Ten Years After

Communism and Feminism Revisited

Edited by Francisca de Haan

Introduction

Francisca de Haan

The first volume of *Aspasia,* which came out in 2007, included a Forum on the question of whether communism and feminism were a contradiction in terms.[1] The wealth of research published in the past decade was one reason to go back to that initial question and organize this Forum. In the past few years, there has been an explosion of new publications analyzing the relationship between communism and feminism and the gender regimes socialist states supported and produced. In 2015 alone, two French historical journals published an issue with contributions about this: *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* ("Le 'socialisme reél' à l' èpreuve de genre")[2] and *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'Histoire* ("Femmes, genres et communismes").[3] The 2015 volume of the *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* was also dedicated to "Frauen im Kommunismus."[4] And then a lot of work has been published in the region.[5] This topic has also raised controversy, partly in relation to the work of *Aspasia* and some of its authors and editors. All this was reason to design a Forum in which seven scholars reflect on their research in this field and some of the issues recently raised: Chiara Bonfiglioli, Krassimira Daskalova, Alexandra Ghit, Kristen Ghodsee, Magdalena Grabowska, Jasmina Lukić, and Raluca Maria Popa.

As we know, "the truth about history" is by definition partial, created by human beings who are, as Susan Kingsley Kent recently put it, "always embedded in their surroundings, embedded by language, by history, by our social and economic relations."[6] The best we can do is to try to convince each other of our partial truths, based on a careful presentation of evidence and arguments.[7] Our partial truths are also often contested. If there is one topic to which this applies, it is the history of communism. The history of communism is very recent history; many archival records from the period remain closed to historians. Nonetheless, the interpretation and evaluation of socialism

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(used here as an umbrella term) and women, our focus here, has already gone through a number of stages. In a 2011 article about Soviet women, cultural exchange, and the Women's International Democratic Federation, Soviet historian Melanie Ilic wrote that "[b]y 1963, Soviet women, in comparison with many other women in the world, had every reason to boast about their recent achievements that were both clearly set down on paper and relatively advanced in reality."[8] Historian of German Democratic Republic women Donna Harsch similarly remarked in a survey article on "Communism and Women" in the 2014 *Oxford Handbook on the History of Communism* that "[f]rom the 1950s to the 1970s, many observers, and certainly communist leaders, believed that communism had successfully answered the 'woman question.'"[9] After listing the reasons for this belief, Harsch pointed out that "[i]n the 1980s, the critical balance tipped in the negative direction," which she attributed to the influence of rapid economic decline and political collapse on popular and scholarly opinion, combined with the fact that women in many Western countries had finally equaled or even surpassed the gains made by women under socialism, making those achievements lose some of their earlier luster. What Harsch calls new perspectives also contributed to this more negative assessment of communist accomplishments in the arena of women's rights. First, contemporary Western feminism foregrounded the private sphere as a key site of women's oppression, and women under communism seemed to have not made much progress in this realm. In addition, the availability of new archival materials after the fall of socialist states made it clear that many earlier impressive-looking official data had painted an overly positive picture of women's equality in state-socialist regimes.[10]

Scholarship that has come out in the past decade has changed the picture yet again. Historians and others including Jill Massino, Ana Hofman, Beata Hock, and Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-Indruchová on Romania, Serbia, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, respectively, have come to nuanced and mixed conclusions about the impact of state socialism on women.[11] While these scholars have reached different conclusions, they have tended to evaluate state-socialist policies for women somewhat more positively than scholars did in the first decade after the change from socialism to capitalism. This shift has been based partly on an understanding of the harsh realities of neoliberal policies,[12] and partly on new, in-depth research, particularly on the role of state-socialist women's organizations. This new research on socialist women's organizations, unfortunately, was not considered in Donna Harsch's recent book chapter on "Communism and Women," a striking omission in an otherwise well-informed and nuanced essay.[13] When it comes to what Harsch calls the mass organizations of and for women in China, Eastern Europe after 1945, and later Cuba, she writes that "communist women's leagues … initially were quite autonomous and eager to represent women's interests and, especially women workers." But, she then continues, "party leaders soon brought them into line. Relegated to cheerleading for the party line, the woman's organization[s] took up the task of convincing housewives to join the workforce."[14] Recent research about women's lives during state socialism in Europe and (partly) about the role of state-socialist women's organizations clearly shows that this whole history was more complex and contradicts the latter denigrating statement, but it remains invisible in this prestigious book.

By contrast, some of that recent research inspired an article by US feminist philosopher Nanette Funk. Like Harsch's chapter, Funk's article was published in 2014 and in a prominent location, but in her case, the new work has drawn her ire.[15] A few of the Forum contributions here address Funk's article directly, whereas for others it plays a marginal role. Before introducing these contributions more specifically, I will briefly engage critically with some of Funk's propositions. Although I think that an article like hers can be very helpful in creating debate and motivating scholars to define their research and their concepts more clearly, I see fundamental problems with it. Funk believes that the new research on gender and state socialism in Eastern Europe from 1945 to 1989 is too positive, especially because it suggests that women in state socialist women's organizations had political agency and/or that their policies or agendas were "feminist." Funk calls this work "feminist revisionist" and attributes it to a "desire" of these researchers, including myself, to find feminist foremothers (along the lines of Joan Scott's analysis in *The Fantasy of Feminist History*).[16] Perhaps the most basic problem with Funk's article is that she does not recognize the partiality of her own perspective and instead assumes that she can prescribe *the* right interpretation of the history of state-socialist women's organizations. This is a problem, in other words, in the sphere of the politics of knowledge production: what Krassimira Daskalova in her contribution here refers to as the issue of "knowledge production and domination (who is entitled to provide 'THE definition' of feminism/s)"; what Magdalena Grabowska indicates as the problem of the "universalizing representation of liberal Western feminism … as the sole point of reference for the marginal East European women's movement"; and what Chiara Bonfiglioli calls the "normative categorization that deprives women of the right to define their own subjectivity *in their own terms*."[17]

Second, Funk's work has a key conceptual problem. For Funk, communism and women are necessarily separate and opposed entities.[18] In her view, the Party coerced, misled, or used women. She cannot account for the existence of communist women, Party members or not, who dedicated themselves (in some cases their whole lives) to the fight for social justice, including women's liberation or emancipation (both terms were used) for which they believed communism was the best route (even when they also knew of, or had gained ample experience with, male communists' resistance to women's liberation, or when their relationship with the Communist Party changed over time). There is simply no space in Funk's universe for Alexandra Kollontai, as subtly interpreted by historian Natalia Novikova in *Aspasia* (vol. 1), or for historian Wang Zheng's equally subtle analysis of the All-China Women's Federation and her call "to excavate women's role in the policymaking process in the socialist state."[19]

Third, Funk calls us "Feminist Revisionist Scholars" but does not explain how she understands the term *revisionism*—other than in the general sense of offering a new interpretation based on new historical research. There is nothing wrong with that,[20] but since the word *revisionism* often has a negative meaning, a clarification might have been in order. In any case, I interpret it along the lines of the "Revisionism in Soviet Scholarship" that historian Sheila Fitzpatrick identified in 2007, by which she meant the English-language historical scholarship about the Soviet Union of the 1970s and 1980s that successfully challenged the reigning totalitarian model-paradigm.[21] In that

sense, the name "Feminist Revisionist Scholars" is fitting, since our work is concerned with rethinking the roles of women's organizations from the perspective of these organizations by investigating how their leaders and members navigated and crisscrossed local, national, and transnational political levels, sometimes working with and through state institutions for their cause, in other cases working against, or fighting with, "patriarchal state power." Our work, in short, regards a totalitarian or top-down model (from the state or the Party to women) as inadequate and tries to replace it with more complex and multidirectional approaches.[22]

Fourth, Funk seems to especially disagree with the claim that communism and feminism are not necessarily opposites, or that some of the ideas and work of these women's organizations and their leaders could be called (Left) feminist. Rather than repeating what I have written about this elsewhere, here I would just like to point out the following. First, this issue is much broader than Funk acknowledges, and includes the whole complex and contested history of socialism and feminism since the nineteenth century (rather than the desire for feminist foremothers on the side of ten scholars Funk reduces it to).[23] Second, and in line with the above, there is definitely no single "right" position on whether some "pro-women" ideas or struggles could or should be called feminist or not. Having said that, I tend to agree with scholars such as Kumari Jayawardena, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Carole Boyce Davies, and Erik McDuffie who argue that the term *feminism* should not be limited to white, middle-class women's struggles and concerns, because that leaves out the struggles of most women in the world, which—even if these women did not use the label *feminism* themselves—from an analytical perspective can be understood as intersectional, "left feminism."[24]

The seven contributors to this Forum are not all included in Funk's group of "Feminist Revisionists,"[25] but all of them saw this as a useful opportunity to clarify some of the theoretical and historical issues at stake. Kristen Ghodsee has discussed Nanette Funk's take on agency elsewhere.[26] In her contribution here, Ghodsee argues that it is not really appropriate to speak of "revisionism" in this context (and certainly not in a negative sense) because the current scholarship on socialist women's organizations has important predecessors, especially in the work of the political sociologist Maxine Molyneux, who since the late 1970s has published extensively about women's organizations in socialist countries in Europe and other parts of the world. Molyneux's thorough and nuanced publications deserve to be recognized and integrated into the current and ongoing work on this topic.

Krassimira Daskalova addresses the issue from another angle. Daskalova is particularly critical of Nanette Funk's assumption that she has the right or ability alone to qualify "the historical phenomena in question in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe," especially since Funk "cannot know all East European languages and therefore cannot have followed the discussions of feminist historians within all East European settings," whose new research speaks a great deal against Funk's assumptions. Daskalova also reacts against the oversimplified (black-and-white) picture of everyday socialism and the unnuanced understanding of gender contracts in East European countries. She points to Funk's inability to see gender conflicts and tensions within the Communist Party establishments, and communist women's gender sensitivity and actions in support of women's rights in their respective countries.

Magdalena Grabowska discusses socialist and communist women's organizations in Poland over a longer period of time, from the 1940s through the 1980s. She describes their contribution to the building of socialist Poland and carefully places their work in the context of the evolving (Stalinist and post-Stalinist) political environment, and briefly, that of the international socialist women's movement, led by the Women's International Democratic Federation. One of her main points is that "conceptions of agency and practices of women's movements vary from context to context, and so do their interpretations."

Jasmina Lukić's contribution, "One Socialist Story, or How I Became a Feminist," likewise questions whether there is one true feminism (i.e., the Western one Funk assumes as the norm). She argues that in the context of socialist Yugoslavia, it makes no sense to assume an opposition between the state (or the ruling party) and Yugoslavia's approved women's organization, because the women who worked with this organization obviously were very much aware of the emancipatory policies the state had put in place, and used the support and legitimacy of the state to enhance their work on behalf of women. Lukić urges us to approach the history of socialism with a sense of its complexity, since this system "produced a range of social practices with very different effects on various classes of people at different times and in different parts of the globe."

The Yugoslav context is further discussed by Chiara Bonfiglioli, in her text about Vida Tomšič (1913–1998), whom she describes as "a Slovenian lawyer, former partisan, and high-ranking communist politician who had a fundamental role in shaping welfare policies in socialist Yugoslavia." After outlining Tomšič's long-term and extensive work on behalf of women globally and within a framework that included and recognized anti-imperialist and anticolonial struggles, Bonfiglioli explains why she regards Nanette Funk's proposed terminology as inadequate and sees her narrative as reinforcing "Western cultural imperialist attitudes toward postsocialist Europe." Bonfiglioli's contribution again demonstrates the importance of understanding women's activism within its own changing contexts and within the broader frame of transnational struggles for social justice.

In "We Opposed It," Raluca Maria Popa briefly explores the previously not well-known role of the National Council of Women from Romania in the introduction of the much discussed 1966 strict ban on abortion in Romania. Based on an interview with one of the top women involved, whose words she corroborates with other evidence, Popa shows that the National Council of Women did oppose the decree to ban abortion. Popa's research thus also underscores how useful interviews with former members of official women's organizations can be—especially in a case like Romania, where the central archives of the communist women's organizations are absent, and against Funk's suggestion that such interviews can lead to "distortions."[27]

Alexandra Ghit's text is the most agenda-setting one and therefore fitting to end with. Discussing the recent scholarship on communist women's organizations in Eastern Europe, she proposes focusing on the systemic functions of these organizations in order to be able to integrate their histories "with the histories of other socialist and nonsocialist modernization projects." As case studies, she writes, "state-socialist women's organizations are excellent entry points for exploring in a gender-sensitive and decolonial manner transnational processes and themes that defined the twentieth century: mass democracy and mobilization, the global history of leftist social movements,

postwar reconstruction, and the history of social policy and welfare states or state interventionism." Such an approach, in other words, would allow us to understand these organizations' histories as part of transnational processes that have created citizens of modern states as bearers of rights *and* obligations, which also led to new forms of exploitation and disciplining of female (and other) bodies.[28]

The Forum contributions, in sum, compellingly show why this research is needed and how it can contribute to a better understanding of the history of socialist states in general and of socialist women's organizations in particular, which, if nothing else, did a whole lot more than "convincing housewives to join the workforce" (Harsch's words, quoted above).

It is also worth pointing out that, while it has already generated important insights, research on state-socialist women's organizations is still only in its infancy, and in many cases large archival collections from these organizations have not yet (or only minimally) been explored for historical research. This applies first of all to the Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee (SWAC, from 1956: the Soviet Women's Committee, SWC), whose huge archive of more than 10,700 (often extensive) *del* (files) in GARF (the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow) is a veritable gold mine for research about women's activism in the USSR: the SWAC/SWC itself, Soviet women's connections with women and women's organizations elsewhere, and women's organizations in dozens of countries worldwide. In 2013, the historian Galina Nikolaevna Galkina, a former vice-chairperson of the SWC, published an in-house history of the SWC based on its archive in GARF, and at least two US-based historians are now working on projects about the SWC in an international context.[29] The second case is that of Czechoslovakia. For the early period, 1945 to 1955/6, there is research based on the archives of the Communist Party, the women's organizations (the Czechoslovak Women's Union, the Czechoslovak Council of Women, the Council of Women, the National Front of Women, the Committee of Czechoslovak Women), and the Central Committee of the National Front and personal archives of leading members of women's organizations (Anežka Hodinová-Spurná, Julie Prokopová, Miloslava Grimmichová).[30] However, for the years 1955/6–1967, when the Czechoslovak Women's Union had been reorganized into a Committee, no recent, systematic archival research has been done, nor for the period of 1967 onwards, when the Czechoslovak Women's Union was reestablished.[31] The third case is Yugoslavia. Much has been written about the Antifašistički front žena (Anti-Fascist Women's Front, or AFŽ), the women's organization that existed in Yugoslavia from 1942 to 1953, but primary research on the official women's organizations from 1953 onward, Savez ženskih društava (the Union of Women's Associations, UWA, from 1953 to 1961) and Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena (the Conference for the Social Activity of Women, CSAW, from 1961 to 1990), is just beginning.[32] Last but not least, there is the case of China. The feminist historian Wang Zheng has done extensive historical research about the All-China Women's Federation, and in 2016 will publish a monograph about the history of the organization from 1949 to 1964.[33] However, much of Wang's research is based on local archives and other materials because she has not been allowed access to the ACWF's central archive.

We can only conclude that a wealth of material and an enormous amount of work are awaiting the historians of women's organizations in socialist states. I hope the current discussion and the questions raised will encourage historians to delve into these

archives, not on the assumption that these contain "the truth" about these organizations' histories, but with the hope that they can help us to get a better and more grounded understanding of the scope of the domestic and international work of these women's organizations, of their struggles and strategies, and of the continuities and discontinuities in their histories. This will then enable us to discuss our results, make comparisons across national and temporal boundaries, and determine what substantiated conclusions we can draw.

Notes

1. "Forum: Is 'Communist Feminism' A Contradictio in Terminis?" *Aspasia* 1 (2007): 197–246.

2. *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* (Theme: "Le 'socialisme reél' à l' èpreuve de genre") [Clio: Women, gender, history ("Real socialism" and the challenge of gender)], no. 41 (2015), with contributions from Donna Harsch, Kristen Ghodsee, Brigitte Studer, Andrea Pető, Dobrochna Kałwa, and others.

3. *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'Histoire* (Theme: "Femmes, genres et communismes") [The twentieth century: Historical review (Theme: Women, gender and communisms)], no. 126 (April–June 2015), with contributions from Malgorzata Fidelis, Celia Dohnert, Michel Christian, and Xiaojing Tang, among others.

4. *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* [Yearbook for historical research of Communism] vol. 12 (2015). The contributors include Nicola Spakowski, Olena Petrenko, and Natalia Jarska (see https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/jhk-2015-4938.html [accessed 1 October 2015]).

