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Introduction: Postcolonial studies and postsocialism in Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The introduction to this special section explores the ways in which postcolonial studies contribute a deeper understanding of postsocialist change in Central and Eastern Europe. Since the collapse of socialism, anthropological and other social science studies of Eastern Europe have highlighted deep divides between “East” and “West” and drawn attention to the ways in which socialist practices persist into the postsocialist period. We seek to move beyond discourses of the East/West divide by examining the postsocialist context through the lens of postcolonial studies. We look at four aspects of postcolonial studies and explore their relevance for understanding postsocialist Eastern Europe: orientalism, nation and identity, hybridity, and voice. These themes are particular salient from the perspective of gender and sexuality, key concepts through which both postcolonialism and postsocialism can be understood. We thus pay particular attention to the exchange of ideas between East/West, local/global, and national/international arenas.

Keywords

Eastern Europe; gender; postcolonial studies; postsocialism

Since the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, observers of the region have attempted to understand the roots and direction of the transformations. European Union expansion to include some but not all postsocialist countries has raised further questions about how to define the region: Are countries in “Eastern Europe” bound through shared and unique cultural, political, and economic traditions that should be analyzed together in “area studies” (Metzo and Cash 2006)? Is the conceptualization of Eastern Europe as different from the West based on stereotyped visions of socialist life rooted in Cold War tropes, and therefore demanding interrogation and redefinition (Berdahl 1999)? Or does the interpretation of Eastern Europe as different from Western Europe and North America have deeper historic roots, a process of “othering” that links Eastern Europe to Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America (Buchowski 2006)?

These perspectives raise questions about identity and the politics of representation in Eastern Europe vis-à-vis the West. The last perspective in particular draws parallels between postsocialism and postcolonialism, highlighting social, political, and economic inequalities between East and West, and the ways in which conceptualizations of East and West are mutually constituted. This special section seeks to move beyond discourses of East/West, though not completely abandon them, by exploring the relevance of postcolonial studies for postsocialist contexts. The articles in this section were first presented at the biennial conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, held in Bristol in

September 2006. The panel in which these papers originated—“Westernising gender regimes? Discourses and practices of gender and sexuality in Eastern Europe”—sought to understand the ways culturally constructed “Others” draw on globally circulating discourses and local histories to react to, resist, and define the terms of their engagement with the new contexts that have arisen with socialism's demise. Importantly, the aim of this special section is not to assert that Central and Eastern European countries were colonized by Soviet Russia after World War II, as the edited volume *From Sovietology to postcoloniality: Poland and Ukraine from a postcolonial perspective* (Korek 2007) attempts to do. Rather, we suggest that “postsocialism” has been used as a geographic label, not an analytic category, in contrast to “postcolonialism,” which has a rich history as a theoretical paradigm.

We ask new questions about the postsocialist experience by drawing on insights from postcolonial studies. In particular, we focus on four themes central to postcolonial studies: orientalism, nation and identity, hybridity, and voice. Recognizing the centrality of gender and sexuality to colonial, postcolonial, socialist, and postsocialist projects, the articles collected in this special section explore these four themes through the lens of gender/sexuality. Interrogations about gender, particularly as they relate to debates about feminism, have formed key contributions to anthropological insights into postsocialist transformation (e.g., Gal and Kligman 2000a and 2000b). Moreover, the focus on issues of postsocialism and gender contributes to broader questions of concern to feminist scholarship, such as the question of power and agency. Like Verdery (1996: 19), we recognize the diversity of both the socialist and postsocialist experiences in Eastern Europe, but discuss them from a single analytic perspective in order to highlight new paths for exploring postsocialism as part of broader global phenomenon.

The collaborations that led to this special section were made possible by the increasing mobility of people and ideas following the Cold War. The same political circumstances that cause the flow of ideas (e.g., feminist ideology) shaping these articles also allow scholarly exchange and dialogue. Eastern European scholars increasingly demonstrate their ties with “Western” academia, such as increasingly publishing in English-language journals, conducting research in the West, and engaging in scholarly activities as part of European and American-based research teams. Westerners also have greater possibilities of conducting research in the East, no longer the targets of socialist-era secret police suspicions. Furthermore, according to Kideckel (1997: 138), much of Western anthropology conducted in socialist Eastern Europe focused on debunking Cold War stereotypes of life under socialism, produced in the Western press and academy. In particular, anthropology of socialism brought attention to local practices and heterogeneity that existed within centralized states. With the collapse of socialism, Western anthropologists could ask new questions about Eastern Europe that were not only responses to myths and stereotypes of life under socialism.

