

Kristen Ghodsee
Kateřina Lišková

Bumbling Idiots or Evil Masterminds? Challenging Cold War Stereotypes about Women, Sexuality and State Socialism

Abstract In academic writing, facts about the past generally require the citation of relevant sources unless the fact or idea is considered “common knowledge:” bits of information or dates upon which there is a wide scholarly consensus. This brief article reflects on the use of “common knowledge” claims in contemporary scholarship about women, families, and sexuality as experienced during 20th century, East European, state socialist regimes. We focus on several key stereotypes about the communist state and the situation of women that are often asserted in the scholarly literature, and argue that many of these ideas uncannily resemble American anti-communist propaganda. When contemporary scholars make claims about communist intrusions into the private sphere to effect social engineering or the inefficacy of state socialist mass organizations or communist efforts to break up the family or indoctrinate the young, they often do so without citation to previous sources or empirical evidence supporting their claims, thereby suggesting that such claims are “common knowledge.” We believe that those wishing to assert such claims should link these assertions to concrete originating sources, lest it turn out the “common knowledge” derives, in fact, from western Cold War rhetoric.

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There exists an interesting paradox in the way that contemporary Western scholars discuss the state socialist experiments in Eastern Europe during the 20th century. On the one hand, Americans laud themselves on winning the Cold War, having spent decades fighting proxy wars and spending billions of dollars to support communist containment policies across the globe (Leebaert 2002). The United States made Himalayan efforts to defeat Communism, and many American politicians credit these efforts with the demise of the Eastern Bloc, nurturing a spirit of self-congratulatory triumphalism, most famously captured when Francis Fukuyama declared liberal democracy and free market capitalism the “end of history” (Fukuyama 2006).

On the other hand, many Americans also want to argue that communism, and the command economic system in particular, contained inherent flaws

KRISTEN GHODSEE: Full Professor, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program, Bowdoin College, USA; kghodsee@bowdoin.edu.

KATEŘINA LIŠKOVÁ: Assistant Professor, Gender Studies Program, Department of Sociology, Masaryk University, Czech Republic; katerina@fss.muni.cz.

that doomed it to inevitable failure.¹ This line of argument posits that communist societies were inherently weak and unsustainable in the long run; they would have collapsed under the weight of their own inefficiencies. But if this is true, then why did the Americans expend so many resources to defeat them? Either the communist threat was real, offering a viable alternative to the free-market capitalism and liberal democracies of the West, or it sprung from unnatural and flawed assumptions about human nature, and all the West had to do was wait for it to implode on its own.

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A similar intellectual paradox often occurs in discussions of the situation of women and sexuality in state socialist regimes. As we will explore below, many scholars studying the situation of women and families during the state socialist era assert that the one-party state was omnipresent, invading every nook and crevice of the private sphere to socially engineer the new socialist man and woman. Through education and family policy, as well as through vast networks of agents and informants working for the state security services, the ordinary lives of individuals in communist regimes were pervaded with politics. The socialist state apparently intruded into the most intimate affairs of its citizens with a ruthless disregard for privacy in its quest to destroy vestiges of the bourgeois family and ensure sexual equality.

At the same time, scholars fault socialist states for their inability to live up to their promises regarding women's emancipation. Under state socialism, women still supposedly suffered continued discrimination and were victims of the notorious "double burden" of formal employment and household responsibilities. Although women were formally incorporated into the labor force, patriarchy continued to rule in the home (cf. Funk and Mueller 1993), a gender wage gap persisted (cf. Gal and Kligman 2000b), and few women occupied positions of political power within the highest echelons of the Communist Party (cf. Wolchik and Meyer 1986). If the power of the socialist state had penetrated so deeply into the contours of everyday life, however, wouldn't the communists have been more successful at shaping the gender identities of its citizens? How could patriarchy survive this onslaught of state interference? The omnipotence and omnipresence of the socialist state is belied by its own admitted failures.