5. *Aspasia* reviewed a lot of these titles. Two other recent examples are Aida Spahić et al., *Women Documented: Women and Public Life in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 20th Century*, trans. Adisa Okerić Zaid and Lejla Efendić (Sajarevo: Sarajevo Open Center, 2014), esp. Part III: "1945–1990 Women in Socialism: From Accelerated Emancipation to Accelerated Re-Patriarchalisation," 66–108, and Luciana Jinga, *Gen și reprezentare în România comunistă: 1944–1989* [Gender and representation in communist Romania, 1944–1989] (Bucharest: Polirom, 2015).

6. Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and History*, Theory and History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 60. Edward Said expressed this as follows: "No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his [*sic*] involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society." Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1995 [first published 1978]), 10.

7. The historian Natalie Zemon Davis discusses this eloquently in Maria Lúcia G. Pallares-Burke, *The New History: Confessions and Conversations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), ch. 3, 50–79.

8. Melanie Ilic, "Soviet Women, Cultural Exchange and the Women's International Democratic Federation," in *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, ed. Sari Autio and Katalin Miklóssy, Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe 14 (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 157–174, here 168.

9. Donna Harsch, "Communism and Women," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, 1st edition., ed. S.A. Smith, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 488–504, here 488. Hers is chapter 28; so much for the understanding of the editor of the crucial role of women in building up communist societies, if nothing else.

10. Ibid.

11. Jill Massino, "Constructing the Socialist Worker: Gender, Identity and Work under State

Socialism in Braşov, Romania," *Aspasia* 3 (2009): 131–160; Ana Hofman, *Staging Socialist Femininity: Gender Politics and Folklore Performance in Serbia,* Balkan Studies Library (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Beata Hock, *Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices: Politics, Cinema, and Visual Arts in State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013); Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-Indruchová, eds., *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism: An Expropriated Voice* (London: Routledge, 2014).

12. The more positive evaluation of women's lives under socialism can easily be attributed to (mere) nostalgia for better times under communism, nostalgia suggesting that this longing is based on a romanticization of the past; however, I agree with Malgorzata Fidelis, the author of *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), that "one should be careful not to discount these sentiments [women's positive memories of their lives under communism] as mere nostalgia." Quote from Malgorzata Fidelis, "Recovering Women's Voices in Communist Poland," in *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources,* ed. Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 107–124, here 120. These positive views are at least as much based on the fact that these women have now acquired a more realistic understanding of what it means to live in a post-industrialist, capitalist society, and hence have a more grounded perspective for comparison.

13. Though it must be added that *Aspasia,* the main journal for historical research on the region, is not mentioned, nor are some of the main authors and publications about China, though China does figure in Harsch's survey. Missing are, for example, Elizabeth Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978; repr. Routledge, 2011); Wang Zheng, "'State Feminism'? Gender and Socialist State Formation in Maoist China," *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 519–551; Wang Zheng, "Creating a Socialist Feminist Cultural Front: Women of China (1949–1966)," *China Quarterly* no. 204 (December 2010): 827–849; and Harriet Evans, "Chinese Communism and Chinese Feminism," *Aspasia* 1 (2007): 220–230, part of the Forum in that issue.

14. Harsch, "Communism and Women," 492.

15. Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (2014): 344–360.

16. Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History,* Next Wave Provocations (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

17. In strikingly similar language, Lilijana Burcar has written about "the negative consequences of retrospectively interpreting the gains of socialist feminism through the lens of Western liberal feminism." See her "Izkrivljanje in degradacija samoupravnega socializma v imenu liberalnega feminizma in novodobnega 'antifa'" [Liberal feminism and contemporary anti-fa movements: The story of the deformation and degradation of self-managing socialism], *Borec: Revija za zgodovino, antropologijo in književnost* [Fighter: Journal of history, anthropology, and literature], no. 706–708 (2004): 55–82.

18. Kristen Ghodsee discusses this fundamental problem as part of her criticism of Funk's take on "agency"; see her "Untangling the Knot: A Response to Nanette Funk," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, no. 2 (2015): 248–252.

19. Natalia Novikova, "Communism as a Vision and Practice," part of the Forum in *Aspasia* 1 (2007): 202–206, where she writes about Alexandra Kollontai: "Thus, I cannot agree with the interpretation of Alexandra Kollontai as an agent of Bolshevism, who promoted women's emancipation for communists' practical purposes. On the contrary, as I understand her principles and actions, she rather regarded the communist transformation of society as a means towards women's emancipation" (204); Wang, "'State Feminism'?" 520.

20. Ruth Roach Rierson, for example, uses this term for feminist scholarship that has critically rethought the role of "white western feminism in imperialism and colonialism." See Ruth Roach Rierson, "Introduction," in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race,* ed. Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, with the assistance of Beth McAuley (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 1–20, here 7.

21. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 77–91. Fitzpatrick explains that in Soviet history, the "revisionists" of the 1970s used the term unwillingly at first, often in quotation marks, but in the end it stuck (79). Alexandra Ghit in her contribution here is more hesitant about this label for our work.

22. "Patriarchal state power," is Wang Zheng's wording, see her "'State Feminism'?" 520.

23. For helpful ways to rethink this complex history, see Sherry J. Katz, "Excavating Radical Women in Progressive-Era California," ch. 6 in Chaudhuri et al., *Contesting Archives,* 89–106, and Susan Zimmermann, "A Struggle over Gender, Class, and the Vote: Unequal International Interactions and the Formation of the 'Female International' of Socialist Women (1905–1907)," in *Gender History in a Transnational Perspective: Biographies, Networks, Gender Orders,* ed. Oliver Janz and Daniel Schönpflug, ch. 6 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 101–126.

24. See Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World,* Third World Books (London: Zed Books, 1986); Chandra Talpade Mohanty et al., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). Ellen DuBois has defined left feminism as "a perspective which fuses a recognition of the systematic oppression of women with an appreciation of other structures of power underlying … society (what we now most often call 'the intersections of race, class, and gender'). Therefore [she continues], by left feminism, I also mean an understanding that the attainment of genuine equality for women—all women—requires a radical challenge to … society, the mobilisation of masses of people, and fundamental social change." Ellen C. DuBois, "Eleanor Flexner and the History of American Feminism," *Gender and History* 3, no.1 (1991): 81–90, here 84; condensed to "a sense of women's systematic oppression with a larger understanding of social inequality" (85). In addition, Funk's article, "A Very Tangled Knot," rejects a number of claims that no one ever made, at least one of which is odd ("In such cases, independent organizational agency is not established") (348): not a claim that anyone has made about these state-sponsored women's organizations; it makes mistakes ("The GDR had no communist women's organizations until 1945") (349); what she means here is unclear since the GDR was founded in 1949; there are mistakes in the names of authors Funk refers to, and in the case of Krassimira Daskalova in her institutional affiliation as well (345); and the article uses a double standard: when Funk quotes an impressive example of women's active agency in the GDR according to her own definition, it does not count because it took almost twenty years for the Family Law Book to be enacted (351).

25. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 345, writes: "I refer to the above-mentioned nine authors jointly as Feminist Revisionist Scholars." However, at that point she has listed ten, not nine names: (1) De Haan, (2) Ghit, (3) Popa, (4) Daskalova, (5) Ghodsee, (6) Grabowska, (7) Wang, (8) Novikova, (9) Herbst, and (10) Bonfiglioli. Those not participating here are Natalja Herbst, Natalia Novikova, and Wang Zheng.

26. Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot."

27. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 356.

28. For an analysis of the Soviet Union along these lines, see Adeeb Khalid, "The Soviet Union as an Imperial Formation: A View from Central Asia," in: Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School of Advanced Research Press, 2007), 113–139.

29. G.N. Galkina, *Komitet Sovetskikh Zhenshchin* [the Soviet Women's Committee] (Moscow: TONChU Publishing House, 2013). Christine Varga-Harris is currently working on the interactions of the SWC with women from Africa and South Asia in a number of areas, including the discursive and visual realm of *Soviet Woman,* and travel and educational exchanges that its members both participated in and facilitated, with a focus on the 1950s and 1960s. Elizabeth Banks is working on a dissertation about social-cultural relations between the Soviet Union and Mozambique in the 1960s to 1980s, which includes relations between the Soviet committee for youth organizations and the Mozambican youth league, and between the SWC and their Mozambican counterpart (OMM). My own work on the WIDF includes the SWC as well.

30. Denisa Nečasová, *Buduj vlast - posílíš mír! Ženské hnutí v českých zemích 1945–1955* [Build the homeland - You will strengthen peace! The women's movement in the Czech Lands 1945–1955] (Brno: Matice moravská, 2011).

31. The archive of the Czechoslovak Women's Union and Committee, in the Czech National Archive in Prague, consists of 113 boxes, including 26 boxes related to the WIDF. Denisa Nečasová has recently attempted to synthesize, for the whole socialist period, the interaction of the Communist Party with the women's organization and the latter's position in society. See Denisa Nečasová, "Women's Organizations in the Czech Lands, 1948–89: An Historical Perspective," in Havelková and Oates-Indruchová, *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism,* 57–81. Nonetheless, it is clear that a great deal of primary research still needs to be done, including research into the role of the Czechoslovak Women's Union and of Czech women leaders in the WIDF. I am grateful to Denisa Nečasová for clarifying the state of the research regarding the CWU.

32. Jelena Tesija recently wrote "The End of the AFŽ—the end of Meaningful Women's Activism? Rethinking the History of Women's Organizations in Croatia, 1953–1961" (MA thesis, Central European University, 2014); Sandra Prlenda is currently working on a PhD dissertation at the CEU, titled "Yugoslav State Women's Policies in National and Transnational Perspectives (1950s–1980s)."

33. The book is titled *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1964* and will come out with the University of California Press.

State-Socialist Women's Organizations in Cold War Perspective

Revisiting the Work of Maxine Molyneux

Kristen Ghodsee

Feminist historians and anthropologists have recently rediscovered state-socialist women's organizations. More than two decades after the collapse of East European state-socialist experiments, scholars are delving into archives and conducting ethnographic interviews with those who once advocated for women's emancipation within larger Marxist-Leninist paradigms of social and economic justice. Much of this work aims to complicate received narratives about the totalitarian, top-down nature of these organizations, specifically the claim that state-socialist women's committees mobilized their constituents primarily to serve Party goals rather than mobilizing the Party to

serve women. Furthermore, Western scholars tend to homogenize women's committees, failing to recognize that these mass organizations operated differently in different national contexts and in different epochs of the Cold War. Recent research is therefore aimed at providing a more complex picture of organizations that have been derided or ignored in the historical scholarship on international women's movements.

In her article in the fall 2014 issue of the *European Journal of Women's Studies* (*EJWS*), the US philosopher Nanette Funk asserts that recent scholarship on state-socialist women's organizations in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc constitutes a form of historical revisionism. Funk labels the historians and anthropologists conducting this research "revisionist feminist scholars" because we (I am included in their number) supposedly wrongly attribute "agency" to women complicit with totalitarian regimes. This brief essay provides my second response to Funk's criticism. In my first response, I questioned her limited definition of "proactive agency."[1] In this essay, I will address the issue of historical "revisionism" and what this term refers to when discussing the state-socialist regimes of the twentieth century. By revisiting the scholarly work of the political sociologist Maxine Molyneux, I will demonstrate that current scholarship is not revising established or "correct" interpretations about the state-socialist past, but rather rediscovering complexities already present in the scholarly literature written during the Cold War.

This article, therefore, is a necessarily short survey of Maxine Molyneux's prolific output of research on women's movements and state socialism, especially in the Global South. For those scholars interested in the history of state-socialist women's organizations, and how they operated, Molyneux's books, articles, and reports provide a rich and thorough account by a Western scholar who studied their activities firsthand. Although Molyneux is keenly aware of the limitations of women's organizing under state socialism, and the ubiquitous tensions between feminist goals, gender interests, and socialist economic priorities, she is also willing to consider their relative successes, especially when state-socialist countries are compared with countries at similar levels of economic development. Molyneux's sociological work emphasizes the plurality of organizational forms that can represent women and their interests, beyond the autonomous, independent women's movements so fetishized by liberal feminists.

Revisionism—Historical and Otherwise

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *revisionism* means: "The policy or practice of revision or modification; departure from the original interpretation of a theory." Its early twentieth-century usage was derogatory, and referred to specific revisions of orthodox Marxist theory by those who believed that socialism could be achieved through electoral (as opposed to revolutionary) means. Later revisionism morphed into "deviationism," as in the "national deviationism" of Tito and some World War II–era partisans in Bulgaria.[2] The key element of this negative "revisionism" was that it named the process by which an original interpretation of a theory was reconsidered. Those who defended against revisionism claimed that the original interpretation was the only correct interpretation, but it is important to point out that

these were debates over interpretations and not over incontrovertible facts. The various diatribes of the US historian Ron Radosh against "left-wing" scholars revising the history of the Cold War are paradigmatic of this negative definition of revisionism.[3]

Within historical scholarship, the term *revisionism* also refers to the reinterpretation of past events, and the word can have a positive and negative connotation. In its positive form within the field of historiography, "historical revisionism" names the natural evolution of historical research, that is, the ongoing dialectic between established historical interpretations and new evidence that challenges these interpretations. As new archives become available, and as an emerging generation of scholars conducts oral history or ethnographic research, our understanding of the past necessarily becomes more complex and nuanced. According to Sheila Fitzpatrick's well-known article on "Revisionism in Soviet History," at its best, revisionist scholarship forces readers to reexamine preconceived notions of history and to reconsider the various contingencies that realized historical outcomes.[4]

In the case of the state-socialist women's organizations, researchers are examining the previously inaccessible archival records in former Eastern Bloc countries. These documentary sources and ethnographic interviews with women once involved in these organizations expose a wider variety of resistance and backdoor politicking than many feminist scholars believed possible within authoritarian states. These new sources suggest that even the most oppressive state-socialist regimes allowed various groups of political elites to lobby on behalf of their constituents for changes in Party policy. The "feminist revisionist scholars" named by Funk rely heavily on the documentary evidence, and we are actively reinterpreting the standard assertion that women in state organizations had no power, or no "proactive agency" to use Funk's term. In this respect, our "historical revisionism" can be seen as a positive development for the historiography of international women's activism during the Cold War.

Funk's article in *EJWS,* however, seems to suggest that our form of revisionism is essentially negationism—a denial of the *correct* interpretation of the state-socialist past. Funk suggests that scholars interested in excavating the history of state-socialist women's organizations deny established interpretations of the past that are self-evident and unquestionable to her generation of feminist scholars. Recent scholarship on state-socialist women's organizations *does* challenge the received wisdom about communist women's ability to maneuver within strict Party constraints, but Funk's assertion of a negative historical revisionism does not work for at least two reasons. First, it is part and parcel of what historians do to revise older interpretations on the basis of new research. This may be painful to an earlier generation, but that in itself does not devalue the new scholarship. And this is exactly what feminist scholars working on socialist women's organizations in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and elsewhere are doing: careful and extensive research that allows for new interpretations. Second, unlike what Funk suggests, it is NOT the case that there was only one interpretation of women's activism in state socialism, the one she defends. There is excellent Western scholarship recognizing the differences among state-socialist women's organizations and exploring the ways that these women's organizations worked efficaciously within the admitted political constraints. Indeed, sociological studies of state-socialist wom-

en's committees from the 1970s and 1980s present numerous examples of "proactive agency," examples that have been ignored or forgotten in the subsequent historiography of international women's movements. I believe that rather than revising established historical interpretations of the state-socialist past, our scholarship challenges *post-1989* triumphalist discourses about the primacy of autonomous Western women's movements in spearheading global feminist activism during the Cold War.

In 2007, in the first *Aspasia* forum, the Bulgarian historian Krassimira Daskalova asked how to name the "women-friendly actions" of state-socialist regimes in Eastern Europe.[5] She argued that there was not enough research being conducted on the question. Since that initial forum in *Aspasia,* many scholars have taken up the challenge of applying the model of "state feminism" to the former Eastern Bloc countries, but in 2010, the Dutch historian Francisca de Haan asserted that the historiography of international women's movements was still deeply influenced by Cold War paradigms.[6] My own work on the Bulgarian women's committee explores their domestic successes as well as their international advocacy efforts during the United Nations Year and Decade for Women (1975–1985).[7] This work, as well as the work of other scholars examining state-socialist women's organizing in China, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, Poland, and Eastern Germany, illuminates the political realities of those women who believed that communism offered the best path to women's emancipation and economic independence from men.[8]

Western feminist interpretations of the past insist on the inefficacy of state-run organizations, which replaced preexisting women's organizations and prevented the formation of independent women's movements. Women who were members of the Communist Party and committed to achieving the Party's revolutionary goals dominated these organizations, crowding out women who might have had a "truer" feminist consciousness. Communist women supposedly took orders from male Party elites, and obediently implemented Party directives among women, mobilizing the latter to help realize predetermined state plans and social agendas. The US political scientist, Barbara Wolfe Jancar, best captured this sentiment in her influential 1978 book, *Women under Communism.* She wrote: "Throughout history, women have served the patriarchal establishment, whether as supporters of the status quo or as revolutionaries seeking to replace one variant of male political order with another. Women are continuing this support in the Communist countries."[9]

The basic idea is that members of one male communist political order merely mobilize the language of women's emancipation until they can displace an existing male capitalist or feudal political order. Women are supposedly foot soldiers in this struggle between male elites for political power, despite the fact that many communist women shared and cherished the same ideals as communist men and considered their struggles as women inextricable from larger struggles for social and economic justice. Unless we are willing to argue that all communist women were suffering from false consciousness, we have to accept that at least some of these women truly believed that they were best serving women by serving the Party, and that including women's issues within the broader socialist program for societal transformation was the most effective way of achieving lasting social change.