Moreover, scholars of the region are committed to incorporating the views of “native anthropologists” in order to produce responsible scholarship that respects the insights contributed by Eastern European ethnology and cultural studies (Skalnik 2002).¹ The marginalization of native anthropologists partly reflects a discipline-wide skepticism of native anthropology as less authentic than the “journey into otherness” that has defined the archetypal field-work experience (Bunzl 2004a). The concept of “native anthropology” stems from a critique of anthropology's colonial roots by repositioning its traditional objects of representations (“natives”) as active agents in ethnographic writing (Kuwayama 2003: 8). However, even though Western scholars have demonstrated a commitment to East/West academic dialogue, this trend is in its infancy, and the omission of Eastern European

¹A discipline called “anthropology” only appeared in Eastern Europe around the late 1980s.

scholars as contributors to the anthropology of their region is particularly glaring. For example, in a 2000 review of postsocialist anthropology (Wolfe 2000), Eastern European perspectives are conspicuously absent. This introduction discusses the four chosen themes in colonialism and postcolonialism as they can shed light on the processes and experiences of postsocialism, thereby linking the articles of this section together. I encourage readers to draw out parallels, contradictions, or limitations from their knowledge of other postsocialist countries, whether in Europe or elsewhere.

Orientalism

Postcolonial studies itself is a disparate field, broadly encompassing the experiences of living under colonial rule, struggles for freedom from foreign rule, what happens after a colonial power is overthrown, and questions of identity and representation in these contexts. Postcolonial studies offers ways of understanding how states are differentially positioned within a globalized world system and how power and economic and political inequalities—most often discussed in terms of North/South, East/West—create the terms through which each region and its people are defined. Edward Said (1978) defined the term “orientalism” as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 2003, quoted in El-Haj 2005: 540). It is the discursive practices through which the West constructs the East in both real and imagined terms, as monolithic, ahistorical, inherently antimodern, and unable to change (Buchowski 2006: 463; El-Haj 2005: 544). According to Said (1989: 212), “the histories, traditions, societies, texts of ‘others’ are seen either as responses to Western limitations—and therefore passive, dependent—or as domains of culture that belong mainly to ‘native’ elites.” Conceptualizing the “East” as existing outside history casts it as the West’s discursive Other, the antithesis of modernity (see Dirks 1992). Furthermore, Western discourses about the East are often portrayed as superior to the knowledge that those in the East have of themselves. The knowledge they do have is portrayed as “irrational, illogical, unscientific, unrealistic, and subjective” (Inden 1986: 408). Based on the assumption of the superior knowledge and expertise of the West over the East, the East becomes the domain into which projects of development, aid, and modernization are thrust (Inden 1986).

Verdery (1996) was one of the first anthropologists to explore the applicability of postcolonial studies to postsocialist contexts, while noting that both have addressed different kinds of questions. Postcolonial studies examines representations of “self” and “other,” and the Cold War was organized around dichotomies, not of “colonies” and “metropole,” but of “West” and “East.” These same dichotomies have been perpetuated in the postsocialist era, particularly through discussions about what essentially distinguishes Western democracy from the communist regimes of the Cold War era (Watson 2000). Verdery (2002) asks us to explore how the “West” and the “East” made and propagated images of one another, and for what purposes, including representations of socialism and capitalism and practices of domination.² Whether the entire region of Eastern Europe during the socialist period was truly colonized by Soviet Russia is open to debate, and the tremendous diversity in the socialist experience among different countries cautions us against broad generalizations. Moreover, the racial dimensions of colonialism and postcolonialism may have limited applicability to socialist and postsocialist projects, although postsocialist nation-building has also been shown to have involved racial politics (Imre 2005) and through issues of ethnicity have taken center stage in many postsocialist contexts (e.g., Korac 1996, 1998).

²Verdery (2002) argues that both postcolonialism and postsocialism (and studies based in them) emerged from the same historical era: the Cold War. Thus, Verdery proposes “post-Cold War studies” as a way of creating a unified interrogation of the processes of global capitalism that unite seemingly disparate regions such as Africa and Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, East European scholars of and from the region have themselves drawn on postcolonial studies to understand both their experiences as Soviet satellites, and their experiences as postsocialist states vis-à-vis Western Europe. Following Said's (1978) effort to put empire at the center of understanding European history and politics (see also El-Haj 2005), scholars of Eastern Europe have used postcolonial studies to explore representations of the region as Western Europe's "other." They have also used postcolonial studies to understand the political, social, military, and economic interference and domination by Russia, Western countries, or entities such as the European Union.³ Most of this scholarship has focused on the former, revealing the ways in which "the otherness of the colonized person was neither inherent nor stable; his or her difference had to be defined and maintained" (Cooper and Stoler 1989: 610). Larry Wolff (1994) for example traces the history of "Eastern Europe" as a discursive construct, placing its origins not in the Cold War and Churchill's infamous Iron Curtain speech, but in the Enlightenment two hundred years earlier. For example, seventeenth-century accounts of Eastern Europe described it as inhabited by "a thoroughly rude and barbarous people ... fit only for slavery," and composed of "countries rather to be pitied, than envied" (Wolff 1994: 10ff.). During the eighteenth century, the notion of "civilization" linked increases in wealth and refinement of manners, and Eastern Europe became located not in civilization but somewhere else "on the development scale that measured the distance between civilization and barbarism" (ibid.: 13).