How do these contradictions continue to persist in the scholarly literature on state socialism to the present day? In this brief reflection, we suggest that the perpetuation of uncritical Cold War stereotypes at least partially explains these rhetorical tensions. We focus on several key stereotypes about the communist state and the situation of women that are often asserted in the scholarly literature, and argue that many of these ideas uncannily resemble American anti-communist propaganda. When contemporary

1 See for instance, William J. Murray 2016.

scholars make claims about communist intrusions into the private sphere to effect social engineering or the inefficacy of state socialist mass organizations or communist efforts to break up the family or indoctrinate the young, they often do so without citation to previous sources or empirical evidence supporting their claims, thereby suggesting that such claims are “common knowledge.” We believe that those wishing to assert such claims should link these assertions to concrete originating sources lest it turn out the “common knowledge” derives, in fact, from western Cold War rhetoric.

In what follows, we will first discuss the politics of contemporary citation practice and the circumstances under which scholars should or should not cite sources for factual claims put forth in their published work. Then we will provide some representative quotes from contemporary scholarship on women’s issues under state socialism, all of which are assertions made with no citation to original research or other scholarly literature. For each of the stereotypes presented in this literature, we will attempt to suggest a source in American propaganda. Our key claim is that much of what we consider “common knowledge” about state socialist regimes today, especially with regard to the politics of women, sexuality and the family, can be traced back to anti-communist rhetoric from as early as the late-1940s. But Western Cold War propaganda did not end with the Cold War; it continues to inform our shared knowledge as unquestioned assumptions, which influences the way contemporary scholars continue to write about the socialist past.

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Two caveats must precede our discussion of these issues. First, in an article of this short length we cannot trace the path by which U.S. anti-Soviet propaganda in the 1950s and 1960s became common knowledge about the state socialist experience in the second decade of the 21st century. Surely, scholars conducted empirical scholarship in the intervening period, and this scholarship either confirmed, denied, or complicated these stereotypes, depending on the era and the political agendas of the researchers conducting it. Some scholarship has been delegitimized (especially scholarship produced during the Cold War in the Eastern Bloc), while other studies (particularly those conducted by Western researchers) continue to exert an influence on contemporary debates. A genealogical study of present-day stereotypes about socialism requires a book length study, and we hope that this short reflection will be a catalyst for future research.

Second, in providing specific examples of uncited assertions in contemporary scholarship, we have no intention of mounting ad hominem attacks on our colleagues and friends. We understand perfectly well the political economy of scholarly production in the neoliberal university where aspiring academics must publish or perish. Given the limited time and resources available for our research, we all (the present authors included) make assertions in our published writing, particularly when we assume a scholarly consensus around

a particular truth claim. But occasionally we need to stand back and examine these truth claims and the seeming scholarly consensus around them. Our intention is therefore not to call out or criticize any particular authors, but rather to demonstrate the ubiquity of these types of claims, and to ask why editors and peer reviewers do not ask for substantiation when it comes to making stereotypically negative assertions about the communist era. By exposing the pervasiveness of this practice, we hope to re-open a debate about knowledge production in the post-Cold-War era.

What counts as “common knowledge” in general?

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Almost all scholars who conduct historical or social scientific research on the state socialist regimes in Eastern Europe receive some form of academic training in the university where professors teach the rules regarding citation practice as early as undergraduate school. Making assertions about “common knowledge” is a common practice in academic writing, but specific rules govern its use. Since we are focusing on English language scholarship published in scholarly books or journals purporting to uphold academic standards of impartiality and peer-review, we focus on the Anglo-American tradition of how to determine what sorts of knowledge require no citation. For example, consider these instructions from Princeton University:

[I]f you use a piece of information discovered by another scholar in the course of his or her own research, you must cite your source. But if the fact or information is generally well known and accepted—for example, that Woodrow Wilson served as president of both Princeton University and the United States, or that Avogadro’s number is 6.02×10^{23} —you do not need to cite a source. Note that facts are different from ideas: facts may not need to be cited, whereas ideas must always be cited. Deciding which facts or pieces of information require citation and which are common knowledge, and thus do not require citation, isn’t always easy. For example, finding the same fact or piece of information in multiple sources doesn’t necessarily mean that it counts as common knowledge...when in doubt, cite. (Princeton, “When to”)

This passage makes clear that the key exception for not citing a source for a piece of information is when it is considered “common knowledge,” such as a basic fact about who is president or a mathematical concept. In a separate essay on “Not-So-Common Knowledge,” Princeton University clearly states that, “the belief that an idea or fact may be ‘common knowledge’ is no reason not to cite your source” (Princeton, “Not so”). Also worth noting is the idea that a fact does not become “common knowledge” just because it appears in multiple sources. So when does a bit of information become so incontrovertible that asserting it as a statement of fact requires no citation to a source? The Massachusetts Institute of Technology publishes

a handbook on academic integrity where it discusses the issue of “What is Common Knowledge?”