While it is true that communist leaders benefited from the program of women's emancipation in practice (for instance, by challenging the power of traditional elites,

by rectifying labor shortages, etc.), Jancar and other liberal feminists underestimate the extent to which the program of women's emancipation was a fundamental component of the overall communist program for rapid modernization. Although undeniably top-down in nature, communist prescriptions for legal equality, women's education, and formal labor participation, as well as their radical revision of family law, resulted in significant progress for women, especially when one compares culturally similar socialist and nonsocialist countries at similar stages of economic development. The scholarship of Maxine Molyneux therefore provides an important corrective to the static and one-dimensional stereotypes about state-socialist women's organizations.

Maxine Molyneux and the Political Sociology of Women's Movements in International Perspective

Born in Pakistan, Maxine Molyneux grew up in India and Latin America, but spent most of her scholarly career in the United Kingdom. According to Molyneux, her interest in state-socialist women's organizing dates back to her early student days when she was influenced by the tradition of comparative and historical sociology at the University of Essex. She writes: "As a feminist my interests focused on the interconnecting issues of power, authority and gender—at both the macro level and in the micro-worlds of everyday life."[10] During the 1970s, mainstream sociological scholarship in Great Britain concerned itself primarily with Western, capitalist states, and there existed a dearth of research on both women's issues and the socialist or postcolonial states of the developing world.

Molyneux trained as an expert in Latin America, and her planned dissertation research was on Argentine feminism, but the 1976 military coup and subsequent "Dirty War" made her fieldwork in Argentina impossible. Suddenly deprived of a dissertation project, Molyneux turned her attention to the question of state socialism in the developing world. Most of her early work grew out of this improvised dissertation research, although it expanded well beyond Latin America to include Ethiopia and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Molyneux's interests expanded yet again. Serving as an adviser and consultant to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) throughout the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985), Molyneux found herself working alongside women from Eastern Europe, mostly social scientists interested in gender issues. These encounters informed her later research, particularly an important article on women and perestroika.[11] Indeed, by the late 1980s, Molyneux was writing a book manuscript on gender politics and state socialism, but her scholarly plans were once again overtaken by events. State socialism in Eastern Europe collapsed, and the book was never published.

I first encountered the articles of Maxine Molyneux because liberal feminist scholars cited her work as evidence that state-socialist women's organizations were no more than tools of their respective communist parties.[12] In an early article on the international activities of the Committee for the Movement of Bulgarian Women (CMBW), I, too, cited Molyneux's work as being representative of a certain stereotype of state-socialist women's organizations that infused liberal feminist scholarship. "All [communist] political institutions," Molyneux wrote in 1981, "are designed primarily to

execute party policy and to mobilize their particular constituencies for the fulfillment of state goals."[13] It was only later, after I began reading through Molyneux's extensive work from the late 1970s and 1980s on Cuba, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, and South Yemen, and her later work from the 1990s and early 2000s on perestroika and Eastern Europe, that I realized how narrowly Molyneux has been read by her scholarly colleagues (including me). When one takes the time to read the many books, articles, and reports produced by Molyneux over three decades of studying international women's movements, her claims about the efficacy of state-socialist women's organizations are much more measured, and Molyneux is careful to put their failures and achievements in historical and sociopolitical context. Reading her early work, one is struck by her attentiveness to the "top-down" nature of these organizations while at the same time recognizing their significant achievements in radically transforming traditional societies, particularly in the global south.

Molyneux admitted that legal equality and incorporation into the formal labor force could not fully eradicate patriarchy at the domestic level, and that state-socialist women's committees were often pronatalist and reinforced women's primary responsibility for household labor, but she was also attentive to the problem of imposing Western feminist standards on women's movements in the developing world. For example, in 1977, Molyneux traveled to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) to study how women's position had evolved since independence from the British a decade earlier. Molyneux published her interviews with three Yemeni women, leaders of the Yemeni Women's Union, the state-socialist women's organization.[14] In her introduction to these interviews, Molyneux provides important contextualization for the Western reader:

> As in all such socialist countries, it is often extremely difficult to discern what is really happening behind the official claims, and a degree of defensive evasiveness characterizes the responses to even sympathetic western investigators. Yet in the PDRY as in Cuba, Vietnam and China, it is evident both that there have been substantial changes in the position of women as a result of the revolution, and that there are major areas which state policy has left untouched, and where the conception of women's emancipation being implemented is, by western feminist-socialist criteria, a partial one. Yet whilst it is possible and necessary to criticize the Yemeni process for being incomplete, such criticisms must be made within a framework of what is, and what is not, possible in these very poor, beleaguered countries.[15]

Molyneux goes on to explain that the progress of the women's movement in the PDRY should not be compared with women's movements in the United States or the United Kingdom, where women face different cultural and political obstacles. Instead, she insists that the PDRY should be compared with other developing countries, particularly other Arab countries, and specifically with North Yemen. Molyneux points out that despite a stronger economy and a pro-Western political orientation, the Northern Yemeni government had done nothing to improve the legal, social, or economic positions of its women, and that in this context, the women of South Yemen have made

considerable progress. Molyneux concludes with a warning, "When evaluating this material it is therefore important to recognize the dangers of unconsciously transporting the assumptions and expectations of the western women's movement to a very different society, and thereby underestimating many of the real gains that have been made and the many real difficulties which are being faced."[16]

As I read through her hundreds of pages of research and theoretical reflection on the relationship between state socialism and women's emancipation, I wondered why contemporary historians and anthropologists working on these issues have not engaged her work more directly. Curious, I tracked down Professor Molyneux at University College London, and asked if I was correct in interpreting the body of her scholarship to be far less hostile to state-socialist women's organizations than I had initially assumed. Molyneux responded: "You are quite right to have understood my position as less categorical than it may seem to some people—and also a) these [state-socialist women's] organisations changed over time as the society and the party evolved and b) some had more autonomy and influence than others—although they had to show that their demands in some way converged with or did not depart from overall party goals."[17]

She directed me to her 2001 book, *Women's Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond*,[18] which she explained contained some (but not all) of the material from her aborted book on gender and state socialism. Here she revisited the question of state-socialist women's organizations and their relative efficacy. In her chapter on "State Socialism and Women's Emancipation," Molyneux once again tries to provide a balanced retrospective on what the state-socialist countries did and did not achieve. Discussing both the formerly state-socialist societies of Eastern Europe and the former and existing societies in the developing world, Molyneux provides a thorough and compelling analysis of some of the political contradictions inherent in state-socialism's policies toward women's emancipation while at the same time acknowledging the deep societal transformations overseen by communist states, and the role played by state-socialist women's organizations. Molyneux writes:

> Yet if state socialism was a failure in terms of its goals, the claims its rulers made about the changes it had wrought were more than mere rhetoric: communist parties presided over some of the most dramatic and widespread attempts at social change in modern times. … As a result of the policies adopted by communist states, women's socio-economic position was radically transformed: under communist party rule women acquired new rights and obligations; they entered the public realm in substantial numbers, as workers and political actors; they attained similar, if not superior, levels of education to men; and the family was modernized and placed on a foundation of legal equality between the sexes. On any conventional definition of progress, let alone one based on feminist criteria, as far as the situation of women was concerned, the communist states merit some recognition.[19]

This demand for recognition was even more important for countries in the Global South where there existed a vast gulf between the status of women in the capitalist versus the communist states. In the less-developed countries that pursued a state-led

path to economic development, Molyneux argues that women "obtained greater legally quality, access to health, education at all levels and practical support for entry into employment."[20] She also discusses the record of communist countries in outlawing traditional practices that reinforced women's subordinate position in society, such as the banning of foot binding in China, the eradication of divorce by repudiation and female genital cutting in South Yemen, and ending of women's seclusion in Central Asia.

Wherever revolutionary governments came to power, the Marxist-Leninist party granted women full legal equality, expanded literacy campaigns, promoted education and professional training, and encouraged full labor force participation. Although these policies supported the central socialist goals of rapid economic development and modernization, which required women's productive and reproductive labor and often resulted in the notorious "double burden," the status of women was higher in the state-socialist countries of the developing world. This resulted from communism's ideological commitment to women's emancipation and the state's empowerment of women's organizations to work to achieve these aims. Molyneux writes: "Women's organizations, controlled by the ruling party, were given some scope for furthering the policy aims of the party with respect to women and provided 'women's issues' with some visibility and legitimacy. As a consequence, it could be claimed with some accuracy that in such developing communist states, women suffered less publicly sanctioned discrimination on the basis of sex than did those in comparable capitalist states."[21]

Finally, Molyneux questioned the uncritical Western feminist preference for autonomous women's organizing, interrogating whether advocacy for women's gender interests needs to be linked exclusively to any one organizational form. Molyneux recognized that "autonomous organizations," those groups of women advocating through independent actions, constitute the organizational form "that is most closely identified with feminist definitions of women's movements."[22] She saw that this feminist definition of a proper "women's movement" ignored a vast array of women's activism that had been successful in helping women achieve their strategic gender interests in different national contexts. In her seminal 1998 article in *Development and Change,* Molyneux asks:

> [W]hat do we do with the women's organizations and their sizeable memberships in the existing and former socialist states? These are usually excluded from being considered women's movements on the grounds of autonomy, if not on the grounds of interests. Yet they deserve consideration in order to evaluate their significance both as political phenomena and for what they signify for their participants. … Women's interests cannot be "read off" from the organisational form in which they are expressed; the mere fact of an organisation's autonomy or internal organisational structure does not indicate that it is a privileged vehicle for the expression of women's interests nor, indeed, that it is entirely free from authority, either internally with respect to the organisation concerned or with regard to external influence.[23]

As Wang Zheng has shown for the All-China Women's Federation and as I have argued for the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement, communist women working in the state-women's organizations strategically aligned their programs with

larger Communist Party goals, because they understood that this move would be more effective than advocating for women's interests using so-called bourgeois feminist arguments.[24] Furthermore, communist women often used ideological commitments to women's emancipation to pressure their Politburos into living up to some of their promises. By quoting Bebel, Engels, Lenin, or Mao on the importance of women's emancipation, activists could use communist rhetoric as a tool to support their gendered interests. The recent archival research that explores how communist women maneuvered within the corridors of power and often challenged male elites supports Molyneux's earlier sociological findings that state-socialist women's organizations could have at least some positive impacts on their respective societies.

Conclusion

Maxine Molyneux's voluminous body of scholarship is a gold mine for those interested in the history of state-socialist women's organizations. Even though the bulk of her work focuses on the state-socialist countries in the developing world, Molyneux makes it clear that state-socialist commitments to women's emancipation were incredibly uniform across the communist world, due to the "practical co-operation between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and other more established socialist states … and those of the newly emerging socialist states who relied on the former for advice and expertise."[25] For scholars interested in understanding the internal operations of these mass women's organizations, Molyneux's work provides rich and detailed accounts that challenge some of the pervasive post–Cold War stereotypes. Indeed, current scholarship on East European state-socialist women's organizations must be put into dialogue with Molyneux's work, creating an important continuity with previous feminist scholarship on the topic. Rather than being "feminist revisionist scholars" in any pejorative sense, those of us working in the newly accessible archival collections and conducting oral history interviews with women's activists under socialism should build our scholarship on the foundations provided by an earlier generation of feminist scholars who saw avenues for agency and action even within the admitted constraints of one-party states.

Notes

1. Kristen Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot: A Response to Nanette Funk," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, no. 2 (2015): 248–252.

2. Tito was expelled from the Soviet Bloc for his national revisionism, and in Bulgaria, many of the partisans who fought together with the Yugoslavs were sent to labor camps for associating with them. See Kristen Ghodsee, *The Left Side of History: World War Two and the Unfulfilled Promise of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

3. History News Network, "Ron Radosh Charges Leftwing Historians with Peddling Myths to Inspire Activism," http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/156101 (accessed 8 August 2015).

4. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 77–91; see also Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Retrospect: A Personal View," *Slavic Review* 67, no 3 (2008): 682–704.

5. Krassimira Daskalova, "How Should We Name the 'Women-Friendly' Actions of State Socialism?" *Aspasia* 1 (2007): 214–219.

6. Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 547–573, here 548.

7. Kristen Ghodsee, "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade for Women, 1975–1985," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (2012): 49–73; Kristen Ghodsee, "Research Note: The Historiographical Challenges of Exploring Second World–Third World Alliances in the International Women's Movement," *Global Social Policy* 14, no. 2 (2014): 244–264; Kristen Ghodsee, "Pressuring the Politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and State Socialist Feminism," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 3 (2014): 538–562; Kristen Ghodsee, "Internationalisme socialiste et féminisme d'État pendant la Guerre froide: Les relations entre Bulgarie et Zambie," [Socialist Internationalism and State Feminism during the Cold War: The Case of Zambia and Bulgaria] *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* [Clio: Women, gender, history] 41 (2015): 115–138.

8. See, for instance, Wang Zheng, "'State Feminism'? Gender and Socialist State Formation in Maoist China," *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005): 519–551; Wang Zheng, "Creating a Socialist Feminist Cultural Front: *Women of China* (1949–1966)," *China Quarterly*, no. 204 (2010): 827–849; Raluca Maria Popa, "Translating Equality between Women and Men across Cold War Divides: Women Activists from Hungary and Romania and the Creation of International Women's Year," in *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe,* ed. Shana Penn and Jill Massino (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010): 59–74; Chiari Bonfiglioli, "Revolutionary Networks: Women's Political and Social Activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia (1945–1957)," (PhD diss., University of Utrecht, 2012); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); "Forum: Is 'Communist Feminism' A Contradictio in Terminis?" *Aspasia* 1 (2007): 197–246; Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 1–25; "Forum: Gendering the Cold War in the Region. An Email Conversation between Malgorzata (Gosia) Fidelis, Renata Jambresic Kirin, Jill Massino, and Libora Oates-Indruchova," ed. Francisca de Haan, *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 162–190.

9. Barbara Wolfe Jancar, *Women under Communism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 107.

10. Personal email communication with the author, 8 March 2015.

11. Maxine Molyneux, "'The Woman Question' in the Age of Perestroika," *New Left Review*, no. 183 (September/October 1990): 23–49.

12. See, for instance, Yeshi Mariam, "Ethiopian Women in the Period of Socialist Transformation," *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, no. 44 (29 October 1994): WS57–WS62.

13. Maxine Molyneux, "Socialist Societies Old and New: Progress toward Women's Emancipation?" *Feminist Review* no. 8 (1981): 1–34, here 28.

14. Maxine Molyneux, Aida Yafai, Aisha Mohsen, and Noor Ba'abadd, "Women and Revolution in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen," *Feminist Review* no. 1 (1979): 4–20.

15. Ibid., 6.

16. Ibid., 7.

17. Personal email communication with the author, 14 October 2014.

18. Maxine Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective: Latin American and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

19. Ibid., 100–101.

20. Ibid., 111.

21. Ibid., 111–112.

22. Maxine Molyneux, "Analysing Women's Movements," *Development and Change* 29 (1998): 219–45, here 224.

23. Ibid., 224–225.

24. See Wang, "'State Feminism'?"

25. Maxine Molyneux, "The Law, the State and Socialist Policies with Regard to Women: The Case of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen," in *Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism,* ed. S. Kruks, R. Rapp, and M.B. Young (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), 127–147.

Audiatur et altera pars

In Response to Nanette Funk

Krassimira Daskalova

In an article published in the fall 2014 issue of the *European Journal of Women's Studies,* the US feminist philosopher Nanette Funk took a stand against the work of nine "Feminist Revisionist Scholars" (as she named us) and argued that official state socialist women's organizations should not be named "feminist," and that meaningful women's agency occurred in Eastern Europe during the Cold War period only "in two contexts—before 1955 or in moments of political rupture."[1] Funk accused some of us of making "weaker, vague, undefined claims that official state socialist women's organizations should be understood as part of the 'history of women's movements.'"[2] While Funk is right to say (citing Malgorzata Fidelis) that women's organizations were subordinated to male interests in some instances,[3] refusing to see feminist actions of state-socialist women's organizations and activists will not allow us to create a comprehensive picture of past feminist actions, and will continue to reserve the label of "feminism" for middle-class white Western women's activism only.