On this developmental scale, Eastern Europe served as the West's intermediary "Other," neither fully civilized nor fully savage. With the collapse of socialism, this discursive categorization re-emerged and scholars have borrowed theories from postcolonial studies to understand its implications for the postsocialist experience. For example, the notion that Poland is a postcolonial country has resonance for Poles, who widely contend that Poland was colonized during the period of partitioning that began in the eighteenth century, continued through World War I, resumed after a brief period of independence between the world wars, and lasted through the socialist period. This supposed colonization has created sentiments of inferiority vis-à-vis the West (Janion 2006).⁴ Ewa Thompson (2005), a Polish literary scholar at Rice University, wrote a piece in a widely read Polish daily to provide Poles with a basic understanding of Said's orientalism and its applicability to Poland. Polish anthropologist Michał Buchowski (2006: 466) describes internal "nesting orientalism" in Poland, suggesting that with the lifting of the Iron Curtain orientaling discourses transcended geographic boundaries and now encompass social spaces. According to Buchowski, those who could access the resources and cash flows that came with postsocialism (the so-called winners of postsocialist transformation) developed a colonial discourse about those who have not benefited from the collapse of socialism, such as unskilled workers and rural residents. Using Western-like colonial discourses and categories, the so-called losers of capitalism became "not people with problems but ... themselves the problem" (Buchowski 2006: 468). They are portrayed as incompetent, carrying "bad habits," and failing to adopt the "positive features" of capitalism, such as high work standards, self-discipline, and an ethic of hard work.

³It is this second point that Verdery (2002) pushes for in "Whither postsocialism?" with her proposition of "post-Cold War" studies. We recognize the specificity of the colonial experience, particularly its gendered and racial dimensions, economic exploitation and dependency, and issues of sovereignty, all of which make the assertion that Soviet states and satellites were colonized particularly problematic. However, here we illustrate the ways in which native scholars have used the concept of colonialism to understand their experiences as reluctant allies to the Soviet Union during the socialist period.

⁴Maria Janion's book *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna* (2006) was nominated for the Nike Prize in 2007. The book explores Slavic history and contemporary identity in the context of Europe. The Nike Prize is one of the most prestigious literary awards in Poland and is given to the most outstanding book from all genres published by a living author in the previous year.

Similar discourses have emerged in other postsocialist contexts. Haney (1999: 172) illustrates that caseworkers in family support services in postsocialist Hungary discussed their clients as liars, cheaters, thieves, lazy, simple, uncultured, and disorderly, blaming them for their failure to reap the rewards of postsocialist transition. Likewise, with the reunification of Germany, East Germans were often thought of as lacking the personality traits needed for survival in a capitalist society; part of the postsocialist transition for them, therefore, involved educational seminars on how to become “culturally competent” consumers (Berdahl 2005). Similar “othering” has been noted as the European Union expands eastward and casts Eastern Europeans as uncultured, economically underdeveloped, politically unsavvy, and therefore in need of assistance to bring them up to European standards (e.g., Kuus 2006). As Cooper and Stoler (1989: 612) argue regarding colonialism, the justification for holding and taking colonies rested on visions of “a just, socialist society, and their claim to knowledge of the path to reach it—a path that indigenous peoples, lost in their primitive or precapitalist worlds, could not otherwise follow.”

This literature addresses the process through which the “other” is defined, and the context and repercussions of those definitions. Within this framework, however, less attention has been given to the ways in which people living *within* postsocialist states have themselves engaged these processes. Said's critics have noted that discussions of “othering” often draw on the same essentializing discourse used by colonial powers. A focus on domination of the colonized through representation denies autonomy, agency, creative thought, and the ability of resistance to those living under colonial powers or in postcolonial contexts (Sax 1998: 29). In other words, much of Said's influence and the criticism against him address the issue of representation: who controls the means through which non-Western, postcolonial people are represented; the terms of their representation; and the ability of “subalterns” to represent and speak for themselves on their own terms (see Spivak 1988). That is, a key contribution of postcolonial research has been to redefine people living under oppressive and exploitative regimes as active agents in their own lives.

Nation, gender, and identity

Colonialism, postcolonialism, socialism, and postsocialist transition are deeply gendered processes (e.g., Haney 2002; McClintock, Mufti and Shohat 1997; Rivkin-Fish 2005; Stoler 1997). It has been argued by Stoler (1997), for example, that gender and sexuality, particularly sexual control, were central to the production of the “colonizer” and the “colonized,” as well as to inclusion in and exclusion from access to the means of power and privilege. Nations and nation-building projects create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, in terms of gender, race, religion, geography, or ethnicity. National governments delineate rights in gendered terms (Yuval-Davis 1993). Women in particular are implicated in nationalism as biological reproducers of the nation, reproducers of the boundaries of national groups, transmitters and producers of national culture, symbols of difference, and active participants in national struggles (McClintock 1997). Likewise, issues of gender and sexuality, as well as the ability to control these, have infused socialist and postsocialist politics, practices, and nation-building, suggesting that questions of gender should be at the center of postsocialist studies (Gal and Kligman 2000a). Such research interrogates actors' uses of gender and reproduction to pursue a range of political projects, from transforming state-subject relations, to shoring up the authority of formal institutions, to justifying the legitimacy of their own political power (Gal and Kligman 2000a: 34).