Broadly speaking, common knowledge refers to information that the average, educated reader would accept as reliable without having to look it up. This includes:

Information that most people know, such as that water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit or that Barack Obama was the first American of mixed race to be elected president.

Information shared by a cultural or national group, such as the names of famous heroes or events in the nation’s history that are remembered and celebrated.

Knowledge shared by members of a certain field, such as the fact that the necessary condition for diffraction of radiation of wavelength from a crystalline solid is given by Bragg’s law.

However, what may be common knowledge in one culture, nation, academic discipline or peer group may not be common knowledge in another. (MIT)

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With these definitions in mind, we now turn to the use of “common knowledge” when it comes to discussions of women’s rights and families under the state socialist regimes of the 20th century.

What counts as “common knowledge” about 20th century communism in Eastern Europe

The scholars we will cite in the following paragraphs are well-known figures in the field who have produced fascinating and often foundational research. Yet, when it comes to making generalized claims, they sometimes slip in “common knowledge” assertions, and occasionally these assertions contradict their very own research. It is as if the “common knowledge” about communism somehow trumps the empirical research using demonstrable sources. We believe that this “common knowledge” unconsciously shapes the scholarly debates because scholars are wary to challenge certain ideas about communism that “everyone” supposedly shares.

One of the most striking things about reading post-Cold War scholarship on women’s issues in Eastern Europe is how often socialist “totalitarian” states are judged by a different yardstick than contemporary “free and democratic” states, even when they engage in the same actions. Implicitly (and too often explicitly, as the quotes below will demonstrate) scholars assert as common knowledge that everything that happened during state socialism (i.e. what “the communists” did) was wrong, or motivated by the wrong reasons, or at least suspicious of some wrongdoing. “The Communists” (used almost always in the plural) or “the Communist state” or “the socialist state” is portrayed as an “evil mastermind” capable of manipulating the population for its own ends.

Moreover, scholars ignore differences among various communist states to make broad, unsubstantiated generalizations, homogenizing all of the experiences of different state socialist regimes. And even when the state's supposed "manipulations" resulted in positive outcomes for women, for example, the impure motives of the communist state undermined its recognized achievements. Consider the following claims about the intrusiveness of all socialist/communist states:

1. [T]he socialist state considered emancipation less an end in its own right than a means to achieve other goals, such as the mobilization of female labor force (Brunnbauer 2009: 79).
2. Communist states manipulated both men's and women's participation in wage work. But in the case of women, states also intruded significantly on reproductive lives, in a directly embodied manner (Gal 2000: 8).
3. In most of the communist states of East Central Europe, women were at first primarily defined as workers, a dramatic revision of pre-war imaginings. This was part of the broader commitment to the homogenization and equalization of the populace that intended to eliminate all social distinctions, including gender, in order to construct the 'new socialist man' (Gal 2000: 47).
4. Scholars agree, nevertheless, on some of the broad features of socialist gender orders. There was an attempt to erase gender difference (along with ethnic and class difference), to create socially atomized individuals directly dependent on a paternalist state (Gal and Kligman 2000a: 5).
5. While there were alternative gender constructions being produced, most importantly in the family, the village and the workplace, private lives were often narrowly circumscribed, and privacy was a rare luxury in crowded and collectivized living (Johnson and Robinson 2006: 2).
6. To encourage women's entry into the labor force, the government promoted the establishment of child-care facilities and the socialization of household chores. A welcome side effect of these policies – from the point of view of the state – was that control over the household and children would be assumed by the state (Brunnbauer 2009: 83).