I fundamentally disagree with Funk's claims about state-socialist women's organizations, and I develop and substantiate my argument in my article about Tsola Dragoicheva elsewhere in this issue. Here I will focus on what I see as the underlying problem with Funk's article, which is about knowledge production and domination (in this case: who is entitled to provide "THE definition" of feminism/s), a profound problem in the way gender theory is usually done.[4] Funk admonishes us, the "feminist revisionist scholars," that we do not need to "claim state socialist women's organizations were feminist to claim a feminist past in their own countries, though usually pre-1945."[5] She generously allows that we "can also build on what was positive in state socialism for women without labeling it feminist."[6] The major concern for Funk is who has the power of naming (or "labeling" in her terms) the historical phenomena in question in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. Warning us against what is presumed to be our "oversimplified" picture of the state-socialist past, Funk herself actually oversimplifies everyday social reality under state socialism, which was much more complex and nuanced than she is ready to accept, and far away from the black-

and-white picture of women's life and gender contracts in Eastern Europe that she is pushing us to create. Philosophers, and gender theoreticians in general, also need to read history and to respect historical work in order to be able to build their theories and formulate empirically based, gender-sensitive analyses of the past.[7] If Funk has read at least some of our work dealing with the precommunist women's movement in Bulgaria, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe as a whole, she should have been able to see that we are not at risk of contributing "to the dangers that anti-democratic elements will be forgotten and that women in the region will misunderstand their own histories."[8] (I will come back to this later.) But, of course, because her article is dealing with the scholarly work of people who do not work in (and even do not belong to) the "Global North," it is much easier to forget about academic standards and blame them for sins/weaknesses they do not have.

My colleague Kristen Ghodsee has already brilliantly addressed the false assumptions behind Nanette Funk's denial of any agency for women who lived under state socialism.[9] But as far as the periodization Funk suggests regarding women's agency (under the heading, "*When* were they agents?"), it is clear that she cannot know all East European languages and therefore cannot have followed the discussions of feminist historians within all East European settings.[10] (Thus, Funk's opinion, based on (cherry picking of the) English publications she managed to (selectively) read, suffers from partiality, and her conclusions are unrepresentative. As some of us have argued elsewhere, at least some women, during some moments in their lives acted as agents.[11] If we neglect those women's agency, we take on the role of the patriarchal male establishment and reproduce the view that women-friendly policies—that is, especially those in tune with the "relational" feminism defined by Karen Offen[12]—only resulted from the decisions of male communist rulers. As feminist historians, we should be well aware that there were tensions between the communist male establishment and women-activists (such as Tsola Dragoicheva or Ana Pauker, as my own work and that of Robert Levy have shown).[13] These tensions should not be overlooked because they say a great deal about the patriarchal context in which female activists had to act and react. In other words, the agency these women exercised needs to be carefully contextualized, taking seriously the ways in which their actions were both supported and opposed, requiring what has been called "resisting reading," and taking into account change over time.[14]

Now, I would like to address some of Funk's accusations about the six pages of my own scholarship she cited in her article. While pretending to discuss "the work" of the nine feminist scholars she evaluated, in my case at least, Nanette Funk referred to only six pages of a polemical text I published as part of a Forum on communism and feminism in the first volume of *Aspasia* (2007).[15] Neglecting the greater part of my research on various topics related to the history of women's movements and feminisms during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Funk attempts to educate me about something I—and many of my fellow "Feminist Revisionist Scholars"—have written hundreds of pages about: the history of the precommunist women's organizations and their fate after the communists came into power.[16] Thus Funk distorts the major ideas of my work and findings. More than that, I am quite careful when speaking about state-socialist measures toward women and the varieties of women's experience during that

time, knowing (not only as a historian but as a participant observer) the structural constraints of this type of regime very well. So, I would never dare to offer the totalizing simplified picture of women's experience/representations, which, according to Funk, the "work" of the nine "Feminist Revisionists Scholars" suggests.

The main message of my 2007 text, as I intended it, was to show that there were not enough *historical* studies regarding women's experience/representations and gender contracts during state socialism in Eastern Europe. The situation today, in April 2015 (or in 2014, when Funk wrote her article) is of course different than it was in 2006 when our first *Aspasia* Forum was conceived. Back then I was especially concerned with the use of opinions or theories about the totalitarian state—including the picture Hannah Arendt presented in her famous book[17]—which are completely gender blind and lack *historical foundation* (by which I mean detailed gender-sensitive comparative *historical* research regarding the period); such theories still "justify" the lack of any agency of the subjects (or maybe only objects, in Funk's understanding), who lived under totalitarian regimes. With the Forum in *Aspasia* we wanted to provoke gender history research throughout the region and about the region, and to a certain extent we managed to do so. The results of our discussion—I dare to hope—are visible in the publications accumulated during the past decade by both East European and Western scholars working on the topic.

In order to make the changes in gender contracts in East European societies after World War II visible, we should pay attention to the historical context. In 1945 Bulgaria and most of the East European communist states were peasant societies, with peasants constituting between 70 percent and 80 percent of the population. Within a very short time, these societies underwent a huge modernization process, which included the introduction of radical gender equality legislation.

This East European drive for women's emancipation met with curiosity, if not admiration, from some Western intellectuals and politicians at the time, both in Western Europe and the United States. In the context of post-World War II antifascism and anti-Hitlerism, when middle-class women in the West were mostly considered and encouraged to be mothers and housewives,[18] women in Eastern Europe were not only pronounced legally equal to men in all spheres of life but also were admitted to higher levels of education; women's economic rights were secured by law and even women's rights to abortion were, at least for a short period of time, guaranteed. (Something a great majority of Western women did not enjoy at the time.) East European women also entered various professions previously reserved for men. In the 1940s and early 1950s, there were at least two Southeast European female communist politicians—Ana Pauker in Romania and Tsola Dragoicheva in Bulgaria—whose lives as clandestine fighters before and during the war and as prominent politicians within the communist establishment after 1945 held the interest of Western media and politicians and supported the opinion about their "exceptionalism" within the male-dominated political world around the globe. Western media used the qualification "the most powerful woman in Europe" for both Pauker and Dragoicheva.[19]

It may be accurate to say that state-socialist women's organizations in many cases were "transmission belts" of the communist parties, as Funk argues,[20] but at least the recent work of some colleagues working on the Bulgarian case—Kristen Ghod-

see, Savina Sharkova, Ekaterina Stoikova, and Veronika Dimitrova,[21] to name but a few—as well as my own work on the lives of the state-socialist functionaries and leaders of the Bulgarian women's movement after World War II (true, appointed by the male communist establishment) show that women's leaders and activists such as Tsola Dragoicheva, Sonja Bakish, Maria Dinkova, Elena Lagadinova, and other members of the Bulgarski naroden zhenski suiuz (Bulgarian People's Women's Union, 1945–1950), and its successor Komiteta na dvizhenieto na bulgarskite zheni (Committee of the Movement of Bulgarian Women, 1950–1989), and the journalists working for the organ of the Bulgarian women's movement, the magazine *Zhenata dnes* (Woman today), for example, were those who mainly designed state and Party policies toward women. In many cases they were following the activities and decisions of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and Scandinavian social legislation regarding women. In interviews, some of these female activists told me and other researchers that while designing the state-socialist measures toward women, they were inspired by the meetings of the international leftist women's organizations and their decisions.[22] The measures these activists developed regarding women's issues were turned into state policy toward women by the male Party establishment. In fact, male Bulgarian government officials had to take the measures suggested by the international women's networks (some of them operating presumably under Soviet authority), and implement them within the Bulgarian context.[23] Most of those women activists were convinced emancipators, some were self-proclaimed feminists who worked for the well-being of all women and tried to do their best to achieve their goals. This was, for example, what the sociologist Maria Dinkova, the author of one of the major documents—from 1973—regarding women in communist Bulgaria wrote in her published memoirs and reiterated in the interview I conducted with her.[24] In some cases the language used in such documents, and/or other publications dealing with women's issues, relied heavily on Marxist rhetoric and contained references to authoritative "classical" texts by August Bebel, Lili Braun, and Vladimir Ilich Lenin (or Georgi Dimitrov, in the Bulgarian case), a practice that might have irritated or misled Funk, but was a useful strategy because it helped to justify women's pleas for their emancipatory goals.

The format of this Forum does not allow me to go further into details. In these pages I just hoped to bring to light some aspects of the huge political and social nuances that existed throughout the East European contexts and especially of the situation of women and gender relations there.

Notes

Audiatur et altera pars is translated as "Hear also the other side."

1. Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (November 2014): 344–360, here 344.

2. Ibid., 352.

3. Ibid., 354.

4. On this issue see the fine analysis of the Australian scholar Raewyn Connel, *Southern Theory: Social Science and the Global Dynamics of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). From the position of the (Balkan) "semiperiphery," the Serbian sociologist Marina Blagoevic has powerfully

articulated this problem in her, *Knowledge Production at the Semiperiphery: A Gender Perspective* (Belgrade: Institut za kriminoloska i socioloska istrazivanja, 2009).

5. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 356.

6. Ibid.

7. Such a serious empirically based comparative historical research is Karen Offen's book, published in 2000 (on which she worked for more than twenty-five years) about European feminisms. There she suggests her typology (developed much earlier) of the two historically existing types of feminist argumentations in European societies in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. She calls them "individualist" and "relational." In my view, Offen's findings are important and relevant for studying (and naming) women's activities during state socialism in Eastern Europe as well. See Karen Offen, *European Feminisms: A Political History, 1700–1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000). In fact, in my 2007 contribution to the *Aspasia* Forum, I mentioned precisely these two (ideal) types of feminism (or feminist argumentation), a fact that Funk neglected when she accused me of "never" defining what feminism is or was. See Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 353.

8. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 356–357.

9. Kristen Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot: A Response to Nanette Funk," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, no. 2 (May 2015): 248–252.

10. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 348–349; for the Bulgarian case, see, for example, the contributions in the volume Krassimira Daskalova and Tatyana Kmetova, eds., *Pol i prehod, 1938–1958* [Gender and transition, 1938–1958] (Sofia: Tsentur za politiki i izsledvania za zhenite, 2012).

11. Kristen Ghodsee, "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade for Women, 1975–1985," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 49–73; Kristen Ghodsee, "Pressuring the Politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and State Socialist Feminism," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 538–562; Kristen Ghodsee, *The Left Side of History: World War II and the Unfulfilled Promise of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Savina Sharkova, "Sotsialisticheskata zhena mezhdu publichnoto I chastnoto (1967–1973): Vizii, protivorechia i politicheski deistvia pri sotsializma v Bulgaria (Analiz na Reshenieto na Politburo na TsK na BKP ot 6 mart 1973 g. *Za izdigane roliata na zhenata v izgrazhdaneto na razvito sotsialistichesko obshtestvo*)" [Socialist woman between public and private (1967–1973): Visions, tensions, and political actions during socialism in Bulgaria (Analysis of the Decision of the Politburo of the CC of the BCP from 6 March 1973 *For elevation of the role of woman during the construction of developed socialist society*)], *Godishnik na Sofiiskia Universitet Sv. Kliment Ohridski* (Yearbook of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski), *Filosofski Fakultet* (Faculty of Philosophy)103 (2011): 61–80; Ekaterina Stoikova, "Sotsialnoto konstruirane na zhenskite roli prez sotsializma v Bulgaria (Zhenska sotsializatsia prez primera na sotsialisticheskite bukvari)" [The social construction of female roles in Bulgaria during socialism (Women's socialization seen through a case study of socialist primers)] (PhD diss., Sofia University, 2007).

12. Offen, *European Feminisms.*

13. Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

14. For more, see Krassimira Daskalova, "A Woman Politician in the Cold War Balkans," elsewhere in this issue.

15. Krassimira Daskalova, "How Should We Name the 'Women-Friendly' Actions of State Socialism?" *Aspasia* 1 (2007): 214–219.

16. Here are some examples (published in English) of texts in which I discussed the way the communist regime in Bulgaria and within Southeastern Europe in general dealt with "bourgeois" women's organizations and activists from the precommunist time: Krassimira Daska-

lova, "A Life in History (Fani Popova-Mutafova)," *Gender and History* 14, no. 2 (2002): 321–339; "Women's Movement in Bulgaria in a Life Story," *Women's History Review* 13, no. 1 (2004): 91–103; "Bulgarian Women's Movement (1850s–1940s)," in *Women's Movements: Networks and Debates in Post-Communist Countries in the 19th and 20th Centuries,* ed. Edith Saurer, Margareth Lanzinger, Elisabeth Frysak (Cologne: Boehlau Verlag, 2006), 413–437; "Balkans," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History,* ed. Bonnie Smith, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 185–195; "Manipulated Emancipation: Representations of Women in Post-Communist Bulgaria," in *Gender in Transition in Eastern and Central Europe: Proceedings,* ed. Gabriele Jaehnert, Jana Gohrisch, Daphne Hahn, Hildegard Maria Nickel, Iris Peinl, Katrin Schaefgen (Berlin: Trafo Verlag, 2001), 246–253; "Women's Problems, Women's Discourses in Bulgaria," in *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics and Everyday Life after Socialism,* ed. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 337–369; see also the entries regarding socialist feminists, written in a *longue duree* perspective and published in Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loutfi, eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms, Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th C* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006).

17. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958).

18. A situation masterfully described for the United States by Betty Friedan in her famous *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

19. Levy, *Ana Pauker,* 1. *Time* magazine even called Pauker "the most powerful woman alive"; Peter Labon, "Bulgaria's 'Lady Stalin,'" *Magazine Digest* 33, no. 1 (January 1946): 113–116.

20. See Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 344, 348.

21. See Ghodsee, "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations;" Ghodsee, "Pressuring the Politburo;" Ghodsee, *The Left Side of History;* Sharkova, "Sotsialisticheskata zhena;" Stoikova, "Sotsialnoto konstruirane."

22. This was communicated to me by Maria Dinkova in the oral history interview I conducted with her on 10 April 2015. In their above-cited works Kristen Ghodsee and Savina Sharkova also mentioned similar information shared by Elena Lagadinova and Maria Dinkova.

23. For more on this, see my text about Tsola Dragoicheva in this issue.

24. Maria Dinkova tells the story of the difficulties she herself and her colleagues from *Zhenata dnes*—Penka Duhteva and Nevena Abadjieva—experienced after they were accused of being feminists (back then feminists were regarded as "bourgeois" and hence as "enemies of the people") by Nadia Zhivkova, the leader of the Central Committee of the Trade Unions at the time. See her memoirs: Maria Dinkova, "Strasti po velikata zhenka revolutsia" [Passions for the great revolution of women], *Vezni* [Scale] 13, no. 5 (2003): 23–37; 13, no. 6–7 (2003): 23–46; and 18, no. 6 (2008): 33–62. She also shared this episode of her life in the above-mentioned interview.

From Revolutionary Agents to Reactive Actors

The Transformation of Socialist Women's Organizing in Poland from the 1940s through the 1980s

Magdalena Grabowska

Even as subordinate players, women always play an active part that goes beyond the dichotomy of victimization/acceptance, a dichotomy that flattens out

> a complex and ambiguous agency in which women accept, accommodate, ignore, resist, or protest—sometimes all at the same time.[1]

The story of women's movements in Poland has often been told: How women of Solidarity fought for freedom and democracy, how over the past twenty-five years women have been mobilizing against various hegemonic discourses that emerged or reemerged during the transition, including that of neoliberalism, religious fundamentalism, nationalism, and antisocialism.[2] But the existing approaches often leave the period of state socialism unexamined, rendering it a time of "stagnation" in regard to women's rights. In this entry, I reflect on the ways in which women's activists under state socialism reproduced and or transformed the very structures that shaped their actions. The responses to questions including: "Why are socialist women absent from feminist historical narratives?," "What were their motivations to become Party members?" and, "What did they do?" may produce a new and fascinating, if controversial, picture of what was an important time period in the (transnational) history of women's movements. They might help uncover a critical element of the history of women's movements in Poland, an element invisible to many researchers and activists blinded by the historical tradition that valorizes Western liberal feminism over the local legacies of emancipation present in Eastern Europe.

By examining the changing agenda of socialist women's organizing, and unraveling the complex and contradictory motivations behind socialist women's actions, I wish to strengthen the argument that the project of women's emancipation and the level of women's autonomy varied depending on political context and international circumstances, and make a case for securing a place for socialist women's agenda and actions in the history of women's movements. In working toward these ends, I rely on multilayered, predominantly primary sources: in-depth interviews (collected in research with members of communist parties and women's organizations before 1989, which I conducted between 2010 and 2014 in Poland and Georgia),[3] and archival sources (particularly the Polish United Workers Documents, collected in the Archive of New Records in Warsaw, and Women's International Democratic Federation archives available at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts), to rediscover lost and socially invisible traditions of agency and activism present in the socialist past.

But before turning to some of the results of my own studies, I briefly reflect on the question of why so many scholars are currently interested in issues related to women's agency under state socialism, issues that are at the same time captivating and divisive. While there are many answers to this question, there is, I believe a strong connection between the emergence of interest in new conceptualizations of the history of East European women's emancipation, and the desire to destabilize the universalizing representation of liberal Western feminism—in which feminism is understood as unfettered resistance toward a universal patriarchy, driven by free will—as the sole point of reference for the marginal East European women's movement. Recent research and analyses emerging from the region and beyond point to the diverse ways in which women's activism under state socialism may become a starting point for establishing Eastern Europe as an indispensable and original site for the ongoing formulation and reformulation of global gender theory and practice.[4] Fundamental to these conceptualizations are pursuit of the notion of agency "as the socio-culturally mediated capacity

act,"[5] and the argument that conceptions of agency and practices of women's movements vary from context to context, as do their interpretations.

