roce 1983," signed on 8 November 1982; MPSV, "Povolení k placení nákladů přepravy na cizích úsecích trati za vietnamské občany, přijaté k odborné přípravě nebo do dočasného zaměstnání v ČSSR—dodatek č. 1 ke všeobecnému devizovému povolení č. 6019," 14 April 1983.

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Thus, in 1986, for example, 3.2 percent of the total fees Czechoslovakia paid to Vietnam were deducted on account of premature departures.[62]

The bulk of early departures consisted of pregnant women and people forced to return for disciplinary reasons. Czechoslovak administrators almost always discussed pregnancies and disciplinary infringements simultaneously. In their documents, the administrators sometimes explicitly categorized pregnancy as a subgroup of disciplinary infringements. For example, a 1985 report noted that in the previous year there had been 274 cases of early departures due to disciplinary violations, of which 119 were further specified to be pregnancies.[63] Similarly, two 1984 memoranda—"Departures of Vietnamese Citizens due to Medical Reasons" and "Securing of Departures of Vietnamese Citizens to the SRV [Socialist Republic of Vietnam] due to Medical Reasons"—that were ostensibly meant to discuss various medical issues shifted the discussion between medical cases and bona fide disciplinary infractions (such as absenteeism), treating them as belonging in the same category.[64] This is significant as this bureaucratic practice of lumping together pregnancies and disciplinary infringements in the official accounting led to the line between transgression and pregnancy becoming blurred.

On pragmatic grounds, this practice can be explained (and explained away) by the fact that, as far as the Czechoslovak program administrators were concerned, the issue at hand was logistically uniform: the need to get the workers out of the country as soon as possible. However, this conflation also shows that the administrators did not see the two as sharply distinct on the conceptual level either. Various Labor Ministry documents show the ease with which health issues were also treated as disciplinary issues. For instance: "Physicians explain the occurrence of tuberculosis [among Vietnamese workers] by bad regimen [*životospráva*] (too little sleep, spending nights sewing clothing, and insufficient nutrition in our climatic conditions, as well as the lower resistance of their bodies to TB)."[65] Here, Vietnamese workers' poor health was presented as the result of failings in personal discipline, if not quite a disciplinary breach in the usual sense. Syphilis cases exemplify most clearly the way in which medical issues were simultaneously conceptualized as disciplinary issues. If workers were diagnosed with syphilis, they were first treated and then made to return to Vietnam. Given that by the 1980s the treatment of syphilis (in early stages) was a fairly trivial affair, as well as the fact that early returns meant financial losses for both sides, the insistence on the workers' departures makes sense only if viewed as a disciplinary measure, namely a punishment for a moral transgression. Crucial to my argument is the fact that the workers received medical treatment before they were sent

62. MPSV, "Záznam z jednání delegací federálního ministerstva práce a sociálních věci ČSSR a ministerstva práce, válečných invalidů a sociálních věcí VSR," dated 12 May 1987.

63. MPSV, "Úhrada nákladů za předčasné odjezdy vietnamských občanů v roce 1984," 11 March 1985.

64. NA, "Odjezdy vietnamských občanů ze zdravotních důvodů do VSR," 15 September 1984; NA, "Zabezpečení odjezdů vietnamských občanů do VSR ze zdravotních důvodů," 13 September 1984.

65. MPSV, "K jednání s delegací vietnamského ministerstva práce," 5 March 1984.

home. The practice illustrates the firmness of the Czechoslovak state's commitment to act as the care-provider in cases of general healthcare, even those of "moral transgressions."