These six quotes, taken from four different books published in 2000, 2006, and 2009, appear without citations to document the source of the claims, yet none of them meet the unambiguous definition of common knowledge. They constitute ideas rather than incontrovertible facts, and they are ideas with a very specific Cold War lineage. Furthermore, all of these quotes recognize some positive effects of state socialist policies to support women's

equality, but always in the same breath as they condemn the communist system more generally, as if these scholars feel that recognizing the positive always requires a restatement of the “common knowledge” about the negative aspects of all communist regimes. Quote number four even asserts that “Scholars agree,” but then provides no footnote or endnote for this claim, listing the scholars who make it. Who are these “agreeing scholars” and when, and within which contexts, did they produce their research? More importantly, how did the scholarly consensus emerge, at least within English language publishing, that generalized claims like these require no citation? These are important questions that might help us to understand the continued influence of Western Cold War anti-communist propaganda in contemporary academic writing.

One interesting experiment would be to try to find some earliest instances of the core ideas embedded in these quotes, e.g. that the “communist state” infiltrated the fabric of everyday life to “create socially atomized individuals,” “to erase gender differences,” or to intrude “significantly on reproductive lives.” In our quest for a genealogy of the “common knowledge” about communist families, we discovered the following quotes, which might serve as sources for truth claims about the invasive nature of the communist state:

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1. A communist government controls much more than the political, agricultural, and industrial activities of a country. It controls people's lives in many other ways... Communists limit the freedom, mold the thinking, and run the daily lives of the people they rule (*What you should know* 1962: 13).
2. The home, as communists see it, is a place where parents and senior members of the family play an important part in the training of the child in communist morality. Child care and training are only an extension of the activities of the Communist party, and the home is not considered to be the foundation of the society itself as it is generally considered in most non-communist areas. Women play a vital role in the working force, and much of the child's upbringing is delegated to the nursery school and other state institutions (Joint Committee 1962: 12).
3. The aim and object of Communism is always the same – complete control over the human mind and body, asleep and awake, in sickness and in health, from birth to death (Committee on Un-American Activities 1949: 35).
4. This is to tell you what the master minds of Communism have planned for your child in the name of ‘Education.’ They mean to take him from the nursery, put him in a uniform with a hammer and sickle flag in one hand and a gun in the other, and send him out to conquer the world (Committee on Un-American Activities 1949: 53).

The spirit of these latter quotes proves more hostile and direct than those of the hedged claims of the former collection of quotes, but the kernel of the idea of the pervasive intrusion of the communist state into the realm of private life underpins all of them. But it is the source of these latter quotes that intrigues: the United States government. The first quote comes from a 1962 textbook to teach American schoolchildren about communism, and the second derives from a special guide prepared for those teaching about communism in American junior highs and high schools. The third and fourth quotes come from a series of histrionic, anti-communist pamphlets prepared in 1949 by the United States House of Representatives Communist on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which laid the foundation for the McCarthy-era witch hunts. In all cases, no sources exist for this information about the goals and practices of communist states, but rather these statements originate directly from U.S. anti-communist propaganda. Thus, it could be argued that one source for the “common knowledge” asserted by contemporary scholars studying the histories of women and sexuality in state socialist countries is the U.S. government.

Other examples of these sorts of unsubstantiated claims can be seen with regard to the supposed slavish devotion of state socialist mass women’s organizations to the Communist Party and the socialist state. Despite the acknowledgement of many women-friendly policies that far exceeded those policies available to support women in the western democracies, many Western scholars portray East European attention to the woman question as “emancipation from above” and therefore somehow less legitimate than the emancipation from below supposedly found in the West. For example:

1. Female sociologists and party activists also urged the state to do more to reduce women’s household duties. But their influence was marginal; the Bulgarian Communists subscribed to the view that the woman’s question was part of the class question and, therefore, solved with the advent of socialism.... This granted a highly circumscribed form of autonomy to ‘organized women’, rather than constituting an independent ‘women’s movement’. The issues taken up by organized women under communism included labour force participation and work-life balance, equality in family and partnership relations, women’s living standards and education, and, most of all, childcare (Brunnbauer 2009: 171).
2. The official women’s organisations – the only such organisations permitted under state socialist rule – were... subordinated to, and in effect mere executive instruments of, government policy (Einhorn 2010: 55).
3. While the East German state related to its female citizens and their bodies in terms of the heterosexist norms of motherhood and marriage, it also enforced an ideology of gender equality. This was not

equality based on demands triggered by massive social movements, but planned equality determined by state bureaucrats, and practices introduced and maintained through state-funded social institutions. In addition to guaranteed day care and formal laws that guaranteed equal pay for equal work and equality within the family, there was also the right to abortion without restriction and the right to divorce (Partridge 2012: 46).