In my own research in Poland, I also follow the imperative that any examination of various forms of women's agency under socialism must pay attention to the particularities of each national situation and try to communicate all its nuances, without losing sight of the global processes that emerged from the region and beyond. In Catholic Poland, the place of my studies—unlike in the Soviet Union, where equality provisions can be traced to the work of "Bolshevik feminists"—"radical" socialist measures for women's equality were introduced only briefly after World War II. The idea of making some "private" issues public—for example, efforts toward the taking over of housework by the state, and the idea of the abolition of the patriarchal family that were promoted by Bolshevik activists such as Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai—never fully entered open debate. As it was transformed at the turn of the 1950s, the Polish project concerning women's equality was mainly (re)shaped after Stalin's death in 1953, during the period of the "Thaw" (the years after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's subsequent denouncement of Stalin's crimes), which, as Małgorzata Fidelis demonstrates, had ambivalent effects on women: it aimed at reconciling the post-war gender provisions with values represented by the Catholic Church and Polish nationalism. In this context, one can argue that the struggles of socialist and communist women in postwar Poland (between 1946 and 1952) correspond to the feminist notion of agency, as active resistance to the patriarchal status quo,[6] whereas the work done by the succeeding generations exemplifies what historian Basia Nowak has called "practical activism," which rarely touched upon political aspects of struggles related to emancipation and requires more nuanced examination in terms of agency.[7]

Polish Women's Changing Activism

In 1945, when the new regime was brought into existence, attracting women to communism, encouraging them to enter the workforce and to reproduce became the first and most profound tasks of the Polish Socialist Party (PSP) and the Polish Workers' Party (PWP) Women's Departments. Their agendas correlated with the broader aims of the new socialist state that focused on fighting the devastating effects of World War II on Poland. They also fit an overall representation of the "new democracies" as progressing in the area of women's equality and endorsing the world peace that was promoted at the international level, including within the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). The commitment of the Women's Department (WD) founded in 1946 within the PWP, and led by experienced, prewar communists, "true believers" such as Edwarda Orłowska (a member of the Association for Communist Youth since 1920, jailed for her involvement in the Communist Party of West Belarus in 1934)[8]—was to emancipation, understood as a part of the communist project itself. Women active in the PWP unit focused on working toward the success of the communist state, and they envisioned the grand transformation of women's lives as a part of it. In 1946 Orłowska, argued: "We must organize a mass, democratic, cross-party women's movement—take into our influence half a million women—this is a matter of

honor for the PWP women."[9] In her mind, achieving the mass involvement of women in the new regime required creating a strong institutional base grounded in both the work of local women's departments and women's mass membership in the League of Women[10]:

> Our goal is to wrest woman from the influence of the reaction, to create the women's organization-powerful. The women's party apparatus has to be strong. Women's departments in the provinces should consist of 5 to 7 women representing the League of Women, Trade Unions, Rural Self-Help. We should expand the county women's departments; wherever we have strong cadres, we can build units with the full-time employees.[11]

Recruiting women to the Party proved to be a daunting task because activists faced patriarchal bias in their own party and struggled against an even more pervasive system of cultural domination, represented by the Catholic Church. In the mid-1940s, the idea of *kobieca robota* (women's work) was still foreign to Polish communists "on the ground": many local Party leaders defied the sole existence of "women's instructors" (paid representatives of the Women's Department in the field). Orłowska reported, "Regional committees do not appreciate women's work. In Lubelskie province the county secretary comrade Tomaszewski forced the women's instructor to replace his stenotypist, who was on holiday, for months. In Kieleckie, the party secretary does not invite women's instructors to party meetings."[12] While the successes of the circulars on "women's work" issued by the Central Committee proved to be limited—they were ignored by and large by the local secretaries—the Department members discussed a number of alternative, on-the-ground strategies to fight the bias of their "comrades": one of these involved the male communists' wives. At a May 1946 meeting of the department, one of its members stated: "we have to organize meetings with the comrades' wives—without the husbands knowledge. … Let them get involved," she added, "Get their families and friends involved."[13]

The Catholic Church was another locus of resistance to the ideas of women's equality. During the postwar period in Poland, the official line of the Party was not to fight the Church openly. Although the socialist state positioned itself as secular and supportive of women's emancipation from traditional family structures, it hesitated to implement radical emancipation provisions that would go against the Church teachings. The new regime was aware that the Church, which during the war and postwar developments (particularly the Holocaust, the changing of Poland's borders after World War II, and the expulsion of ethnic Germans from the "Recovered Territories" of formerly German eastern provinces) had gained demographic domination among the Polish population, could not be omitted as an important political force. In return, Church authorities several times expressed their sympathy toward the new regime and some of the developments within the Soviet Union, including the Stalinist antiabortion law of 1936 that according to some of the Church's representatives was preventing the death of citizens.[14]

The Women's Department outwardly appeared to follow the strategy of the silent truce between the state and the Church. During a WD meeting in July of 1946,

a regional representative argued: "The 'reaction' is spreading propaganda that the PWP is fighting religion, that during the procession it took over the banner and shot the woman. We have to say that we do not fight religion. Comrade Wdowik went to Church with women. It was received with enthusiasm and clapping."[15] Yet, in the privacy of Party meetings, the Church was represented as a reactionary force that kept women from the Party, and needed to be invigilated. "We have to gain control over particular institutions. … The merciful ladies attached to the Church … have large sums of money at their disposal, and we do not know how they spend it, none of our people are there. … We need to put our people in, so there are no mistakes,"[16] argued one of the members during the meeting in May 1946. Also, "on the ground" the fight between the department's members and Catholic priests was at times severe. At the WD meeting in June 1946, the representative from Białystok reported:

> Our comrade Roszkowska disseminated 100 membership League declarations in Bielski county. When the priest found out about it, he announced from the pulpit that the League is a Komsomol. Women returned the declarations to comrade Roszkowska, when she was back next Sunday. Comrade Roszkowska was attacked by the group of men and kidnapped into the forest.[17]

In comparison to the Women's Department of the Workers' Party, its parallel in the Polish Socialist Party had been established before World War II and featured committed socialists, including Eugenia Pragierowa—a historian, member of the PSP since 1910, and undersecretary to the minister of labor between 1946 and 1949. The work of the PSP Women's Department focused mostly on issues related to women's work. During her public appearances in Poland and outside (during WIDF Congresses), Pragierowa consistently advocated focusing on issues of equal pay for equal work as "the question that symbolizes the basis of the independence of women."[18] The Women's Departments of the PSP and PWP merged in 1948 and continued their positive actions to facilitate women's participation in the workforce, including provisions for working mothers: maternity leave, child-care institutions (such as factory daycares, seasonal child care in rural areas), liberalization of the divorce and parental laws, health care for pregnant women and infants, nursing breaks, and breast milk banks. Many of these actions resonated with activists on the ground in both rural and urban areas.[19] Wiesława, who started her career as a floor worker and ended up as director of the factory, says of her 1950s experience as a working mother: "We had only three months of maternity leave and after these three months a woman was back at work. I'm such a mother, who went back to work after three months. But there was a day care [center] behind the wall of the floor shop. Day and night."[20]

The successes of the socialist states—including Poland—in the area of women's equality were announced internationally as the proof of progress, and functioned as a tool of legitimization of the communist regime locally and transnationally. During the 1948 WIDF Congress in Budapest, Poland reported impressive progress in the area of child care with "343 nurseries in operation, 4,070 milk distribution centers, 350 village maternity homes, and 300 kindergartens for the harvest time (during the peak season for farming)."[21] At the 1953 WIDF Congress in Copenhagen, Eugenia Pragierowa an-

nounced that the mission of women's political and economic equality in Poland had been accomplished and argued:

> The Polish People's Republic is a country where full and real equality of the rights of women is now a fact. … These principles were laid down with emphasis in our new constitution of 23 July 1952. … The principle of equal pay for equal work is rigorously carried out, and has become an iron law in the daily life of our country.[22]

While the postwar activists can be seen not only as *actors*—whose actions were rule-governed but also as *agents*—who exercised power and the ability to "bring about effects and to (re)constitute the world,"[23] this changed during the subsequent "Thaw." New state policies, introduced in the 1950s, drew heavily on the prewar ideas about gender order, adjusting them to new realities of the "progressive" socialist state. They corresponded well to state efforts to create a "Polish road to socialism" but limited women's efforts to carry on with more groundbreaking ideas about women's equality. Slowly but steadily, women's organizations became less "proactive agents" acting on behalf of their own ideals and beliefs, and more "reactive agents" implementing the state policies.[24]

Significantly, while the shift that took place in the 1950s limited and transformed women's activists' agency and autonomy, it did not eliminate them entirely. In her book *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland,* the historian Małgorzata Fidelis examines the ambivalent effects of the "Thaw" on women's agency and argues that in the 1950s "coercion in the workplace decreased. Women could voice their views more freely, including those on persistent discrimination in the workplace. Some were able to leave full-time employment, often in horrid conditions, and to devote themselves to full-time homemaking, if they so wished. And the state liberalized its anti-abortion law."[25] On the other hand, however, changes introduced after 1953 aimed at reconstituting the prewar gender contract, in particular to ensure the existing gender division of labor, based on the unpaid work of women in the families, and put new constraints on women and activism on women's behalf.[26] The "humane socialism" proposed after 1956 aimed at building the new order with old forces—the socialist state was seen as based in the traditional family, to which the figure of "Mother Pole" remained crucial.

Important legal and institutional transformations marked this shift. The new abortion law introduced in 1956 was such effort. While in the mid-1950s the Polish state was no longer interested in maximum demographic growth (as it was immediately after the war), improving the living conditions of children became the main focus.[27] The new law allowing abortions for social reasons thus aimed at limiting the number of births among women who already had children. Access to the procedure was limited by the requirement of a medical doctor's permission, and the procedure was not available to all women (Polish women had to wait until 1960 for further "liberalization" of the law and for the possibility to make an independent decision about an unwanted pregnancy). In addition, new institutions were established to help women facilitate the "double shift." The Committee for Household Economics, founded in 1957, combined

the goal of supporting women's emancipation and maintaining the traditional gender roles by teaching women how to become rational and effective working housewives.

As the character of women-centered policies changed, so did the profile of the activists, and their relationship with the Communist Party. The first generation's passionate commitment to communism was gone, and the next generation of activists followed different life trajectories, which featured Party membership as a rational and practical choice. In 2011 Halina, the daughter of a small-town middle-class family, a former member of the Council of Polish Women (founded in 1966), and former director of the Committee for Household Economics, explains: "I was apolitical, but I wanted to be active, so I was. … During the time I was active, all of this seemed rational."[28] Institutional circumstances created by the previous generation attracted various other groups of women too, including working-class women and the wives of male Party members. Barbara, a paint factory worker says: "I joined the League, I think maybe on Women's Day. I went to the celebration as a young woman and met ladies from the workplace unit of the League."[29] Janina, an accountant, and a former head of the local branch of the League of Women, recalls: "I became a member in 1956, partially because my husband was in the party, but also because I wanted to participate in meetings; I wanted to know what was happening here, I wanted to get involved with the workplace and town politics."[30]

During the 1950s, the Women's League was associated with the Communist Party as the only legal women's organization, one that implemented the Party's policies, and typically followed Party guidelines.[31] But in the eyes of League members to whom I spoke, the organization remained to some extent independent from the state, and sometimes even oppositional to it. This sense of autonomy is represented most vividly by the way in which Polish activists talk about their work and their relationship to the authorities. Wiesława, who was head of the regional branch of the league in Łódź argues: "We *fought* to establish factory shops where women could buy produce rather than standing in lines for hours on end. Then there was the *battle for day care*." Members of the league vividly recall their struggles with the state—throughout the decades from the 1940s to the 1970s—with regard to changing the family code, divorce laws, maternity leave laws, and issues surrounding day care facilities; for many of them this was not a superficial but rather a genuine struggle against the patriarchal residues within the state and the Catholic Church, and for the advancement of women.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the work of the Committee for Household Economics focused mostly on research, which—while still supervised by the Party—was, in the eyes of its workers, fairly autonomous. Halina says: "Nobody ever imposed a specific research program. No one ever told me that I can or cannot work in a factory or as a professor." But it is absolutely true that all of these organizations were under the supervision of the Party." During the crisis years of the early 1980s, supporting women economically as well as mobilizing them for economic activity became the unofficial focus of women's organizations. As a nationwide and state-connected organization, the Committee for Household Economics and the League of Polish Women, respectively, were in a position to provide their members with material and organizational resources. Alina, a member of the league's branch in the town of Szczecinek in northwest Poland remembers: "there were branches of our organization in education and

health care, women from the post office and the communication sector—we worked together. We brought textiles and blankets from the textile factory in Łódź. Since there were no clothes we had to make our own."[32]

Such mobilization and mutual help sometimes morphed into income-generating activity that helped some women to survive the painful time of transformation to capitalism after 1989.

Conclusion

Over the decades of state socialism, women's activists in Poland grew adept at facilitating their actions within the norms, policies, institutions, and discourses through which their agency was made available. Acknowledging the intricate and incongruous motivations and actions of women who acted within authoritarian regimes, and recognizing their capacity to act toward accommodating the system but also to resist its patriarchal aspects provides a new context for discussing the term "agency" as always emerging within the omnipresent influence of culture and socially constructed beliefs. These new conceptualizations can act in concert with some feminist critiques of the romantic representations of agency as free will, oppositional agency, and agency understood as sheer resistance,[33] to help create more connectivity between the experiences of second- and third-world women. This will help us go beyond the paradigm in which state socialists are generally omitted and post-state socialist women's writings and struggles are seen as arising solely in the context of, or in response to, Western feminisms.

Notes

1. Arlene Elowe MacLeod, "Hegemonic Relations and Gender Resistance: The New Veiling as Accommodating Protest in Cairo," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1992): 533–557.

2. See, for instance, Magdalena Grabowska "Bringing the Second World In: Conservative Revolution(s), Socialist Legacies and Transnational Silences in the Trajectories of Polish Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 385–411; Agnieszka Graff, "Lost between Waves?" *Journal of International Women's Studies* 4, no. 3 (April 2003): 100–120; Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

3. The research with members of the communist parties and women's organizations before 1989 in Poland and Georgia was conducted between 2010 and 2013, when I was a Marie Curie Reintegration fellow at Warsaw University (grant no. 256475). The fieldwork was conducted in the context of the Polish National Science Center project: *Okruchy Wolności: Aktywna podmiotowość kobiet w socjalistycznej Polsce i Gruzji* [Bits of freedom: Women's agency in Socialist Poland and Georgia], 6731/B/H03/2011/40. This cross-national study of state-socialist women activists in Georgia and Poland applied interdisciplinary research methods. Data collection involved the conducting of approximately seventy individual interviews, including tape recordings of those interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with women involved in policymaking within the socialist state and those affiliated with the state-sponsored women's organizations. The fieldwork was conducted in several locations, including Tbilisi and Gori in

Georgia, and Warsaw and Łódź in Poland. The "snowball" method was used to recruit women for the interviews. Methodologically, this research used the narrative interview, which deploys a flexible topic guide or questionnaire and is organized in thematic fields.

4. Kristen Ghodsee, "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade for Women, 1975–1985," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 49–73; Francisca de Haan, ed., "Gendering the Cold War in the Region. An Email Conversation between Małgorzata (Gosia) Fidelis, Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Jill Massino, and Libora Oates-Indruchova," *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 162–190; Raluca Maria Popa, "Translating Equality between Women and Men across Cold War Divides: Women Activists from Hungary and Romania and the Creation of International Women's Year," in *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe,* ed. Shana Penn and Jill Massino (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 59–74.

5. Laura M. Ahrean, "Literacy, Power, and Agency: Love Letters and Development in Nepal," *Language and Education* 18, no. 4, (2004): 305–316.

6. Virginia Goddard, ed., *Gender*, *Agency and Change: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Routledge 2000), 3.

7. Basia Nowak, "'Where Do You Think I Learned How to Style My Own Hair?' Gender and Everyday Lives of Women Activists in Poland's League of Women," in Penn and Massino, *Gender Politics and Everyday Life*, 45–58.

8. These two Women's Departments merged in 1948 to become the Women's Department of the Polish United Workers' Party, under the leadership of Orłowska (Pragierowa remained on the board of the department). The department was closed in 1952 when it was claimed that women's equality has been achieved in Poland.

9. Protocol of the Meeting of the Warsaw's Women's Cadres, 27 May 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, K/1/P.-46, 12.

10. The Social and Civil League of Women claimed its continuation of the prewar organization of the same name that was founded in 1913. In 1945 the league was established as an autonomous organization that retained close personal ties with the existing political parties, the Polish Socialist Party, and the Polish Workers' Party (the founding committee consisted of three representatives of the Workers' Party, two representatives of the Socialist Party, one representative of the People's Party, and one representative of the Social Democratic Party). The leadership of the league was initially independent, only in 1951 was Irena Sztachelska replaced by the Workers' Party representative, Alicja Musiałowa.