In regard to Vietnamese workers' pregnancies, Labor Ministry clerks articulated the disciplinary aspect most explicitly in their consternation over the fact that many women decided to leave their hostels and stay with friends in order to avoid returning to Vietnam. In describing these cases, Labor Ministry reports framed pregnancies as alternately disciplinary breaches and medical issues. For instance, a textile factory reported in early 1984 that a worker in the stage of "advanced pregnancy" left her employment and was staying at another company's hostel. The clerk noted in regard to the case, "Her employment has been terminated, no company will take care of her!"[66] In the final paragraphs of the report, the clerk employed an emotional style rarely found in bureaucratic texts: "In general, we can say that the cases when pregnant women and workers sent home for disciplinary reasons do not show up at the airport have been proliferating. It is necessary to address with all responsibility the issue of Vietnamese women afflicted [*postižených*] in this way, because they hide in hostels, their residence permits are revoked, they are sustained by their friends, and they **l a c k** basic pregnancy care!!"[67] The text first frames the issue as one of disciplinary transgression, but then switches to framing it as a medical emergency. An integral part of this latter discourse is the element of paternalistic condescension. The women are presented as both transgressors (running away, hiding, overstaying their legal residence periods) and as naïve victims (they are "afflicted") who end up endangering their health and therefore must be protected. The significance of framing pregnant Vietnamese workers in this way becomes clear from a follow-up report, which also recounts individual stories to convey the urgency of the issue.[68] In one story, "a woman hiding in the hostel of the VŽSKG Ostrava [ironworks company] went into labor at 2:00 a.m. and, had it not been for a speedy intervention by Czechoslovak citizens, the delivery could have ended badly." In another story, a Labor Ministry clerk, upon being notified of yet another heavily pregnant woman, traveled to the hostel—some 250 miles away from Prague—and drove "the Vietnamese citizen . . . to the hospital just before she went into labor." Both these stories portray Czechoslovak citizens quite unambiguously as the Vietnamese women's rescuers, willing to undertake almost heroic measures to save the recalcitrant women.[69]

However, as the rest of this report makes clear, the Labor Ministry administrators only partly faulted the women themselves. The main target of their disapproval was the Vietnamese Embassy, which "had been informed about the woman's case . . . but did nothing for her." The tenor of these stories is reminiscent of accounts from settings such as colonial India, in which "white men

66. NA, "Problémy se zaměstnáváním vietnamských pracovníků (výňatky z komentářů podniků ke statistice)," 13 February 1984.

67. Ibid., emphasis in the original.

68. NA, "Odjezdy vietnamských dělníků v roce 1983."

69. In the original text, Czech grammatical gender makes it clear that these citizens were male.

[were] saving brown women from brown men."[70] Such colonial officials "were sanguine about their own role in 'uplifting' the position of Indian women," and "the colonial state was . . . identified with the civilizing role of the 'manly' protector of Indian women."[71] If, as Mrinalini Sinha suggests, "'manhood' in colonial society was based on a particular relationship to property," then in the context of this migrant labor program "manhood" was perhaps derived in part from the ability to ensure "proper care," as defined by the ideas and priorities of this central European socialist state, once again driving home the immense importance that the commitment to providing care had for the self-definition of the Czechoslovak state.[72] At the same time, this narrative strategy served another purpose: to deflect the demands of the Vietnamese state. As I review these demands in the following section, the reasons for the embassy's (lack of) action become clearer.

Pregnancy as a Labor-Rights Issue

Czechoslovak and Vietnamese representatives held regular meetings to assess the program and discuss whatever issues had arisen in the preceding period. In April 1983, during a meeting led by the two countries' deputy labor ministers, the Vietnamese delegates first presented the request that pregnant workers be allowed to continue working in Czechoslovakia and do so under the same conditions as Czechoslovak women.[73] However, this was only one of about a dozen demands the Vietnamese side presented, the majority of which concerned various improvements in Vietnamese workers' labor conditions. The demands ran the gamut from the request that a minimum wage be established, to the request that workers employed in agriculture be transferred to industrial companies, to a request for an expansion of the right to vacation in Vietnam.[74] After the meeting, the representatives of the Czechoslovak branch ministries in charge of the companies that employed Vietnamese workers met to discuss the Vietnamese demands. These officials deemed the demand in regard to pregnant women "unacceptable both on economic grounds and because it would interfere with the substance of the interstate treaty on the employment of these female workers . . . as well as negate the reason for their

70. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago, 1988), 296.

71. Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, Eng., 1995), 44.

72. Ibid.

73. NA, "Zpráva z jednání delegací Federálního ministerstva práce a sociálních věcí ČSSR a Ministerstva práce VSR o výsledcích realizace mezivládní Dohody ze dne 27.11.1980 a o návrzích na zlepšení další spolupráce, která se předkládá předsedům obou částí Československo-vietnamského výboru pro hospodářskou a vědeckotechnickou spolupráci," 27 April 1983.

74. The reason for the demand that agricultural workers be transferred to the industrial sector was twofold. These jobs included a fair amount of work outdoors, which the Vietnamese workers found very difficult for most months of the year due to the drastic differences between the two countries' climates. Furthermore, the opportunity to gain the sorts of skills that the Vietnamese government wanted its workers to acquire was almost nonexistent in the agricultural sector.

stay in Czechoslovakia."[75] Thus, disregarding the fact that the very point of the negotiations was to amend the terms of the treaty, the Czechoslovak representatives all but explicitly stated that the Vietnamese women—in a sharp contrast to Czechoslovak women—were to be restricted entirely to the sphere of production. In other words, they were to be limited to productive labor and excluded from reproductive labor. The argument, in effect, called for a segmentation of the workforce along racial lines.

In its formal response to the Vietnamese requests, the Czechoslovak side refrained from mentioning the "economic grounds" brought up in the internal discussion and stated instead that the request was "not in compliance with the intergovernmental treaty and thus [could not] be implemented."[76] Undeterred, the Vietnamese government brought up the demand (as well as other outstanding demands) again in March 1984.[77] This time, while the Czechoslovak response was still in principle negative, it was less categorical: the Czechoslovak officials said that while it would be "very difficult to accommodate [these women] because Czechoslovak companies did not have the conditions to do so," they nonetheless conceded that, should an individual company be able to provide such accommodations, it was possible for a Vietnamese woman to stay, deliver, and finish her contract.[78] The Vietnamese representatives continued to bring up the issue, and the Czechoslovak side's responses continued to shift subtly toward a somewhat more accommodating stance. An August 1986 document reiterated that the cases of pregnant Vietnamese women "must be dealt with on an individual basis and by taking into account the capacities of Czechoslovak companies to provide appropriate housing for Vietnamese female workers with children, or to allocate Vietnamese families apartments, as the case may be." But, in contrast to previous, unambiguous rejections, it also explicitly stated for the first time that, "in principle, the Czechoslovak side agrees with Vietnamese female workers giving birth in the ČSSR."[79] There is some evidence to suggest that the situation may have shifted even further in favor of Vietnamese women. In 1987 a company contacted the Labor Ministry asking how to proceed in the case of a pregnant Vietnamese worker who was deemed medically incapable of traveling back to

75. NA, "Zápis z porady na federálním ministerstvu práce a sociálních věcí k projednání výledků jednání s delegací ministerstva práce VSR v dubnu 1983," dated 19 May 1983.

76. NA, letter from Deputy Labor Minister Ing. Milan Kyselý to SRV Deputy Labor Minister Nguyen Van Diep, dated 24 October 1983.

77. MPSV, "Otázky k jednání—K jednání s delegací vietnamského ministerstva práce," 5 March 1984.

78. MPSV, "Zápis z jednání delegací ministerstva práce a sociálních věcí ČSSR a Ministerstva práce VSR o výsledcích realizace mezivládní Dohody ze dne 27. listopadu 1980 a o návrzích opatření na zlepšení další spolupráce na úseku dočasného zaměstnávání kvalifikovaných pracovníků VSR spojeného s další odbornou přípravou v československých organizacích," 15 March 1984.