Once again, all three statements appear in published books from 2009, 2010, and 2012 with no citation, thereby imbuing these claims with the status of “common knowledge.” (It is also interesting to note that the final sentences of the first and third quotes contradict the stereotype of evil communists proposed in the preceding sentences.) But what is the source of these claims, and can they also be tracked back to American anti-communist propaganda from the early Cold War? In the specific case of state socialist women’s organizations, the Dutch historian Francisca de Haan has argued that the contemporary historiography of international women’s movements has been heavily influenced by Cold War stereotypes, particularly with regard to the leftist Women’s International Democratic Federation and its American affiliate, The Congress of American Women (CAW) (Haan 2010: 548). During the McCarthy era, many American politicians considered women’s organizations as “communist front organizations.” In the political imagination of the American anti-communists (many who were conservative white men) women’s organizations sponsored by or linked to socialist states merely used women’s issues as a ruse to promote communist ideas. For example, a 1949 HUAC report discussing the WIDF and the CAW opined that:

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The purpose of these organizations is not to deal primarily with women’s problems, as such, but rather to serve as a specialized arm of Soviet political warfare in the current ‘peace’ campaign to disarm and demobilize the United States and democratic nations generally, in order to render them helpless in the face of the Communist drive for world conquest... [Their] real aims are discreetly hidden behind a smoke screen of such attractive idealistic bait as equal rights for women ‘in all aspects of political, economic, legal, cultural, and social life,’ the extension of educational and health benefits, [and] child care.... (Committee on Un-American Activities 1949: 1–3).

Anti-communists promoting the idea that state-based or state-sponsored women’s organizations worked (always and exclusively) for their sponsors may underpin the persistent stereotypes that state-based organizations lack legitimacy in their efforts to represent citizen opinion, despite growing bodies of evidence to the contrary (cf. Zheng 2005: 519; Zheng 2010; Ghodsee 2014). Arguments about the unquestioning devotion of the CAW and the WIDF to Moscow resulted in the disbanding of the former (Weigand 2002) and the successful removal of the United Nations consultative status

of the latter (Haan 2012). Moreover, U.S.-based international women's organizations that were sponsored by or cooperated with the U.S. government or the CIA were held to a different standard than state socialist women's organizations because the former were ostensibly independent, non-governmental organizations (Laville 2002: 113). There exists much rhetorical slight of hand when it comes to the stereotypes about state socialist women's organizations, and once again what passes as uncited "common knowledge" in the contemporary scholarship may be traced back to anti-communist propaganda from the early Cold War.

Another stereotype pervading contemporary scholarship on state socialist countries in Eastern Europe claims that communists were asexual prudes that suppressed the natural flourishing and variation of human sexuality. Once again, we find a plethora of statements asserted with no citation to relevant studies. For example:

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1. Puritanism was a striking feature of orthodox Marxism. Marxism was similar to traditional Christian position on sexual matters, while diametrically opposed to all other teachings (Stloukal et al. 1999: 28).
2. [S]tate-socialist morals celebrated a specifically asexual state-socialist reproduction i.e., the party-statebuilding capacities of labour-force reproduction and not pleasure... As state-socialist morals celebrated a specifically asexual socialist reproduction, sexuality was delegated to social invisibility and surrounded by hypocrisy (Takács 2015: 165, 174).
3. Puritanism that placed a taboo on discussion or even recognition of sexuality was a striking trademark of state socialism, although there are differences between the East Central states (Funk and Mueller 1993: 11).