11. Protocol of the Meeting of the Warsaw's Women's Cadres, 27 May 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, K/1/P.-46, 11.

12. Polish Workers' Party, Women's Department meeting notes, 27 May 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, 26, Żanna Kormanowa, prewar communist activist, historian, and women activist agreed with her leader WD meeting on 27 May 1946: "We have to enlighten our (male) comrades about the serious treatment of women's work. If a (man) member of WPW does not appreciate women's work, he is a bad WPW member."

13. Ibid., 7.

14. Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

15. Protocol of the Meeting of the Regional Representatives of Women's Departments,10 October 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, K/1/P.-46, 5–6.

16. Protocol of the Meeting of the Regional Representatives of Women's Departments, 4 June 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, K/1/P.-46, 4.

17. The Komsomol was the communist youth organization (ages fourteen to twenty-five) founded in the Soviet Union in 1918. The name of the organization is an acronym of the words

Kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezhi (in Polish: Kommunisticzeskij Sojuz Molodiozy) (Communist Youth Association). Protocol of the Meeting of the Regional Representatives of Women's Departments, 4 June 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, K/1/P.-46, 6.

18. *Second Women's International Congress: Account of the work of the Congress which took place in Budapest (Hungary) from the 1st to the 6th of December 1948,* Women's International Democratic Federation 1948, 297.

19. On the effects of postwar women's employment policies on gender relations in Poland's rural areas, see, for instance, Natalia Jarska, "Rural Women, Gender Ideologies, and Industrialization in State Socialism: The Case of a Polish Factory in the 1950s," *Aspasia* 9 (2015): 65–86.

20. All quotations are from interviews with women members of communist parties and women's organizations before 1989 in Poland and Georgia that I conducted between 2010 and 2014. All translations into English are mine. Names of participants were changed.

21. *Second Women's International Congress,* 286.

22. *World Congress of Women: Reports, Speeches (Extracts) Documents* (Berlin: Women's International Democratic Federation, 1953), 229.

23. Ivan Karp, "Agency and Social Theory: Review of Anthony Giddens," *American Ethnologist* 13, no.1 (*1986*): 131–137.

24. Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (November 2014): 344–360 (first published 30 June 2014); Kristen Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot: A Response to Nanette Funk," *European Journal of Women's Studies,* 22, no. 2 (2015): 248–252 (first published online 6 March 2015, contribution to the Open Forum).

25. Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization,* 170.

26. Ibid., 172.

27. Ibid.

28. Interview with Halina K., conducted by the author on 1 October 2011, Warsaw, Poland.

29. Interview with Barbara K., conducted by the author on 11 November 2012, Zgierz, Poland.

30. Interview with Janina L., conducted by the author on 13 November 2012, Łódź, Poland

31. Barbara Nowak, "Serving Women and the State: The League of Women in Communist State," (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2004).

32. Interview with Alina L., conducted by the author on 30 August 2013, Szczecinek, Poland.

33. Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (February 1990): 41–55. Susan B. Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (January 1995): 173–193.

One Socialist Story, or How I Became a Feminist

Jasmina Lukić

At the beginning of their collection of essays on transatlantic feminisms, editors Mary Evans and Kathy Davis offer their own personal stories on how they became feminists. Thus Kathy Davis, an American by birth, narrates her first meetings with young Eu-

ropean intellectuals in the early 1970s in Berlin, and the profound misunderstanding behind the encounters when it comes to feminism:

> While I had simply assumed that what I discovered in the USA could be applied without further ado in Germany, I found to my dismay that this was often not the case at all. The consciousness-raising groups seemed frivolous to my Marxist friends, who were convinced that we should be mobilizing proletarian women in factories. The struggles of poor welfare mothers that had inspired me during my stay in the USA were translated in Germany into campaigns for "Wages for Housework," something that seemed incomprehensible to the feminists I have met in the USA.[1]

This passage struck me as an inverted version of my own encounter with feminism in the late 1970s in Canada, at the time of my MA studies there. As a student of comparative literature, I had found a feminist volume on the post–World War II US strategy to push women out of their workplaces and send them back home again. The idea was very strange to me, and the whole set of problems described in that book seemed very far from what I felt to be relevant. Public discourses on gender roles in my own soft-socialist country at that time were offering a very different picture. No one in Belgrade was preventing me from studying what I wanted, or from getting a job; it was unimaginable to think that my salary would be lower because I was a woman; abortion was legal and free of charge. And I did not feel discriminated against when it came to my participation in the public sphere; no one had ever refused to publish my article because I was a woman. Moreover, I grew up in a rather tolerant family where I was not expected to behave like a "girl." Nobody forced me to learn to sew or to cook, and nobody in my family thought that my being a tomboy and playing boys' games like our favorite cowboy/Indian fights and football was a problem. Rather, while reading Disney cartoons in local translation I was always offended that Daisy Duck persistently wanted to marry Donald Duck, who was such a dope, and that Minnie Mouse kept hitting the garage wall with her car, while my mother was the only one in my family who knew how to drive and my father was lacking in any form of technical knowledge and skills.

I was not such an exception either. Many girls around me also felt themselves equal to boys. Yes, the feeling was shaken with time, and as we were growing up we had to face discrimination in a number of ways, from sexual harassment (which was considered to be a part of male charm at the time, and similar to the so-called Western countries),[2] to less obvious discrimination when it came to significant and influential jobs. But at the same time, profound and far-reaching changes regarding gender roles were being introduced and continually promoted through state intervention. I think of my grandmother, who until 1945 as a married woman was considered to be legally dependent on her husband, and was not allowed to make any decisions regarding her own life unless her husband approved of it. After the war, already in her forties, and very much against her husband's will, she decided to take a job in order to earn her own pension and get some level of financial independence in her marriage. (By the way, finding a position so easily would be much more difficult for her nowadays, not

because of legal constraints, but because women of that age in most transitional countries are to a large extent pushed out of the job market.)

In short, at the time of my first encounter with second-wave feminism in Canada, I did not feel that the agenda of those feminists was something I was really invited to share. Another kind of misunderstanding occurred in the early 1980s when I discovered gynocriticism. That also did not look so theoretically convincing at the time, since I was a devoted follower of Russian formalism and French structuralism, and believed resolutely in the autonomy of literature. Of course, my grounding in formalist approaches was highly contextual, and very much politically and ideologically framed within the soft-socialist Yugoslav context in which we lived.[3] But whatever the reason, it was not Marxism or Communist Party politics but my comparative literature education that made me reluctant to adopt a theoretical approach like gynocriticism, which was obviously political, while I believed—together with many other fellow critics and writers at the time—that my first task was to keep all forms of politics and ideology out of literature. Later, in the early 1990s, while teaching at the Central European University, I met with a similar but somewhat differently argued resistance toward gynocriticism in young women coming from postcommunist countries who grew up under socialism, and coming from various countries across the region. These young women considered gynocriticism to be too ideological and too close to socialist realism.

While such a reaction can be a very good example of the significance of context in reading theories, it can also enhance our understanding of the complex positions that women from socialist and postsocialist countries took with regard to second-wave feminism, particularly in the first years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In 1994, as a member of the first Regional Seminar on Gender and Culture,[4] I was confronted with these complexities quite directly. It was obvious that differences in positions taken by the seminar participants were not simply surfacing along the lines of an assumed East/West divide (more so, since the so-called Western scholars involved in the project were mostly those interested in and knowledgeable about the so-called region), but also depending on which particular socialist contexts the participants had come from. It was not only an issue of Yugoslavia being different from most other socialist countries because it had already been open to feminism since the late 1970s; the other socialist countries also differed among themselves and had different histories, and the group resisted any imposed simplifications of both socialist and postsocialist realities. What I recognize in hindsight as a shared feeling among all of us coming from the postsocialist countries was the deceptive assumption that the level of gender equality and women's rights obtained in our countries until that time (such as equal pay, abortion rights, and child care) was permanent. Assuming that these rights belonged to us indisputably, we did not feel the need to acknowledge them and focused instead on deconstructing inequalities behind the official state discourses and state practices in socialist regimes. And while I still think that this deconstruction was necessary, from the time and distance of today it seems equally important to recognize both the lack of comparative perspective and our illusion that women's rights, once acquired, were there to stay. The case of abortion (one of those rights that we did believe was untouchable), currently suspended in some postsocialist countries and under very strong attack in some others, speaks for itself here.

So in the face of the argument that only an opposition to the Communist Party/state politics can be seen as a "proper" women's agency in socialism, as Nanette Funk recently proposed,[5] it is instructive to remember some facts. Here I reference a collective piece of work on women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is available in electronic format, *Zabilježene: Žene i javni život Bosne i Hercegovine u 20. vijeku* (On record: women in public life in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the twentieth century).[6] Women in Yugoslavia—and consequently in Bosnia—achieved voting rights in 1946 (and in practice, within the antifascist Partisan movement they already had the right to vote and to be voted into the local government organized by the resistance movement before that time). In 1946 legal equality within marriage was proclaimed, and in 1947 all children received equal rights regardless of their parents' marital status. In 1951, abortion became legal. And in 1979 Yugoslavia signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).[7] In such a situation it was not difficult for many women to identify with the politics of the state, since the state was obviously willing to affirm their rights. *Zabilježene* continues:

> The changes that were introduced after World War II to a large extent concerned women, their position, and their rights in the state. The new rights that they acquired in socialism, Yugoslav women actually conquered themselves, in the first place with their equal participation in the War of National Liberation. After the war these hard-won rights became law, which meant that women had state support and encouragement for emancipation and equality with men.[8]

This does not mean that full equality was achieved, or that all the mechanisms of discrimination were neutralized and put under control. But the general trend toward equality had a profound and immediate influence on women's lives, and empowered them strongly in their struggle for recognition. In such a situation, women's relations with the state would not necessarily be antagonistic. Their political positioning and their decisions to work within or outside state structures were defined by numerous elements, among which education, social class, and the historical moment should be taken into account.

The authors of *Zabilježene*—to stay with this source since it is widely accessible, and produced by a large group of feminists—also investigated a number of problems that affected women in Yugoslavia. The authors speak of profound patriarchal legacies that the new state inherited in 1945 and to an extent took over; of the lower economic status of women in general, which affected their fundamental life decisions; of the feminization of certain professions and lack of access to better-paid positions; and of domestic violence. But these negative aspects did not fully overwrite the emancipatory politics of the state that were part of the official discourse and made women feel more socially and legally protected as citizens than ever before.

In that situation many women thought it was appropriate to work through the state institutions, or to cooperate with them in some way. This includes the representatives of second-wave feminism in Yugoslavia, who managed to realize a number of their public activities using the existing structure of state institutions. The reasons

for that cooperation were quite complex. On the one hand, women rightfully viewed these institutions, as public property, as belonging to them as well. At the same time, being mostly part of an educated elite, feminists were very much aware that state control over the actual work and activities of a number of these institutions was rather limited in practice. In that sense, the work of historian Marko Zubak on youth media can be highly instructive. Analyzing the way youth media operated in Yugoslavia, Zubak has shown that state funding was often used for different aims than initially planned or declared; in practice, it meant that youth media repeatedly served as a platform for social criticism and criticism of the state ideology rather than as a tool for ideological education of the socialist youth.[9]

Similar statements can be made for other state institutions, in the first place those that were active in the field of culture and media. Thus the famous feminist conference Drug-ca (He Comrade/She Comrade) took place in Belgrade in 1978 in the Studentski kulturni centar (Students' Cultural Center), an institution funded by the state and supposedly under state control. And yet it was run by a female director, Dunja Blažević, a declared feminist who was known for her support of avant-garde art. Blažević and the Center supported and hosted the international feminist conference, which was organized by the well-known feminist Žarana Papić and numerous other feminist activists. And while the conference was held in Belgrade, its organizers regarded it as a combined Yugoslav event, and the conference had a domino effect on the whole Yugoslav feminist scene. It is instructive to quote the longtime feminist and lesbian activist Lepa Mladjenović here at length:

> After the conference, a women's section of the Sociological Society of the University in Zagreb named Woman and Society [Žena i društvo] was formed in Zagreb. Soon after that, with help from Zagreb, a similar initiative with the same name Woman and Society was created within the SKC (Student Cultural Center, 1980), which was a discussion platform. In Ljubljana the first women's group LILITH was formed in 1985, and the first lesbian group Lilith LL in 1987.
>
> The need for activists to communicate among themselves constantly grew, so the first Yugoslav feminist gathering was organized in Ljubljana in 1987. At the meeting the value of sisterhood, exchange, support, women's activism, but also women's arts and culture were discussed, and the first working meeting on lesbianism was held. … After that, three more gatherings of Yugoslav feminists were held, in Zagreb and Belgrade, and the last one under the title "Good Girls Go to Heaven, Bad Girls Go to Ljubljana" was held in Ljubljana in spring 1991, just before the war broke out.
>
> The second turning point in the development of feminism and women's movement was the founding of the *SOS telephone for women and children victims of violence*. … The first SOS telephone was founded in Zagreb in 1988, followed by one in Ljubljana in 1989 and one in Belgrade in 1990. SOS telephones had the same name, we worked together, rules and principles were discussed in joined workshops, we spent summers together in summer camps—and the exchanges in which we learned from one another at that time have initiated

> the precious feminist politics of solidarity in the times of wars and the regimes of nationalist exclusions of the others.[10]

I quote these facts from the history of Yugoslav feminism to emphasize that, even in the situation of Yugoslav soft communism, it was necessary for feminist organizations to cooperate with state institutions in some form. Yugoslav feminists did not draw their legitimacy only from second-wave feminism, however strongly they were influenced by the movement, but equally so from the discourses on women's rights that were part of the official state policy. Just as women from the *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Women's Front, 1942–1953) after World War II felt that they had actively acquired (and not been given) the rights that were introduced into the socialist legislation after the war, feminist intellectuals in Yugoslavia in the 1980s believed they were arguing for something that not only belonged to them but also fit within the system in which they lived.

It is important to approach the different forms of socialism that were put in practice in the second half of the twentieth century with an understanding of the inherent complexity of the system, which produced a range of social practices with very different effects on various classes of people at different times and in different parts of the globe. Shana Penn and Jill Massino made an attempt to grasp this complexity in their 2009 volume *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe.* While recognizing in their "Introduction" that state socialism did not fully liberate women, Penn and Massino nevertheless emphasize that emancipatory state politics and social welfare did have very concrete effects across the so-called Second World:

> Indeed, in some cases socialism reinforced existing traditions and patriarchal tendencies—most evident in the gendering of labor, women's underrepresentation in politics, and the equal distribution of domestic labor. However, in other cases socialism provided women with opportunities (work) and the discourses (equality between women and men) that, while hyperbolic, could be used to challenge patriarchal attitudes and practices.[11]

In order to better understand these complexities, the authors and other contributors to their volume are open to investigating not only "alternative feminisms" but also what has been discussed as "communist feminism" or "state feminism," emphasizing that "women activists who participated in official women's organizations did have some limited agency and were not all slavishly loyal to the party platform, and that their stories are an important part of the history of state socialist Eastern Europe."[12]

When it comes to methodology, Penn and Massino suggest (but do not elaborate more seriously) that the facts about women in socialism need to be analyzed from a historical perspective, but also in a comparative framework; this means to look into the particularities of the historical moment under discussion as well as into the situation of women in other parts of the world, not only the so-called socialist bloc. This is extremely important, since it is very hard to understand both the differences between socialisms in various countries and the differences between various historical phases

in one location. At the same time, without a comparative framework that goes beyond the so-called socialist bloc, it is impossible to discuss the real scope and relevance of the emancipatory potential behind certain forms of socialist state policies.