Questions of gender occupied a central position in the modernizing projects of socialist governments after World War II, particularly in socialist regimes' attempts to erase gender differences in the pursuit of the socialist utopia (Gal and Kligman 2000a: 5). Gender also figured prominently in theories of socialism and its relationship to capitalism, based on the

notion that the “emancipation of women, together with that of humanity, will take place only with the emancipation of labor from capital” (Clara Zetkin, quoted in Boxer 2007: 131). Although Marx, Engels, Lenin, and later Stalin, held different views regarding gender equality, they generally located the origins of gender inequality within the advent of capitalism. Therefore, these theorists discussed “the woman question” and inequality between the sexes in terms of women's relationship to the economic and political system, arguing that concerns with class-based inequalities subsume gender-based inequalities. Women's movement into wage work was a key feature of socialism, which Fodor (2003) argues was considered to be a necessary condition for the success of socialism. The early socialist project concentrated its efforts on providing services within the public sector that were designed to facilitate this movement, including state-sponsored childcare, public dining rooms, and free and legal access to abortion and other forms of birth control (De Soto 1993: 291). Women's entry into the labor force changed the workplace, for example through the institution of more flexible and shorter work hours, the provision of childcare at work sites, the accommodation of maternity leave, and allowances for household responsibilities (Fodor 2003: 25).

The state's takeover of domestic and female tasks, and the creation of dependence on the state of both men and women through “socialist paternalism” (Verdery 1996: 63), was seen as necessary for the overthrow of capitalism, highlighting that socialist state-making was inherently gendered from the outset. The state attempted to reformulate itself into the “universal and exclusive father” (Kukhterin 2000), on which both men and women would depend. However, within the domestic sphere the liberation of women failed to materialize, and gender relations remained largely unchanged (Einhorn 1993: 31). Socialist regimes frequently failed to recognize the disjuncture between socialist gender ideals (as exemplified by the image of the woman tractor driver) and competing ideas of women's proper gender roles, such as mother, caretaker, homemaker, and reproducer of “the nation.” The overall goals of communism, including rapid and wide-scale industrialization and the erasure of socio-economic classes, were also precedent over women's issues, such as gender equality (Wolchik 2000: 61). Women were largely excluded from political participation, both practically and ideologically, and seen as less devoted to the communist cause due to their domestic responsibilities (Fodor 2003). The ease with which women were reassigned to their domestic roles as a response to demographic fears and a decreased need for labor beginning in the 1960s, illustrates the limitations of socialist welfare states' reconfiguration of women's identities as workers (Haney 2002). In other words, women in socialist states occupied an ambiguous position. On the one hand, socialist governments saw women's entry into the labor force as necessary for the successful abandonment of capitalist class relations. On the other hand, they often did little to transform gender relations within the home, leading women to experience a “triple burden” of paid employment, housework, and political activity.

The maintenance of traditional gender roles within the home paralleled a similar continuation of male dominance as the norm in the public, work, and political spheres. Despite the socialist revolution's rhetoric of gender equality and efforts to facilitate women's entry into the labor force, men retained “the most power, highest status, and best remunerated positions in all spheres of society” (Ashwin 2000: 12). Men were expected to serve as leaders, managers, soldiers, and workers who were to build the communist system. Moreover, in Soviet Russia, psychologists and other scientists made the argument that women entering the workforce and taking on new roles led to the “feminization of the male personality,” and psychological damage to men as the tasks that they were once assigned had been taken over by the state or women (Attwood 1990: 167). For example, these psychologists argued that as women were given greater economic and social independence through their entry into the workforce, they became less reliant on men within the home,

thus undermining traditional male social roles and identities. In short, although the socialist state claimed gender equality, the entire socialist apparatus remained gendered through state interference into almost every aspect of daily life.

With the collapse of socialism, issues of gender and gender roles have emerged as central concerns to the transition process, and the transition has differentially affected men and women. Issues such as childcare, health, and employment have been marginalized as “the critical issues of nationhood are resolved” (Graham and Regulska 1997 71). Women were and continue to be excluded from participation in formal politics (Fodor 2003), and state/national political and economic issues superseded the local and regional concerns voiced by women's groups that were formed in the 1990s (Mencin 1997; Mršević 2000; Vrabkova 1997). For many, essentialist notions of gender that called for women's return to the domestic sphere and a resumption of childbirth duties were seen as a correction to socialist-era policies that violated “natural” sex roles by facilitating women's participation in the paid work force.

Throughout the region, the “critical issues of nationhood” that emerged in the 1990s have centered on questions of reproduction, including abortion rights. In Poland, for example, restricting abortion was seen as a way of signaling the morality of the new democratic government in opposition to its socialist predecessor. In the early 1990s, anti-abortion campaigners used the image of the ideal Polish woman as *Matka Polka*, the silent protector of the family and guardian of the Polish nation, to justify their position that woman's proper place was in the home (Kulczycki 1995; Titkow 1993; Zielińska 2000).⁵ In the postsocialist, post-Yugoslav countries—particularly Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia—Korac (1996, 1998) argues that “state subjects” are gendered, and that the postsocialist period has witnessed the resurrection of gendered ethnonational projects in which male power is celebrated and women are cast as patriotic mothers. Domestic violence against women and rape in war exemplify the gendered violence that positions women and their bodies both as justifications for militarization and tools for ethnic cleansing.