Finally, a passage in the *The Routledge History of Women in Europe Since 1700* also argues that, "interwar communist discussions of sexual liberation and search for pleasure by women were replaced by a communist Puritanism that focused on reproductive sexuality" (Ana Clark in Simonton 2006: 82). It cites Susan Gal as the source of the information, but a quick glance at Gal's 2000 text shows that she cited no source for her own claim (Gal 2000: 54). Thus, statements about the supposed Puritanism of the communists in sexual matters are asserted as "common knowledge," and once again in contradiction to burgeoning bodies of scholarship demonstrating that state socialist citizens had robust and fulfilling sexual lives (cf. Herzog 2005: 184–219; McLellan 2011; Pence and Betts 2008; Spector and Herzog 2012; Renkin and Kościńska 2016; Lišková 2016) .

While it is certainly true that during the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union, the state reversed many of the progressive policies of early revolutionary years, generalizations about sexuality cannot be made about all socialist

countries in all historical eras. So where might we find a source for these stereotypes? Consider, for instance, this quote from a 1956 article in the *New York Times* on “S-x in the Soviet Union.” The author is discussing the discomfort that two Russian visitors expressed after being taken to an American strip club.

[F]or those who know anything about Russian men and their attitude toward Sex with a capital S – in other words the public exploitation of feminine attractiveness – this is not surprising at all. In their own culture Russians encounter this only very rarely. In its presence they are quite uncomfortable and don’t know how to react...I am not implying, of course, that Russians are by any means sexless beings. They have a full complement of normal human impulses and express them. The Russian birth rate is not so high as it used to be but it is still high enough. I am talking here only about manifestations of sex in public. And in this respect Russians can be called prudes (Whitney 1956: SM6)

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“Common knowledge” about Soviet prudes was still alive and well when state socialism was nearing its end. In 1989, Associated Press published a piece about the need for glasnost to reach Soviet bedrooms. AP referred to Soviets as a “nation known for its squeamishness about sex” and continued:

Although the social chill on discussing sex is thawing a bit, sex is still a taboo topic in a country known for its puritanism, where even the Russian language lacks a polite word for love-making (Associated Press 1989).

This 1989 AP article echoes the same language as the 1956 *New York Times* piece quoted above. There, the author also asserted that the Russians were linguistically poor when it comes to sexuality:

There is a Russian word which means “sexual” in an anatomical sense but none meaning what the Anglo-American word “sexy” means. And the Russians, strangely enough, have not even done in this case what they usually do when they lack a native word – borrowed one from abroad. They are left without any way to express the concept (Whitney 1956: SM6).

The idea that not having a word for something means that that thing does not exist, *period*, is suspect. According to this logic, English-speaking people do not “have” *the day after tomorrow* (but Czechs do, it is *pozítří*), while Czechs do not “have” *toes* (Czech expression is *prsty na noze*, literally fingers on foot). In Bulgarian, there is a specific word to denote the relationship between two men who are married to sisters (*badzhanatsi*), where there exists no similar term in English. But it would be absurd to assert on this basis that there exists no relationship between men who married sisters.

Faulty logic notwithstanding, the stereotypes about Soviet prudishness and unsexiness long outlived Cold War. The journalistic assertions of Cold War-era journalists at the *New York Times* become the basis of future claims of future

journalists writing for the post-Cold War *New York Times*. For example in a 2010, the *New York Times* reasserted the idea of Soviet sexual prudishness, unsexy communist women, and the entire society, in public as well as in private, as devoid of sex:

Two decades after government-imposed prudishness ended with the Soviet collapse, Russians still shy away from embracing European-style sexual mores...Sure, sexual innuendo is commonplace: on television and in glossy magazines and in the provocative attire of women on the streets. Advertisements with busty models have long replaced posters of square-jawed women scything wheat... The Soviet government tried to drive all talk of sex under the covers, leaving public life effectively neutered. A lack of private space, especially in the communal apartments of major cities, limited access to sexual encounters even more (Schwartz 2010).

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Although journalists are not always required to cite their sources, and cannot be held to the same standards as scholars, this quote demonstrates the continuity of the idea of sexless Soviets from the post-Stalinist times through the perestroika era and until the present day. Scholars writing about sexuality during state socialism should be more attentive to the lived realities of communism and how it changed over time and space as it was re-negotiated by each society's key social actors (experts such as doctors or psychologists, representatives of the government, journalists, etc.). The trope of communist "puritanism" gets repeated in the scholarship without citation because it has attained the status of "common knowledge" in part due to articles such as those published in the *New York Times*. But this common knowledge is the specific product of American journalism, and should be acknowledged as such.