Penn and Massino rightly emphasized the importance of social benefits under socialism:

> [S]ocialism offered individuals new roles and entities, as well as the dual conceptions of womanhood and manhood. Finally, the state provided a range of social benefits—from universal education to healthcare to state-subsidized vacations—which, despite their shortcomings, improved the lives of some, if not many. The existence of such benefits does not override the fact that people experienced repression, fear, and material want and were denied political and civil rights on par with people in Western democracies. Yet, despite the fact that people in the region lacked political rights—and perhaps even because of it—their civic identities developed with respect to other rights, from guaranteed employment to a range of social welfare benefits, which they regarded as universal. As a result, people's everyday lives and relationship to the state in these countries were more complex than Cold War scholars, policymakers, and some scholars of gender have claimed. As a result, the question "Did socialism liberate women?" cannot be answered with an emphatic "no," but has multiple answers that require attending to many voices and stories.[13]

Why are these more nuanced answers very much needed now? As we are witnessing the dying out of the so-called welfare state, it is important and highly instructive to investigate whether other historical models can offer something we might need to remember, at the same time being aware that socialism is not a real threat nowadays. It is not difficult to agree with Boris Buden that the role of clichés about life under socialism "is not so much to blacken one failed communist utopia as to glorify the current ones, that is, utopias of liberal democracy and capitalism as the final solution to world history."[14]

But these utopias did not deliver on their promises, and women seem to be once again becoming a vulnerable social group through the changes that are transforming our world. In 1993, it was Barbara Einhorn in her seminal study *Cinderella Goes to Market* who warned about women's losing their rights in the transition to capitalism.[15] Recently, in an essay on gender in literature, Dubravka Ugrešić spoke of these losses in the following way:

> Dramatic political changes—such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of communism, or the dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia—primarily affect women and change the lives of women. The differences between me, growing up in socialist Yugoslavia, and my younger compatriots—Croatians, Serbians, Bosnians and the others—are today immeasurably starker than the differences between me and West European and American women of my own age. When I was young, Erica Jong's book was emancipatory for me; for the younger generation Paris Hilton has an emancipatory role. My culture was a

> culture of books; theirs is a culture of television and the Internet. I was, and have remained, an atheist as if it were the most natural thing on earth; they go to church today and pass through religious rituals (Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim) as if it is the most natural thing in the world. I grew up with the conviction that free abortion was the most natural thing in the world; they grow up following daily public debates over whether free abortion should be abolished or not.[16]

Clearly, Ugrešić does not want to underline her "Westernized" identity, but to speak of the consequences of social changes in post-Yugoslav spaces, which have put into question a number of emancipatory practices that were part of Yugoslav reality, both as an outcome of the state-socialist gender politics, and of the country's openness to more global ideas and practices in the 1970s and 1980s. The problem is that the profound social changes that came with the transition in many respects were not favorable for women. These changes did not happen only in the postcommunist parts of the world, but they can be particularly well-observed there. By quoting Ugrešić I do not want to claim that socialism meant a simple linear, progressive development toward women's emancipation. That this was not the case is clear, for example, in Boris Buden's comments on revolutionary laws on marriage in the postrevolutionary Soviet Union and the subsequent fall into patriarchy under Stalin. Following political theorist Bini Adamczak, Buden points out that the first Soviet marriage law was

> the most progressive that the world has ever seen. It abolished drastic tsarist punishments for homosexuality and legalized abortion. In 1922 a Soviet court decided that a marriage between a bisexual woman and a transsexual man was legal, regardless if it were a marriage between same-sex partners or a transsexual marriage. It was enough for a marriage to be based upon mutual acceptance, that is, consensus. Adamczak concludes: "The Russian Revolution was not only ahead of its time, but ahead of our time. It was, partly, also a queer-feminist revolution."[17]

Of course, ten years later Stalin would reintroduce traditional marriage and ban homosexuality and abortion. So what is more "socialist" in this story, its first or its second part? And such a change with regard to gender issues was not a Soviet specialty, either. In other socialist countries as well, there was an observable return from the initial revolutionary impetus toward more traditional gender roles and the preservation of the main principles of patriarchy, including the promotion of the traditional family and a legal ban on homosexuality. The case of Romania, where the strict control of (female) sexuality was the corner stone of Ceauşescu's extremely totalitarian regime, is a radical example here.[18] Even in the case of socialist Yugoslavia, which after 1948 moved away from Stalinist politics and gradually became the most open of all socialist countries, some researchers already observed a tendency toward a more traditional understanding of women's role in society in the 1980s.[19] But the real, very radical repatriarchalization occurred in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav spaces with the rise of nationalism, starting in the 1980s and culminating in the 1990s. Similar processes of repatriarchal-

ization, although in less drastic form, can be observed in other postsocialist countries as well.

All this points to a general tendency that can be observed across the region of Central and Eastern Europe. In Žarana Papić's words:

> One could even say that in times of crises and basic social transformation, the *deconstruction* of the previous gendered order is one of the most fundamental factors of change and an effective instrument of the global restructuring of power. Furthermore, since the most influential concept in the post-communist state-building processes was the nation-state concept, the ideology of state and ethnic nationalism (based on patriarchal principles) inevitably became the most dominant building force.[20]

While acknowledging that in the case of countries with more or less ethnically "pure" populations (like Poland), the transition to postsocialism was not primarily marked by ethnic violence (as was the case in Yugoslavia), Žarana Papić nevertheless points out that "the patriarchal recolonialization of women's bodies was central to post-communist processes of 'democratic' transformations. Because post-communist men have gained decisive political and productive control over women, these societies are often labeled 'male democracies' or 'new patriarchies' or 'phallocracies.'"[21] Papić's article was written in the 1990s; some might object that even if she had been right then, things have changed since. There are at least two relevant answers to such an objection. The first is that the continuing campaigns against abortion, as well as the rise of homophobic and xenophobic and far-right discourses, do not speak for such change. Second, the abandonment of socialist ideology in practice also meant an abandonment of numerous social rights, including certain women's rights. So even if it is true that some advancements have been made since Papić wrote her article, the question is why it was necessary in the first place to abolish some of these acquired rights, so that women were forced to fight for them again in the new social regimes.

The story of socialism is not a simple one. It cannot be told as if it were one and the same in all countries throughout its existence. By acknowledging this complexity, I do not intend to negate the wrongdoings of the socialist regimes in the name of communist ideology. These wrongdoings are enormous and cannot be overlooked. But to dismiss completely the lived experience of socialism in the name of these wrongdoings and to negate any positive social changes in the name of atrocities done by totalitarian regimes, would make it impossible to understand the human investment in an idea that for many people seemed to offer a real alternative. Criticizing the "revisionist history" of socialism, Nanette Funk suggests there was a strong dividing line between women's interests and the ideology of all communist parties at all times.[22] But the realities of life in socialism—or rather socialisms—with significant differences both geographically and temporally, were much more complicated than that.

Theoretical and methodological tools that have been developed within feminist theory in recent decades can be of crucial importance in some more complex and nuanced studies of socialism that are being conducted at present. The number of scholars who are rethinking socialism(s) is much larger than the number of "revisionist histo-

rians" listed in Funk's article.[23] In following Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav studies, I see that the younger generation of scholars both at home and abroad has shifted its focus toward the Yugoslav experience of socialism beyond the wars for Yugoslav succession. Of course, the question of why and how the wars with all of their atrocities were possible, and the question of responsibility for them, still remain central to the history of Yugoslavia. But there is also a need to return to the Yugoslav experience as well as to the experiences of other socialisms, avoiding simplified stereotypes and biased thinking.

So finally, how did I become a feminist? Surely not because of Daisy Duck or Minnie Mouse, despite reading Disney's cartoons regularly as a child and noticing something wrong with their female characters. But that was a fictional world very far away from my own. I did become a feminist because of sexist attitudes and behaviors of my Yugoslav male colleagues and even friends who—once I was older—were constantly pushing me into the tight skirt of a traditional feminine role that I did not like, and that neither my own parents nor the state I lived in expected me to follow (at least not in any direct and obvious manner). And my feminism became stronger with the growing nationalisms in the country I called mine, making it clear that the autonomy of literature that I so strongly believed in was an illusion.

◊ Notes

1. Kathy Davis and Mary Evans, "Introduction: Transatlantic Conversations: Feminism as Traveling Theory," in *Transatlantic Conversations: Feminism as Traveling Theory,* ed. Kathy Davis and Mary Evans, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011): 1–11, here 6.

2. Indicative examples can be found in Gayle Greene, *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1993).

3. Jasmina Lukić, "Poetics, Politics and Gender," in *Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe,* ed. Jasmina Lukić, Joanna Regulska and Darja Zavirsek (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), 239–257.

4. The Regional Seminar on Gender and Culture was one of the first initiatives of the newly formed Program in Gender and Culture at the Central European University. The seminar aimed to bring together scholars in gender studies, both from the region and from Western countries, in order to enable prolonged discussions of feminist theory and activism. The seminar was assembled four times over two years, and after the first one, several others were to follow. These seminars were an important tool for regional networking.

5. Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (2014): 344–360.

6. *Zabilježene: Žene i javni život Bosne i Hercegovine u 20. vijeku,* http://www.scribd.com/doc/258137781/Zabiljezene-Zene-i-Javni-Zivot-Bosne-i-Hercegovine#scribd (accessed 27 June 2015), 108. This has also appeared as an English-language book: Aida Spahić et al., *Women Documented: Women and Public Life in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 20th Century,* trans. Adisa Okerić Zaid and Lejla Efendić (Sajarevo: Sarajevo Open Center, 2014).

7. *Zabilježene,* 109.

8. Ibid., 105, my translation.

9. Marko Zubak, "The Yugoslav Youth Press (1968–1980): Student Movements, Subcultures and Communist Alternative Media" (PhD diss., Central European University, 2013).

10. Lepa Mladjenović, "Počeci feminizma: Ženski pokret u Beogradu, Zagrebu, Ljubljani" [The beginnings of feminism: The women's movement in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana], http://www.womenngo.org.rs/zenski-pokret/istorija-zenskog-pokreta/217-poceci-feminizma-zenski-pokret-u-beogradu-zagrebu-ljubljani (accessed 27 May 2015), my translation. Emphasis in the original.

11. Shana Penn and Jill Massino, *Gender Politics and Everyday Life In State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

12. Ibid., 5.

13. Ibid., 2–3.

14. Boris Buden and Želimir Žilnik, kuda.org i ostali [kuda.org and the others], *Uvod u prošlost* [Introduction to the past], Novi Sad: Centar za nove medije_kuda.org, www.kuda.org, http://www.znaci.net/00003/582.pdf (accessed 27 June 2015), 206, my translation.

15. Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women's Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993).

16. Dubravka Ugrešić, "Women's Cultural Canon," *Aspasia* 2 (2008): 169–174, here 172.

17. Buden and Žilnik, *Uvod u prošlost,* 219–220, my translation.

18. Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1998).

19. Zsofia Lorand, "Learning a Feminist Language: The Intellectual History of Feminism in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s" (PhD diss., Central European University, 2015).

20. Žarana Papić, "Women in Serbia: Post-Communism, War, and Nationalist Mutations," in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans,* ed. Sabrina Ramet and Branka Magaš (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1999), 153–169, here 153–154. Emphasis in the original.

21. Ibid.

22. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot."

23. Ibid., 345.

On Vida Tomšič, Marxist Feminism, and Agency

Chiara Bonfiglioli

Vida Tomšič (born Bernot, 1913–1998) was a Slovenian lawyer, former partisan, and high-ranking communist politician who had a fundamental role in shaping welfare policies in socialist Yugoslavia. A member of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party (later renamed as the League of Communists of Yugoslavia) from 1940 to 1982, she held many important positions in the Yugoslav federal government and in Slovene republican bodies (minister of social policy of the Slovene government in 1945, president of the Assembly of Slovenia, 1962–1963, president of the House of Nations of the Assembly of Yugoslavia 1967–1968, and member of the Presidency of SR Slovenia, 1974–1984).[1] Tomšič was also the president of the Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ) between 1948 and 1952, and played a prominent part in the contested dissolution of the organization in 1953.[2]

Vida Tomšič's contribution to women's rights remains relatively unexplored, particularly when it comes to her transnational activism. Already in 1940, as a member

of the underground Yugoslav Communist Party, Tomšič drafted a program for women's emancipation, modeling it on the demands of interwar feminist groups: "political equality—protection of women's reproductive functions—socialization of child care—education—work."[3] From 1945 onward, she devoted herself to implementing this program, contributing to the design of many policies that promoted women's political, social, and economic equality in Yugoslavia. In a country devastated by World War II, Tomšič saw the creation of modern welfare institutions as necessary means to guarantee basic human rights to the whole population, and particularly to women and children. On the basis of her policymaking experience in Yugoslavia, in the mid-1950s Tomšič started to have an active role in international United Nations (UN) conferences as an expert on gender and social welfare. She represented Yugoslavia on the Commission for Social Development of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (1960–1963; 1971–1974) and chaired the commission in 1963.[4] She was also a prominent member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). Later, she became involved in transnational debates on gender and development, insisting on women's social participation and agency as political and economic subjects. She established connections with women's organizations in Non-Aligned countries, and took part in the Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985) UN World Conferences on Women, as well as in innumerable international workshops and expert meetings until the late 1980s. She also contributed to the foundation of INSTRAW, the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women founded in 1979.

When we look at Tomšič's ideals and convictions, it is clear that she combined a Marxist approach with what could be defined today as a "gender mainstreaming," institutional agenda. She believed that women's life conditions could improve only through greater economic and social development, but she was also convinced that women's participation in policymaking was fundamental to achieving such development, and that women had to mobilize to realize emancipation. According to Tomšič, the improvement in women's lives on a world scale was also necessarily tied to the fight against class and geopolitical inequalities, as made evident in her speech as Yugoslav representative to the UN Commission for Social Development in 1963.[5] Despite her opposition toward feminism, which she considered a "bourgeois" phenomenon,[6] Tomšič strenuously defended women's right to freely decide about contraception and childbirth, and often argued for the need to maintain the right to abortion against those who wished to restrict the existing legislation. In Yugoslavia, abortion was legal beginning in 1952, but only after the permission of special commissions; access was further liberalized from 1960 onward. By the early 1960s, means of contraception were available across the country, and in 1967 the Federal Council for Family Planning was established. Due to patriarchal gender relations, however, women were reticent toward contraceptives and used abortion as the main method of birth control.[7] As a founding member and president of the Federal Council for Family Planning from 1971 to 1978, Vida Tomšič was deeply aware of this negative phenomenon, and was particularly active in promoting planned parenthood, which she considered a basic human right. Women's (and men's) right to freely decide on childbirth was inscribed in the

Yugoslav Constitution in 1974.[8] That same year, during a speech given at a UN Expert Group Meeting on Social Welfare and Family Planning held in New York, Tomšič stated:

> From this forum we should insist on a sustained effort to abolish every kind of discrimination between people and nations, be the[y] discrimination racial, national, social or sexual. We should insist on new relations between people and between nations. Planned parenthood should be promoted as a human right closely related to and dependent on the promotion of other human rights. … The emancipation of women lifts a very serious obstacle from the road to progress, not only their own but that of the entire society.[9]

Issues of welfare and development were at the core of Tomšič's political interests, both in Yugoslavia and transnationally, as demonstrated by the report on her travel to the newly independent African states of Guinea, Mali, and Senegal in 1967. Tomšič accounted in detail for women's activism in the field of education, health, and labor, visiting factories, maternity clinics, hospital, cooperatives, and supporting further connections and aid for local women's organizations. She also recognized women's activism within government bodies and organizations. Reporting on Guinea, she wrote:

> I had the impression that women are well organized within party work, that they achieved a great degree of activism. However, the same problems as in Mali are present: the general economic backwardness of the country, illiteracy, etc. In Guinea women's cooperatives for the dyeing of textiles have been created. These attempts, of getting women to gather together economically and to support themselves through these cooperatives, have been successful and hopeful so far.[10]

In her account on Senegal, Tomšič reported about the creation of a midwives' association to fight against infant mortality, as well as on a ministerial action against the illiteracy of local administrators, men and women: "The course content is based on the cultivation of civic pride: they have to learn to work and administrate without the colonizer." As these accounts make clear, for Tomšič modern state institutions and welfare services were necessary to guarantee citizens' equal access to basic social and economic rights. Her experience of state reconstruction in post–World War II Yugoslavia provided her with a specific understanding of the challenges faced by newly independent postcolonial countries.

The life path of Vida Tomšič cannot be understood through the narrow label of "communist." Rather, it should be placed within a global web of antifascist, anticolonial, and internationalist postwar networks. The women's networks established through the Non-Aligned movement in the 1950s and 1960s, notably, gradually evolved into global expert networks on gender and development in the 1970s and 1980s, so that Tomšič's political agency spanned from the 1930s to the late 1980s. Her contribution to women's rights, therefore, cannot be limited to the early Cold War era, or to

Yugoslavia only. Gender activists in India, for instance, acclaimed Vida Tomšič for her work on gender and development in the 1970s and 1980s.[11]

I believe that Vida Tomšič's transnational engagement and her legacy deserve to be rediscovered, overcoming the limiting division between "communist" and "liberal" women's activists, as well as between Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the "Third World." This is a rather different approach and understanding of Vida Tomšič's work than the one Nanette Funk recently suggested in her article in the *European Journal of Women's Studies.*[12] In that text, Funk defines the new scholarship on state-socialist women's organizations as follows: "a handful of feminist researchers, using strikingly similar language, have made strong claims for a more positive interpretation not only of state socialism's accomplishments for women but also of official state-socialist women's organizations in the region."[13] She then argues for a seemingly more nuanced approach to the theme. However, throughout her article, she ends up reinstating a simplified, negative conception of state-socialist women's organizations, which is precisely what scholars in the field have aimed to deconstruct through empirical research.