79. MPSV, "Záznam z jednání mezi federálním ministerstvem práce a sociálních věcí ČSSR a oddělením péče o pracující velvyslanectvím VSR v Praze o problémech vzniklých v průběhu realizace mezivládní Dohody o dočasném zaměstnávání kvalifikovaných vietnamských pracovníků v čs. organizacích ze dne 27. listopadu 1980," dated 29 August 1986.

Vietnam. In its response, the Czech Labor Ministry noted that, among other things, "the Vietnamese workers have the right to receive the same welfare care as Czechoslovak citizens."[80]

The movement toward greater lenience notwithstanding, it is notable that the program's administrators put the responsibility for the care of prospective Vietnamese mothers entirely on the companies' shoulders, despite the fact that the government was the ultimate sponsor of the program. This was in line with the gradual decentralization of the program, which started in the mid-1980s, and as a part of which a large portion of the financial obligations related to the employment of Vietnamese workers was moved to the companies employing them. Starting in 1989, the enterprises were to cover the costs of Vietnamese workers' recruitment, language training, and travel to and from Czechoslovakia. The costs of the workers' welfare and healthcare were still to be covered by the Czechoslovak state, because "these workers participate in the creation of the state budget through the taxes they pay."[81] These measures were supposed to ensure that "only the companies that create sufficient resources will be able to employ foreign workers." Since 1989 was designated as the transition year, and in November of that year the regime collapsed, the new system was never fully implemented.[82]

Nevertheless, it is evident that it was an attempt to insert more market-based principles into the system without forsaking the state's commitment to securing a certain level of welfare and healthcare for the foreign workers. However, motherhood was still largely exempted from this commitment. The document that outlined these planned changes also emphasized the need to achieve a "significant decrease in the number of deliveries by Vietnamese citizens," and it pointed out again—in contrast to the statements communicated directly to the Vietnamese representatives—that Czechoslovak authorities would "strictly insist on speedy departures of pregnant women."

The Vietnamese government, for its part, insisted on discussing pregnancy within the framework of labor rights for its workers, on a par with other issues it saw as important for improving their working conditions in Czechoslovakia. Accordingly, Vietnamese representatives pushed for this right during official negotiations. Being at first bluntly rebuffed by Czechoslovak officials, and later offered a "Solomonic" solution, the Vietnamese Embassy seems to have adopted the tactic of non-responsiveness and "sluggishness." It would either fail to react when asked by the Czechoslovak Labor Ministry to initiate the administrative proceedings necessary for worker deportations or, when it did respond, it used a process that the Czechoslovak officials found unbearably protracted. The Czechoslovak Labor Ministry commented on the cases of pregnant Vietnamese workers who failed to show up at the airport: "The

80. MPSV, letter from Miloš Brunclík, JUDr, the head of the Foreign Workers' Secretariat at the Czech Labor Ministry, to Sklounion, dated 29 March 1987.

81. NA, "Zpráva o současném stavu odborné přípravy a dočasného zaměstnávání zahraničních občanů v československých organizacích a o výhledu této spolupráce do roku 1990."

82. On changes in the Czechoslovak economy, see Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy 1948–1988*; Judy Batt, *Economic Reform and Political Change in Eastern Europe: A Comparison of the Czechoslovak and Hungarian Experiences* (New York, 1988).