Conclusion

Painting communists as evil masterminds who shrunk people's private lives, crippled their sexuality and bossed women and their organizations around is at odds with representing the same communists as bumbling idiots who spoiled everything they touched and could not get anything right. This image is not only inconsistent; it is too simplistic. Interestingly, it is not only more recent research that brings out a more complex picture. Frequently, the very work of the scholars we cited shows nuanced realities that defy sweeping gestures of the "communists as masterminds and idiots" trope. Could it be that scholarly authors feel compelled to acknowledge the "common knowledge" about communist states in order to make their work appear ideologically neutral? Or is it that the "truths" they absorbed as young people raised in Western cultures of pervasive anti-communism creep into their scholarship decades later? Would similarly overreaching or indiscriminate statements about our contemporary times be accepted in a peer-review process?

Histories of women and sexuality in state socialist countries require careful nuance and open minded scholarship unburdened by the stereotypes of the past. What we must avoid are preconceived notions attributing this or that state action to “ideology” or “manipulation.” All states actions are contextual, which means they might stem from socialist ideals, capitalist ideals, Islamist ideals, or any others. The actions of all states can be called “ideological” or “manipulative.” But contemporary scholars do not usually use these terms when speaking about Western states. Moreover, some labels carry negative connotations; the label “state socialist ideology” is far from neutral. Choosing words like “intrusion”, or phrases like “state control over people’s lives” implies that socialist states were guilty of something that other states are supposedly free of. But is it possible for states to operate free from ideology? Don’t states always impose control over people’s lives (through taxation, laws, social policies, military service, etc.)? It is not only communist states that deploy ideological justifications for their actions.

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Thus, we believe that preconceived notions about communism and life within it continue to cloud our collective scholarly judgments. Yet the ways we think about the past are vital: not only so that we don’t make the same mistakes, but so we can think more creatively about the future. If in writing about a period that presented an alternate vision of modernity we resort to unsubstantiated clichés, we deprive ourselves of possibilities to challenge and change the world we live in today.

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Kristen Ghodsee
Kateřina Lišková

Nespretni idioti ili zli planeri? Propitivanje hladnoratovskih stereotipa o ženama, seksualnosti i državnom socijalizmu

Sažetak

U akademskim tekstovima navođenje činjenica o prošlosti u načelu podrazumeva i navođenje relevantnih izvora, osim kada se činjenica ili ideja može tretirati kao „opšte mesto“: tada govorimo o podacima ili datumima o kojima među naučnicima postoji široki konsenzus. Ovaj kratki članak razmatra upotrebu „opštih mesta“ u savremenim radovima o ženama, porodici i seksualnosti i načinu na koji su oni iskušavani u istočnoevropskim režimima državnog socijalizma tokom 20. veka. Usredsređujemo se na nekoliko ključnih stereotipa o komunističkoj državi i ženama koji se mogu naći u naučnoj literaturi, i tvrdimo da te ideje neobično podsećaju na američku antikomunističku propagandu. Kada savremeni naučnici i naučnice iznose tvrdnje o tome da su se komunisti mešali u privatnu sferu da bi sproveli društveni inženjering, ili o nedelotvornosti masovnih organizacija u državnom socijalizmu, ili o komunističkim nastojanjima da razore porodicu ili indoktriniraju mlade, oni to često čine ne navodeći ranije izvore ili empirijska svedočanstva kojima bi se potkrepile njihove tvrdnje, čime se sugerise da takvi iskazi spadaju u domen „opštih mesta“. Verujemo da svi koji iznose takve tvrdnje treba da ih dovedu u vezu s konkretnim izvorima, kako se ne bi pokazalo da je izvor tih „opšta mesta“ zapravo zapadnjačka hladnoratovska retorika.

Ključne reči: Hladni rat, opšta mesta, državni socijalizam, antikomunizam, žene, porodica, rod, seksualnost, Istočna Evropa, komunizam