The gendered dimensions of postsocialist transition are also evident in economic developments. In Hungary, the World Bank and other international institutions recommended that generous parental leave policies, which mostly affected women, be curtailed in order to decrease government spending (Goven 2000). In Poland, one of the effects of this economic restructuring, in the form of liberalization, privatization, and the introduction of free trade (Marangos 2005) has been increased poverty, especially among women (Tarkowska 2001), as unemployment rose, inflation increased, and government investment in the public sector decreased (Kolodko and Rutkowski 1991). Women often held jobs of lower status and lower pay under socialism, therefore experiencing economic restructuring more negatively than their male counterparts. They have been particularly affected by higher unemployment rates, longer periods of job search, and continued lower salaries. In Germany, East German women have experienced higher rates of unemployment and demotion, and general exclusion from the labor market (Mayer, Diewald, and Solga 1999). Furthermore, Haney and Pollard (2003) note that in the postsocialist transition, the “re-traditionalization” of gender roles, or the assumption that women's proper place is in the home rather than the paid work force, works closely with the decreased role of the state in “carework”: “As maternity leave policies and child allowances are cut, domestic work is re-privatized in ‘appropriate’ families; and as women lose employment guarantees, they are

⁵The image of the “Polish Mother,” *Matka Polka*, is historically rich and complex. At times the image invoked is that of silent protector and at others, that of active defender or fighter, of both Poland and the family. Hauser (1995: 85) argues that the Polish Mother serves to support the religio-nationalistic patriarchy by creating a seemingly natural contrast between womanhood and agency, positioning women as supporters of husbands and sons in national martyrdom. However, in other nationalistic writings, women are depicted as heroic and patriotic, bearing arms in military battles to defend Poland.

returning to their 'rightful' roles as nurturers in the domicile" (Haney and Pollard 2003: 8; see also Gapova 2007).

Both the socialist and postsocialist projects have created gender regimes and ideologies that contrast with those in Western Europe and the United States, revealed in tensions between Western European and North American feminists and their Eastern European counterparts. In some ways, socialism was seen as a sort of paradise for women due to the availability of free childcare and liberal abortion policies. However, with the collapse of socialism, many Western feminists viewed Eastern European women as living in some distant past. Western feminists saw the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe as creating fertile ground for the formation of women's rights organizations (Gal and Kligman 2000a: 98). However, large-scale feminist movements did not develop. In fact, throughout Eastern Europe, the term "feminism" attracted a negative connotation and the women-centered groups that did develop did not call themselves "feminist" (Hemment 2004; see also Keinz this volume). Many Western feminists drew conclusions about Eastern European women that echo representations of the Eastern "Other" noted by Said: that it was the West's task to bring "freedom" and 'democracy' to 'isolated' and 'underdeveloped' easterners" (Gal and Kligman 2000a: 99). However, they ignored the contextual and historical differences between the West and socialist Eastern Europe in terms of women's relationship to the state, women's roles vis-à-vis men, and diversity of women's experiences and positionalities throughout the region. At the same time, women in Eastern Europe expressed skepticism about the intentions of Western feminists and questioned their understanding of the particular gender regimes in the region (Hemment 2000). Similar critiques of Western feminism developed in postcolonial contexts as well, prompting postcolonial women to form indigenous-inspired, grassroots feminisms that draw on pre-colonial pasts, colonial discourses, and contemporary possibilities for action (Loomba 1998).

Recently, Central and Eastern European gender scholars have called for a more nuanced understanding of socialism's feminist dimensions that often had been overlooked. In particular, Eastern European feminist scholars argue against the perspective that socialism created multiple burdens for women with few gains in arenas important to the feminist movement, such as economic autonomy. Gapova (2007) argues that socialism provided women with the opportunity to work outside the home, thus giving women some sense of agency through economic independence. Daskalova (2007) places the changes brought by Bulgarian socialism into a larger historical framework, arguing that prior to World War II, Bulgarian women truly lacked equality with men, for example lacking the right to vote and work freely. In contrast, she asserts many socialist policies were "pro-women and friendly to women," and argues that these benefits should not be ignored based on the broader failure of the socialist project to erase patriarchal gender ideologies (Daskalova 2007: 217). Massino (forthcoming) uses life histories of women who grew up and worked under the socialist system in Romania to challenge totalizing Cold War narratives and reveal how women both benefited from and negotiated state-produced discourses and policies of work and gender. The women at the center of her study describe the benefits that participation in the paid work afforded them, including job stability, social interaction, economic self-sufficiency, intellectual fulfillment, and social prestige.

