



**MELISSA FEINBERG**

Rutgers University

**“Is It Democracy If The Husband Makes Decisions Autocratically?”  
Gender, Citizenship and the Meaning of Democracy  
in Interwar Czechoslovakia**

This talk will examine debates over gender and citizenship in interwar Czechoslovakia and put these debates into the wider East-Central European context. It will concentrate on intersections between the private and public realm, as in family and marriage law. It will argue that debates over women's rights in the Czech lands stemmed from fundamental disagreements over the meaning of democracy and its ties to the Czech nation. The Washington Declaration claimed that Czechoslovak women would be made equal to men socially, culturally and politically. Yet, while most Czechs and Slovaks agreed that women should be allowed the right to vote, many were wary of a more radical approach to gender equality. Czech feminist activists claimed that a truly democratic state needed to respect the ideal of equality in all areas of the law. Their arguments, however, met with intense resistance from those who insisted that removing a husband's legal status as the head of his household would destroy the fundamental basis of the family, creating a grave threat to the Czech nation.

FACULTY OF ARTS, CHARLES UNIVERSITY  
NÁM. J. PALACHA 1, PRAGUE 1 (ROOM 018)

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