[Vietnamese] group leaders do not report these cases. And even when they do, the [Vietnamese Embassy's] Department for Workers' Care does not follow through in the appropriate way."[83] Another report noted with some exasperation, "Motions [for deportation] are oftentimes supported even by the leaders of the Vietnamese groups. However, the embassy, following the order given by the new ambassador, significantly expanded the departure administration, which protracts the proceedings in deportation cases, and, as a result, the deportations lose their pedagogical effects, or else they actually end up dragging out the conflict situation in the factory."[84] A later report explained that the embassy would not simplify its procedures, because many Vietnamese citizens who had been forced to return to Vietnam on medical grounds lodged complaints with the country's highest officials, objecting to the "incorrect and irresponsible procedures used by the employees of the Vietnamese Embassy in Czechoslovakia . . . [and] feeling that they had been wronged by being forced to return to the SRV."[85] Thus, the embassy's "sluggishness" was in part a response to political pressures from the home country which stemmed precisely from the fact that many Vietnamese workers perceived the orders to return home on medical grounds as being in fact cases of unfair disciplinary measures. The "sluggishness" was also a means of exerting pressure on the Czechoslovak officials and thus an attempt to force them to yield to the demands that they had originally rejected at the negotiating table. This pressure was effective to the extent that it contributed to the relaxing of the initial, uncompromising insistence on immediate departures for all pregnant Vietnamese workers. However, it was not enough to fundamentally change the Czechoslovak state's treatment of pregnant Vietnamese workers, as, by 1989, the state was in the process of redrawing the limits of its commitments as the ultimate provider of care.

The issue of welfare policies was of outmost importance to the former socialist states of central and eastern Europe. While the regimes' economic performances could be, and were, questioned by their citizens, the states were able to make a credible case for their welfare policies. The shaming of the most prominent enemy, the United States, through images of the unemployed and homeless, was undoubtedly part of the Czechoslovak state's propaganda. But it was propaganda at its best: the claims may have been overwrought, but they ultimately corresponded to people's lived experiences. The ability of these states to secure a certain level of living standards for a vast majority of their citizens—to which their extensive welfare and healthcare systems were instrumental—was undeniable. The welfare policies, then, were the one basis on which these states could rest their legitimacy securely. This is, of course, not to suggest that those policies were without shortcomings; they certainly were not. Nonetheless, in this regard, these states did largely deliver on their socialist commitments, even if imperfectly.

However, socialist commitments were not the only commitments these

83. "Problémy se zaměstnáváním vietnamských pracovníků."

84. NA, "Informace o některých incidentech vietnamských pracujících v ČSSR" (1982).

85. "Zabezpečení odjezdů."

states made. They had also committed to practicing socialist internationalism. In this article, I have juxtaposed the socialist commitments of one of these states, Czechoslovakia, with its internationalist commitments and shown how the two were paradoxically connected. It might be tempting to interpret the material presented here through a dichotomous lens and suggest that while the Czechoslovak state took care of "its" workers, it left out the Vietnamese. That, however, would be imprecise and incorrect. Throughout their stays, Vietnamese citizens, regardless of whether they arrived in 1968 or 1988, enjoyed almost all benefits available to Czechoslovak citizens while in the country. This is particularly apparent in the area of healthcare, which included not only acute treatment but also preventative medicine. However, the Czechoslovak state's commitment to equality for the "workers of the world" broke down when it came to pregnancy and motherhood. The Czechoslovak state operated in regard to Vietnamese female workers with many of the same gender stereotypes it applied to its female citizens; moreover, it did so with a quasi-colonial tinge, which grew out of its conceptualization of the program as a socialist civilizing mission of sorts.[86] As a result, in its practical steps it treated the workers' pregnancies as part medical issue and part disciplinary infringement and insisted on speedy departures of pregnant Vietnamese women. Unquestionably, an important reason for this policy was economic—in 1987, for instance, the Czechoslovak state paid 263,000 Kčs for sixty-one deliveries by Vietnamese women, and the costs of the temporary placement of twenty-five of these children in *kojenecké ústavy* (infant homes) came to another 1.2 million Kčs.[87] Yet the financial burden does not fully explain this reluctance, since the Czechoslovak state was consistently generous when it came to Vietnamese workers' healthcare in general. In other words, it is not that the Czechoslovak state would have entirely excluded Vietnamese workers from its welfare provisions—as a matter of fact, when it came to their health while in the country, the government was as generous as it possibly could have been. The point is that it drew the line precisely here: including the benefits related to the workers' participation in the production process but excluding those related to reproduction. In other words, it privileged certain types of benefits, namely those directly relevant to productive labor, over other kinds of benefits, especially those relevant to reproductive labor.