These authors are providing new insights into women's roles vis-à-vis the socialist state and what constitutes "feminism"—under socialism and today. In this special section, Anika Keinz takes up this challenge of understanding diverse interpretations of what it means to be a feminist. She focuses on the work of nongovernmental organizations to show the ways in which the "local" and the "global" intervene in the contexts of Polish feminism. In "Negotiating democracy's gender between Europe and the nation," Keinz argues that such discursive play serves as a means through which Polish feminism tries to gain a voice within

the narrow range of public discourse influenced by conservative policymakers and a vocal nationalist and religious movement. She argues that “feminism” and those engaged in feminist activism invoke the ire of “anti-communists,” who assert that gender equality is a fabrication of the immoral, unnatural, and oppressive ideology of the “communist occupiers.” Therefore, in the aftermath of socialism in Poland, those active in “women’s” issues rejected the label of “feminist” in their work in an effort to assert their legitimacy. They strive to distance themselves from both the communist past and what increasingly became viewed as “Western” imperialism in the form of the feminist movement. However, Keinz argues that the debate surrounding feminism in Poland is not static and has changed over time, and increasingly younger women involved in feminist organizations call themselves “feminist” and use Western-derived feminist ideals as a resource against narrow interpretations of women’s appropriate roles within public discourse. She concludes that women NGOs in Warsaw use “the West,” and particularly the EU, to legitimize feminism and gender equality. At the same time, in order to legitimize their work within Poland, they draw on the language of “democracy” to signify rupture with the communist past and emphasize the benefits of their work for “families” to signify adherence to Polish cultural scripts.

Interrogating socialism and postsocialism through sexuality

This body of research illustrates gender’s central position in socialist state-making, as well as the gendered dimensions and effects of the transition. However, in their analysis of gender, scholars rarely mention sexuality in socialist and postsocialist contexts.⁶ The omission of sexuality occurs despite the fact that in several postsocialist contexts, debates about sexuality and homosexuality have been vigorous and touch on many of the same issues as those regarding gender, such as democratization, rights, and national identity. Indeed, borrowing from Adrienne Rich (1980), “compulsory heterosexuality” existed under socialism and re-emerged after 1989.⁷ Extending the argument for the centrality of gender, debates about sexuality in postsocialist contexts can also be instructive for understanding the processes of social change in this region, and the tensions that have been created and made evident through political and social changes, such as European Union accession. As Weston (1998: 4) suggests, “A person cannot ‘just’ study sexuality, because sexuality is never separate from history, ‘class,’ ‘race,’ or a host of other social relations.”

Within Eastern European scholarship on both socialism and postsocialism, the writing on topics such as homosexuality, transgenderism, and queerness is limited. The majority of anthropological, social science, and historical writing on the issue of homosexuality east of the Oder River has concentrated on sexual deviance within Russia and its territories (e.g., Essig 1999; Healey 2002; Rivkin-Fish 1999). Some exceptions exist, for example Matti Bunzl’s (2000) discussion of gay male sex tourism between Prague and Vienna (see also Bunzl 2004b). Although grounded in postcolonial theory, Bunzl writes from the Austrian gaze, and describes how a neo-colonial geography of inequality and “western privilege over Eastern bodies” becomes mapped on the sexualized bodies of Czech boys working in the sex trade (2000: 91). By including other forms of sexuality in his analysis of Eastern Europe, Bunzl expands discussions of gender beyond presumed heterosexual men and women. He argues that the postsocialist period represents a reinvention of Eastern Europe through colonizing tropes that rest on the notion of the sexual availability of the exotic other, in particular the sexual availability of young Czech men working in sex tourism with a largely

⁶Homosexuality is specifically mentioned twice in *The politics of gender after socialism* (Gal and Kligman 2000a), first in reference to the international politics of reproduction and the ways in which postsocialist states are “evaluated” in the international sphere in light of things such as the criminalization of homosexuality, and second in reference to the socialist era tendency to ignore sexuality and deny the existence of homosexuality.

⁷I thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight and reference.

Western clientele. His analysis, however, stops at the border between East and West. Bunzl does not address the issue of homosexuality within the Czech Republic or other former socialist territories, and instead uses his research to better understand the hetero-homo dyad within Austria.

The official Soviet attitude toward homosexuality viewed same-sex attraction as unnatural and the product of bourgeois exploitation, and Soviet scholars accused “bourgeois scientists” of ignoring the societal influences of homosexuality. Attention to homosexuality by the legal system and scientists waxed and waned over the decades, reflecting divergent interpretations of the causes of social inequalities, the manifestation of these inequalities, and the best means of advancing the goals of the socialist revolution and overthrow of capitalism (Essig 1999; see also Healey 2002). Sexuality was politicized and criminalized in Soviet Russia and homosexuality was seen as a threat to the state, and individual and national health were to be achieved through sexual self-restraint (Essig 1999; Rivkin-Fish 1999: 803). In the 1980s, glasnost and perestroika led to a flood of sexually explicit materials into Russian media and markets, and by the 1990s issues surrounding sexuality became a means through which broader debates about Russia's future as a capitalist democracy were discussed. With the collapse of socialism, the link between state visions of a prosperous society and sexuality persisted. In the process of postsocialist democratic transition, attention to sexuality became a political and organizing principle. Conservatives for example argued against the introduction of sexuality education into schools because it would lead to “Western cultural ills,” including homosexuality (Rivkin-Fish 1999: 806). Those in support of sex education framed their arguments in terms that promoted a break with Soviet-era prudery and silence around sexuality in favor of more open discussions (Rivkin-Fish 2005).