To understand why that was so, we need to remember that the Czechoslovak state's financial concerns were about both the raw "bottom line" and, due to the exigencies of a state socialist economy, labor shortages. Generous maternity leave policies inevitably led to the removal of some women from the productive sphere. Indeed, in Hungary the removal of women from the workforce was actually an intended effect of the extended maternity leaves "at a time when the introduction of economic reforms was expected to result in a decreased demand for labor."[88] The effect was the same in Czechoslova-

86. See Alena Alamgir, "Race Is Elsewhere: State-Socialist Ideology and the Racialisation of Vietnamese Workers in Czechoslovakia." *Race & Class* 54, no. 4 (April 2013): 67–85.

87. "Zpráva o současném stavu odborné přípravy."

88. Goven, *The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism*, 14. Haney makes a similar point in *Inventing the Needy*, 94.

kia, but, in the absence of reforms (until the late 1980s) that would have led to (concerns over) a labor surplus, this meant that the long maternity leaves only exacerbated the already dire labor shortage. While the Vietnamese workers, or even all foreign workers in Czechoslovakia—at the end of 1988, there were 28,955 Vietnamese workers, 8,031 Cubans, and 4,950 Poles—could not have replaced all female citizens on maternity leaves (there were 132,667 live births in the country in that same year), foreign workers were certainly instrumental to mitigating labor shortages.[89] If we use the above figures as the basis for a crude estimate, foreign workers "replaced" about one-third of new mothers going on maternity leave. They also, through the taxes they paid, contributed to the generous benefits these women, and by extension Czechoslovak families, received from the state. Indeed, one of the first documents in which a pure contract-worker model of the program was fully articulated, in 1976, did not present the potential financial gains from Vietnamese workers' labor as the rationale for the proposal. Instead, it put forth the opportunity for the Czechoslovak economy to "gain labor forces for preferred engineering companies [*preferovaných strojírenských závodů*] and construction companies" as the primary rationale.[90] Certainly, the phrasing was in part attributable to the political unacceptability of the concept of "profit" (instead, the report talked about "economic acceptability" [*ekonomická přijatelnost*]); nonetheless, the fact that the employment of Vietnamese workers would help address the labor shortage was at least as important a consideration as the financial gains motive, if not more. Conceived in this way, then, it makes sense that the Czechoslovak state was ready to provide foreign workers with healthcare benefits, but it privileged those benefits directly relevant to workers' capacity as producing entities. This means that although the import of Vietnamese workers was supposed to ease the fundamental tension at the core of the Czechoslovak political-economy system between the competing imperatives of production and fertility concerns, the program ultimately ended up reflecting and replicating that same tension.

This approach was also part of the redefinition that the project underwent in the 1980s, which transformed it essentially into a market exchange between the two governments. It is perhaps telling that in my archival research, as of this writing, I have not yet come across any balance or budget sheets related to the 1960s wave of praktikanti (only estimates of overall costs). This is not to say that there weren't any—there surely were—but it does suggest that the question of profit-versus-loss was rather marginal at this time and

89. The Cuban program, which never included the apprenticeship model, was similar to the 1980s stage of the Vietnamese program, but it was far more modest in scope. In the Czech part of the federation, the numbers were comparable only in the early 1980s: 1980, 3,529 Vietnamese workers, 4,304 Cubans; 1981, 7,477 Vietnamese, 3,987 Cubans; 1982, 21,314 Vietnamese, 4,241 Cubans; 1983, 22,446 Vietnamese, 3,737 Cubans; 1988, 24,073 Vietnamese, 9,429 Cubans. MPSV, "Přehled o zaměstnávání zahraničních občanů—rok 1988 (bez učňů)." For the number of live births in the country in 1988, see the Czech Statistical Office, *Czech Demographic Handbook 2007*, at www.czso.cz/csu/2008edicniplan.nsf/engt/24003E05E3/$File/4032080106a.pdf (last accessed 6 September 2013).