“Native” scholars and activists have written about sexuality in Eastern Europe more directly, particularly from the perspective of political organizing (e.g., Flam 2001; Spehar 1997), and the everyday lived experiences of sexual minorities under socialism and in the postsocialist period (Kuhar and Takacs 2007). The edited volume *Beyond the pink curtain: Everyday life of LGBT people in Eastern Europe* brings together scholars of and from Eastern Europe to reveal the ways in which sexual minorities negotiate their sexual identities within their families, workplaces, communities, and political fields (Kuhar and Takacs 2007). The authors focus on lived experiences and emphasize agency in confronting generalized homophobia, thus challenging discourses about the East produced by the West and drawing attention to both diversity and commonality in being a sexual minority in Eastern Europe.

In this special section, Hadley Renkin situates debates about sexuality within a broader socio-political context by examining sexual identity politics through the lenses of representation, discourse, and agency. In “Homophobia and queer belonging in Hungary,” Renkin argues that new patterns of homophobia in Eastern Europe, including the use of sexual minorities as scapegoats for failed promises of transition, EU membership, and globalization, illuminate new configurations of nationalism and postsocialist politics. He argues that people are increasingly making sense of their worlds through direct reference to sexual identity. In the Hungarian case, right-wing/nationalist ideologies and practices mobilize discourses of the other—sexual minorities—to create difference, thus buttressing their legitimacy and claims to political and cultural authority. This new homophobia, in part, is a reaction to the emergence of public sexual politics in the region, and in part a reaction against the ways lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activists contest national histories. He persuasively argues for refocusing the lens through which LGBT politics and national identity are examined by highlighting the ways in which LGBT themselves act as agents of change in defining the terms of nationalism and postsocialism. Renkin echoes Said's (1989: 216) contention that, “There is no vantage *outside* the actuality of relationships

between cultures, between unequal powers, between different Others ... We are so to speak *of* the connections, not outside and beyond them.”

Hybridity

In postcolonial studies, the concept of hybridity emerged from the writing of Homi Bhabha (1995). Prior to its adoption by postcolonial studies, in some contexts such as Latin America, “hybridity” referred to “mixedness,” from biological or “racial” mixture to cultural fusion (Alonso 2004). Hybridity has also been used to refer to belonging to multiple worlds, whether personal, professional, gendered, ethnic, or geographical (Narayan 1997). Attention to the hybrid nature of identity challenges researchers to use field-work to question assumptions of boundedness, localization, and authenticity. The perspective of hybridity reminds us that cultures are not always or necessarily coherent or homogenous. Hybridity encourages researches to reveal heterogeneity within cultures, as well as authority/power and contestations of cultural hegemony (Rosaldo 1989: 207).

In Poland, for example, notions of heterogeneity and belonging to multiple worlds abound, particularly in reference to Poland's ambiguous position as not-quite-Western and not-quite-Eastern. Galbraith (2004) for example writes of young Poles' sentiments of “between-ness” as Poland made preparations to join the European Union throughout the 1990s. Although many of her respondents contrasted “civilized,” “clean,” and “happy” Europe with a “gray,” “dirty,” and “sad” Poland, they also recognized Poland as being “in the middle.” Young Poles talked about “mixed-ness” in terms of maintaining Poland's strong religious identity while moving toward greater economic and political stability, a characteristic they associated with the West (see Asher 2005). In Estonia, consumption practices served as the means through which Estonians expressed their affinity with the West and “normality,” in contrast with the “not normal” Soviet period (Rausing 2002). Rausing argues that the postsocialist transition has created a context in which “the country moves from the edges of the East to the edges of the West, [and] the identity of the people seems to be moving from that of being Westerners in the East to being Easterners in the West” (2002: 138)

Hybridity involves discourses and practices of negotiating multiple and heterogeneous identities, and these practices involve subversive and transgressive contestations of power (Alarcon 1996). In this special section, Agnieszka Kościańska argues that understanding local histories and experiences with socialism and the transition make alternative interpretations of what it means to be “feminist” relevant. In “The ‘power of silence’: Spirituality and women's agency in Catholic Poland,” Kościańska illustrates that religious Polish women often reject Western feminism as it manifests itself in the postsocialist context, and particularly its emphasis on secular ideals and goals. Through a focus on the often overlooked religious diversity in Poland and analysis of an alternative spirituality milieu, Kościańska reveals that discussions of feminist ideas flowing from “West” to “East” obscure the myriad resources Polish women draw upon to create alternative discourses of what it means to be feminine and active agents of social change. The title expression (the “power of silence”) derives from the way members of a syncretic Hindu-based religion and an informal Catholic milieu that incorporates New Age concepts into its practices describe the effects of their meditative practices and speaks to the ways in which these practices reveal alternative models of agency. Significantly, the women participating in this religious movement are not participants in the non-governmental organizations studied by many Western researchers interested in feminist movements in Eastern Europe, including Keinz in this special section. Instead, the women in Kościańska's study transform gender roles, relations, and power dynamics within the most intimate spheres of life, including marriage, sexuality, and eating. The activity of these groups is an important example of the broader phenomenon of women's involvement in various forms of spiritual life beyond the Catholic

Church, with consequences for the ways in which gender, sexuality, agency, and power are conceptualized.