90. NA, "Informace o možnostech zaměstnávání vietnamských občanů v ČSSR a návrh dalšího postupu," received by the *Úřad předsednictva vlády* on 7 April 1976.

probably handled by lowly technocrats rather than the program's main administrators. By contrast, among the documents from 1970s wave, carefully elaborated balance and budget sheets were abundant and efforts at economizing evident. But ultimately, the sense of internationalist duty trumped the actuarial conclusions, and projects were given a green light regardless of their expected economic disadvantageousness. In the 1980s, however, economic "acceptability," along with the feverish efforts to plug the holes in the labor market, became the cardinal rule. As part of this shift, the Czechoslovak state started to price individual Vietnamese workers. The pricing included a process whereby various welfare benefits that the state provided to Czechoslovak citizens were translated into a pecuniary figure to be paid to the Vietnamese state per each "borrowed" worker. Ironically, by pricing the welfare of Vietnamese and Czechoslovak citizens differently, this figure dramatized the very economic disparity between the two countries that the program, as it had originally been conceived, was supposed to help erase.

The Vietnamese state consented to becoming a contracting party in an essentially market-like relationship—indeed, according to a Vietnamese former official, it did not see the market-like nature of the relationship as a problem but rather the fact that its terms were not as advantageous as the Vietnamese would have liked.[91] In doing so, the only recourse it had left was direct and indirect pressure to obtain at least some concessions from the Czechoslovak state and thus ameliorate the situation of its workers. This effort was only moderately successful in regard to the issue of pregnancies, but in other areas—notably, the transfer of Vietnamese workers out of agricultural companies, for example—the gains were far greater. The Vietnamese state, then, stood up for its workers' labor rights, and in that sense it followed much more closely the precepts of socialist ideology than its Czechoslovak counterpart. Ironically, however, it did so within an institutional and discursive framework reminiscent of the allegedly "overthrown" capitalist system.[92]

91. Interview with the author, 15 April 2011, Hanoi.

92. After the demise of state socialism, government resolution 274/1990 invalidated the 1980 treaty and its amendments. The two governments agreed that the companies would do their best to keep Vietnamese workers employed until the completion of their contracts, and if that was impossible, find them other jobs or, if workers had less than five months left on their contracts, offer a five-month severance payment. MPSV, "Zpráva o výsledku jednání delegace federálního ministertva práce a sociálních věcí ve Vietnamu," presented by Labor Minister Petr Miller at the meeting of the government on 23 October 1990. Many of the laid-off Vietnamese workers promptly started their own small businesses, mainly trading in cheap clothing and electronics—something many of them had already done on the side, somewhat clandestinely, during socialism, thus becoming the unsung harbingers of Czech and Slovak capitalism. Many Czech Vietnamese continue to be involved in this trade today, albeit in somewhat different forms. For research on Vietnamese communities living in the Czech Republic today, see, e.g., Ondřej Hofírek and Michal Nekorjak, "Od pásu ke stánku—a zpět? Proměny ekonomických aktivit Vietnamců v České republice," in Robert Trbola and Miroslava Rákoczyová, eds., *Vybrané aspekty života cizinců v české republice* (Prague, 2010), 77–94; Stanislav Brouček, *Aktuální problémy adaptace vietnamského etnika v ČR* (2003), at www.cizinci.cz/clanek.php?lg=1&id=107 (last accessed 6 September 2013); Šárka Martínková, *Vietnamská menšina v Praze* (master's thesis, Prague, 2003); Veronika Kahlerová, *Vietnamská menšina v Plzni* (master's thesis, Pilsen, 2002).