Giving voice and speaking back

Said (1989: 210) argues that only after “natives” made enough “noise” were they finally recognized and allowed to “speak.” The articles in this special section inform the anthropology of global flows and the ways in which global flows are received and contested by the “natives.” In her widely influential essay “Can the Subaltern Speak,” Gayatri Spivak (1988) questioned the degree to which the most marginalized (e.g., illiterate peasantry, the urban underclass) can challenge elite historiographies and discourses (see also Spivak 1985). Although the articles collected here do not focus on those so marginalized through the process of postsocialist transition that they have been rendered voiceless, the authors do attempt to recover the voices of those who are the objects of discourses of postsocialist transition. The authors show Polish Catholics and feminists, Hungarian sexual minorities, and Polish NGO workers as agents of political and social change, through both acts and the production and manipulation of discourses.

Processes of globalization play an important role in the production and negotiation of discourses of postsocialist transition. Globalization exists as a grand narrative that describes “the massive flow of goods, people, information, and capital across huge areas of the earth's surface in ways that make the parts dependent on the whole” (Trouillot 2001: 128). Whereas globalization is often conceptualized as unidirectional, from the “West” to the “rest,” more recent attention has focused on the flows of objects, persons, images, and discourses from and to diverse locations. People in all social positions can and do participate in these processes, although often with differential access to power and ability to bring about meaningful change. According to Appadurai (2000: 6), these global flows provide new possibilities for action and for imagining alternative solutions. Moreover, globalization lends the possibility to reconsider Cold War–era area studies predicated on the notion of fixed boundaries and the immobility of people and ideas. As the articles collected in this special section demonstrate, we need to consider not only how the globalization of ideas and discourses of gender and democracy are received by local people, but also how they challenge us to reconsider our understanding of the relationship between different world regions previously thought to be ideologically and geographically separate. Furthermore, these articles teach us to consider “how the world looks ... from other locations” and how “local” people are engaged in the process of globalization (Appadurai 2000: 8).

Taking their cue from postcolonial studies that argue for a rethinking of agency in the production of historiographies and global discourses about the nature of the world, the articles in this special section have several aims. First, they aim to more critically explore the diversity of gender in Central/Eastern Europe of the post–Cold War era, and look at the ways “others” talk back, define themselves, and draw on globally circulating discourses and local histories to react to, resist, and define the terms of their engagement in this new context. The authors do not contend that they can fully recover the voices of those living at the margins of postsocialist societies or rendered voiceless in the multiple processes of transition. Rather, they recognize a commitment to making their voices and experiences heard. Much of the social science literature on gender and feminism in Eastern Europe has focused on the conflicts, misunderstandings, and unidirectional flows of ideas and resources from West to East, based on the assumption of historically and geographically uniform gender regimes in both locales. Drawing attention to the use of representation as a mechanism of domination unintentionally renders the objects of domination homogenous and monolithic, and as noted above, denies them agency. One means of countering the

homogenizing discourses that have dominated the application of postcolonial studies to Eastern Europe is to look at agency, action, resistance, and diversity.

Second, by addressing questions of sexuality and gay identity, various rights movements, religion, and economic marginalization, the articles collected in this volume provide a more nuanced interrogation of gender, feminism/women's movements and other forms of gender-related activism. Particularly, these articles explore the ways in which international discourses shape local gender practices in response to shifting interpretations of concepts such as the "nation," "citizen," "womanhood," and "Europe." We situate our ethnographic subjects within a multiplicity of hierarchies and address the crucial relations between these hierarchies, and between different forces and discourses (Loomba 1998: 240). The ethnographies collected in this special section draw attention to the ways in which fixed identities imposed on women and sexual minorities in Eastern Europe are rendered unstable as particular social actors draw on multiple resources in order to create meaningful gendered and sexualized practices.

Finally, the articles here assert that gender within Eastern Europe represents the synthesis of gender ideologies and practices that are both historically rooted and internationally influenced. This special section approaches gender and sexuality in Eastern Europe from a variety of perspectives, including, but not limited to, those that problematize assumptions about the dominating roles of religious, ethnic, or political ideologies in the shaping of gender identities and practices; and those that examine the linkages between multiple levels of gender activism (local, national, international). Despite the rhetoric of equality in neo-liberal democracies, citizenship is in fact racialized, gendered, and sexed (Paley 2002: 479). As the socialist system before them, postsocialist Eastern European governments have proven to be infused with gendered politics, practices, and effects. Therefore, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000a: 34) argue that questions of gender need to be at the center of postsocialist studies in order to interrogate uses of gender and reproduction in a range of political debates such as on state-subject relations, questions of morality, the authority of political mechanisms, and the legitimacy of individual politicians. Ethnography is particularly well-suited to provide insights into gender as a site for the contestation and reconfiguration of officially existing social and political gender regulations and power structures, and provides the tools to move beyond rigid assumptions of East versus West through insights into the interplay between the local and the global.

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Biography

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