Funk's article implies that women's agency was close to impossible within state-socialist women's organizations. Her distinction between proactive and reactive agency, or active and passive agency, in my view, is a form of normative categorization that deprives women of the right to define their subjectivity *in their own terms.* To state, in fact, that "promoting women's employment, if done only because of Party directives, makes one an instrument, not an agent or feminist,"[14] means to retrospectively judge women's subjective motives, and to forcefully create a binary distinction between women's "will to act" and socialist state policies, which are necessarily understood as contrary to women's interests. This argument reinforces the Cold War assumption that women's agency could not exist in Central and Eastern Europe because of the totalitarian character of state-socialist regimes, that is, that "meaningful women's agency is not possible under communism."[15] As Kristen Ghodsee argues in her first response to Funk's article, however, despite the fact that many women could not exercise their political freedom in state-socialist regimes, women's agency within communist parties and state-socialist women's organizations was indeed possible. I agree with Ghodsee when she claims that "Women (and men) can still be meaningful agents even if they are acting to promote communist ideals they believe in, or if they are acting for the goal of improving women's lives within the constraints imposed by a particular system of government."[16]

In the last part of her article, Funk explains the resurgence of interest in figures like Vida Tomšič as a "reaction formation" toward neoliberalism, which would push scholars toward a "desire to find what was good in state socialism." Or, in other words: "feminist frustrations at the difficulties of being effective under neoliberalism heightens the desire to find women's agency in an anti-capitalist Marxist past."[17] This explanation seems to be a classic example of the orthodox Marxist figuration of *false consciousness,* deconstructed by Saba Mahmood in her critique of liberal feminist interpretations of women's religious beliefs.[18] Similarly, Funk cannot explain the existence of a genuine interest in state-socialist women's organizations other than as an emo-

tional reaction against neoliberalism. She even warns that this academic trend might "tarnish the reputation" of women's and gender studies in the region, at the risk that "women in the region will misunderstand their own histories."[19]

This narrative, in my view, has the result of reinforcing Western cultural imperialist attitudes toward postsocialist Europe, as well as post-Cold War hierarchies in knowledge production, which are contributing to silencing the relevance of feminist histories and genealogies in Eastern and Southeastern Europe.[20] This is particularly evident when it comes to the passage that refers to the contemporary post-Yugoslav space, which I will quote in its entirety:

> *What is surprising, given widespread past resentment* of Marxism in post-socialist countries, is that some in the region are *even turning to Marxism,* Marxist study groups, the reading of "Das Kapital" and Marxist-inspired activism. In Zagreb, Croatia in 2012–2013 some young self-identified Marxist feminists are *resurrecting Marxist feminism* and have made vague Marxist critiques of 1990s feminist women's groups as too "liberal". Young feminist women at a Zagreb counterculture conference responded enthusiastically to a US-Italian Marxist feminist, a headline speaker, *talking yet one more time of "wages for housework"*. Vida Tomšič, the Slovenian communist women's activist, is *widely touted* in Slovenia and Croatia.[21]

This seemingly matter-of-fact passage contains a number of problematic assumptions and generalizations. To begin with, throughout the article, socialist Yugoslavia is assimilated to the rest of the socialist Eastern bloc, and hence portrayed as totalitarian. This obscures the presence of a long tradition of Marxist critical theory and Marxist feminist ideas in the region, which emerged in urban intellectual and cultural circles after 1968, both *within* and *in opposition to* state institutions and state-socialist women's organizations, because of the relative openness of the Yugoslav socialist system.[22] The first phrase of this passage, for instance, depicts the rediscovery of Marxism as something incongruous and implausible, ("*What is surprising, given widespread past resentment … even turning to Marxism*"), failing to mention that the contemporary interest in Marxism implies a critical rediscovery of a past Marxist tradition, rather than an uncritical revaluation of state socialism.

The rest of the passage refers to the Subversive Festival, an event organized in Zagreb in May 2013, in which several prominent figures of the European radical left were invited, and during which young local feminists discussed with US-Italian Marxist feminist Silvia Federici in the course of a roundtable (that I also attended). Indeed, in the course of the meeting a heated debate took place between a younger activist and a feminist woman who engaged in antiwar and antinationalist movements in the 1990s. However, this single exchange does not fully represent the whole spectrum of political positions and of relations between different generations of feminists, who often cooperate in women's studies centers across the region. Certainly, the issue of class has become more pressing for members of the postsocialist generation, who often express the need to discuss women's poverty, unemployment, and precarity alongside

nationalism and gender-based violence.[23] This renewed interest in Marxist feminism, however, and particularly toward issues of care and reproductive labor, is a European phenomenon, and not just a post-Yugoslav one.[24] It is not by chance that Silvia Federici, one of the founders of the Wages for Housework movement in the 1970s, took part in various countercultural events around Europe in recent years, with Zagreb being one of them. Her presence at the Subversive Festival shows that the post-Yugoslav region is once again connected to trans-European intellectual debates, as it used to be in the 1970s and 1980s, after the partial geopolitical isolation of the 1990s and early 2000s. Instead, Funk seems to describe this interest in Marxist feminism as a backward approach ("*resurrecting Marxist feminism … talking yet one more time of 'wages for housework'*"). This teleological view is rather puzzling, since on the very same page Funk criticizes scholars dealing with state-socialist organizations for reproducing a linear vision of history.

An ultimate proof of backwardness is presented at the end of the passage: "Vida Tomšič, the Slovenian communist women's activist, is *widely touted* in Slovenia and Croatia." With this sentence, the local countercultural Marxist tradition and third-wave Marxist feminist movements are associated with state socialism and communist women. It is not clear who is *touting* Tomšič and in which instances, but the term is clearly disparaging. The whole quote portrays past and present Marxist feminist traditions in Yugoslavia—not just state-socialist organizations—as illegitimate and outdated. This passage clearly shows that state-socialist women's organizations are far from being evaluated in an objective manner in Funk's article. Challenging such a priori disqualification is precisely what lies at the heart of most scholarship published in recent years.[25] What if, instead, we could interpret the rediscovery of Vida Tomšič as an expression of a new, less biased approach toward the history of socialism and toward the multiple identities and orientations that went under the name of "communist" or "Marxist" in twentieth-century Europe (East, West, and Southeast)? What if we could place state-socialist women's organizations in a complex web of geopolitical and historical relations, and investigate the ways in which their leaders and ordinary members defined their own practices, *in their own terms,* instead of establishing in advance what women's agency should look or sound like?

◈ Notes

1. Mateja Jeraj, "Vida Tomšič," in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries,* ed. Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loutfi (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 575–579.

2. Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* 8 (2014): 1–25.

3. Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, Žene, Ratovi* [Horses, Women, Wars] (Zagreb: Ženska Infoteka, 1996), 51.

4. Jeraj, "Vida Tomšič," 577.

5. "Statement by Mrs. Vida Tomsic, Yugoslav Representative to the UN Social Commission

on the Report on the World Social Situation, 26 April 1963," Vida Tomšič collection, AS 1413, box 7, Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana.

6. Jelena Petrović, "What Is Left of the Feminist Left?" in *Feminist Critical Interventions: Thinking Heritage, Decolonising, Crossings,* ed. Biljana Kašić, Jelena Petrović, Sandra Prlenda, and Svetlana Slapšak (Ljubljana: Red Athena University Press, 2013), 83–92.

7. Rada Drezgić, "Politics and Practices of Fertility Control under State Socialism," *History of the Family* 15, no. 2 (2010): 191–205; Mirjana Morokvašić, "Sexuality and Control of Procreation," in *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination Internationally and Its Lessons,* ed. Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz, and Roslyn McCullagh (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 127–144.

8. Jeraj, "Vida Tomšič," 578.

9. "Contribution of women to the formulation and implementation of national and international policies relating especially to population and development," 19 April 1974, Vida Tomšič collection, AS 1413, box 36, Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana.

10. "Izveštaj o poseti ženskim organizacijama u Maliju, Gvineji i Senegalu, 7–19 februara 1967" [Report on the visit to women's organizations in Mali, Guinea, and Senegal, 7–19 February 1967], Vida Tomšič collection, AS 1413, box 253, Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana.

11. Kristen Ghodsee, "Research Note: The Historiographical Challenges of Exploring Second World–Third World Alliances in the International Women's Movement," *Global Social Policy* 14, no. 2 (2014): 244–264. Devaki Jain, *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

12. Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (2014): 344–360.

13. Ibid., 345.

14. Ibid., 349.

15. Kristen Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot: A Response to Nanette Funk," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, no. 2 (2015): 248–252.

16. Ibid., 251.

17. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 356.

18. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

19. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 356.

20. Svetlana Slapšak, "Women, Yugoslavia, Anti-communist Narcosis and Neo-Colonialism: Maps, Roads, Exits," in Kašić et al., *Feminist Critical Interventions,* 40–49.

21. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 356, emphasis added.

22. Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Feminist Translations in a Socialist Context: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Gender and History,* under review.

23. Adriana Zaharijević, "Dissidents, Disloyal Citizens and Partisans of Emancipation: Feminist Citizenship in Yugoslavia and Post-Yugoslav Spaces," *Women's Studies International Forum* 49 (March–April 2015): 93–100.

24. See, for instance, the conference organized in Berlin in March 2015, "The Strength of Critique: Trajectories of Marxism–Feminism," http://www.rosalux.de/documentation/52209/the-strength-of-critique-trajectories-of-marxism-feminism-marxfem.html (accessed 5 May 2015).

25. Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 547–573.

"We Opposed It"

The National Council of Women and the Ban on Abortion in Romania (1966)

Raluca Maria Popa

Communist women's organizations during the state-socialist period in Romania (1944–1989), and elsewhere to varying degrees, to date have hardly been the subject of serious and critical historical research. Despite this lack of research, scholars allow themselves to make statements about "official state socialist women's organizations"[1] as "subordinated to, and in effect mere executive instruments of, government policy."[2] The fact that judgment precedes evidence in the case of communist women's organizations in my view is a measure of their historiographical stigmatization. One measure of such stigmatization is the recourse to sources *about* the organizations rather than *from* the organizations in the study of their actions. In the case of Romania, an important reason for the limited use of the organizations' own records is that the archives of the central organization have not yet been discovered.[3] There is, however, another reason—the mistrust in the "words" of either the organizations or their former members. Feminist philosopher Nanette Funk recently even advised scholars against conducting interviews, since in her opinion "[t]he wish to do oral histories of women from official women's organizations before it is too late, but without adequate caution, leads to distortions."[4] I take the opposite view and believe that, in fact, we need a lot more research into the motivations, contradictions, and complexities behind the actions or nonactions of communist women's organizations, research that would include interviews or biographical records, when they exist.

This contribution discusses the previously ignored role of the National Council of Women from Romania in one amply studied episode in the history of Romanian state socialism and gender—that of the introduction of a virtually complete ban on abortion in 1966, shortly after Nicolae Ceaușescu became the leader of the Partidul Comunist Român (Romanian Communist Party, PCR).[5] The narrative I am presenting is mostly based on an interview with a former secretary of the National Council of Women, Maria Manolescu (married Chivu), which I conducted in February 2013. In our interview, she discussed the opposition of the National Council of Women to restrictions on access to abortion in Romania. I also corroborate the information she provided in the interview with archival sources I have consulted in the National Historical Archives of Romania, fond Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, sections Chancellery, Organization, and Cadres.[6]

Consiliul Național al Femeilor (the National Council of Women, CNF) was the longest-surviving women's organization during the communist regime in Romania, from 1958 to 1989. It bore the name of an influential pre–World War II coalition of women's organizations, Consiliul Național al Femeilor Române (the National Council of Romanian Women),[7] but it was the successor of two post-1944 organizations: Uni-

unea Femeilor Antifasciste din România (the Union of Antifascist Women of Romania) established at the initiative of communist leader Ana Pauker, in 1945, and Uniunea Femeilor Democrate din România (the Union of Democrat Women of Romania), established in 1948.

Previous analyses of the women's organizations affiliated with the Communist Party oscillate between condemnation and oblivion. On the side of condemnation, the influential 2006 *Raport Final* (Final report) written by the Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania, an interdisciplinary group of renowned scholars tasked with providing a definitive account of communism in Romania, provided an assessment of all "mass organizations" during the communist regime, even though it did not devote any specific attention to the women's organization(s). The report described all mass organizations affiliated with the Communist Party as top-down mechanisms of control of the population; in the opinion of the authors of the report, the most important function of organizations such as the Union of Communist Youth, and implicitly the National Council of Women also, was to absorb the entire society under the control of the Communist Party.[8] On the side of oblivion, much of the feminist scholarship on postsocialism largely concluded that the Party-sponsored women's organizations of the state-socialist period had a perfunctory policy performance and were unable to make any meaningful contributions to improving women's situation.[9] Furthermore, these approaches to understanding women's organizations during state socialism mirror a larger framework for understanding women's policies and the gender politics of state socialism as a top-down, authoritarian project that brought about certain advances, such as women's equality of rights with men, and women's access to education, work, and political authority, but in the absence of women's participation and often against their will. In other words, state socialism was "state patriarchy," not state feminism, as the prominent Romanian feminist scholar Mihaela Miroiu put it in 2007.[10]

More recently, Romanian historiography has moved to a more in-depth and more open examination of the women's organizations in state-socialist Romania. Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului (the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism) at the Romanian Academy in 2012 published two volumes of an encyclopedia of the communist regime. The second of the two volumes is devoted to Party, state, community, and cooperative institutions and the National Council of Women receives a ten-page entry.[11] Very recently, a monograph by the historian Luciana Jinga, *Gen și reprezentare în România comunistă: 1944–1989* (Gender and representation in communist Romania, 1944–1989) provides the most complete history of the organizations to date. Such new historiography greatly enhances our understanding of the communist women's organizations and demonstrates that they contributed toward equality between women and men.[12] Importantly, this new historiographical interest opens the possibility of an examination of the organizations in their own terms and looks at the ways they acted to advance the state-socialist equality project for women.

However, in the absence of the central archives of the communist women's organizations in Romania and given the limited efforts to conduct oral history interviews with former members of these organizations, our knowledge about the relations between the women's organizations and the Communist Party, as well as about the

women's own motivations, strategies, and actions, is still very limited. Therefore, interviews remain a privileged and important source for exploring personal motivations and individual contributions.

As already mentioned, one of the women I have interviewed is Maria Manolescu, better known to the Romanian public and historians as the wife of Romanian communist leader Chivu Stoica.[13] At the beginning of the 1950s, before she met her future husband, Manolescu was chief engineer at the textile factory in Arad,[14] a city in western Romania, close to the border with Hungary. The factory had around ten thousand workers. In 1958, Maria Groza, then vice-president of the CNF,[15] invited Manolescu to become the secretary for industry and agriculture of the CNF in Bucharest. She was sorry she had to leave the factory floor, but she did so because she felt the work of the CNF was very important.

On the topic of the passing of the 1966 abortion decision in Romania, Manolescu recalled the following:

> We, the National Council of Women, opposed the decree to ban abortion. We wrote a study. It was a serious study that took us a year or so to develop. I was responsible for elaborating that study, but we had contributions from the [Bureau for] Statistics, from doctors, people who actually had the information. We were advocating for creating the conditions for having more children. We suggested, for example, longer parental leave, for two years. This study generated a huge scandal.[16]

I was able to locate the study Maria Manolescu mentioned as having been drafted by the National Council of Women among the archival records of the Romanian Communist Party, although the authorship is attributed to the Ministry of Health.[17] The study titled *Studiu privind situația natalității din Republica Socialistă România și măsuri de redresare a natalității din țara noastră* (Study on the situation of natality in the Socialist Republic of Romania and measures to improve natality in our country; hereinafter *Studiu privind situația natalității*) was submitted as documentation material for the meeting of the Executive Committee of the PCR on 2 August 1966.[18] Archival documents regarding the adoption of the decision to severely limit abortions in Romania could not be consulted in the first wave of research on this issue.[19] Gail Kligman does not include them in her 1998 flagship study on the politics of reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania.[20] She also attributes no role to the National Council of Women in the abortion debate, other than seeing some remarks made at the June 1966 national women's conference by the then president of the CNF, Suzana Gâdea, as an ominous anticipation of the legislation that was to be adopted later that year. As quoted by Kligman, Gâdea, in her report to the national women's conference, did refer to the need to remedy "certain deficiencies in the current legislation" [on access to abortions], but she also spoke about the need to propose "new socioeconomic and educational measures that will contribute to fertility growth and improvement in the care provided for mothers and children."[21] Therefore, as Kligman also acknowledges,[22] the remarks cannot be unequivocally linked to a statement by the National Council of Women of support for the severe limitation of access to abortion. On the contrary, and in relation

to what Manolescu said during our interview, Suzana Gâdea's words may even be interpreted as evidence to the contrary: that the CNF was not in favor of restrictive legislation as the solution to dramatically falling birthrates.

An extensive set of measures to encourage families to have more children were, in fact, recommended by the *Studiu privind situația natalității*. According to some sources, the study had been initiated by the Ministry of Health, which appointed a committee of experts from several state bodies to explore the sharp decrease of birthrates in Romania.[23] The National Council of Women was a member of that committee.

The study was drafted by a group of experts representing several state institutions—"the State Planning Committee, the State Committee for Labor and Wages, the State Committee for Culture and Arts, the State Committee for Monitoring and Advising the Local Bodies of State Administration, the National Council of Women, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Justice, and the General Union of Labor Unions"[24]—and, according to some records, coordinated by the Ministry of Health. The *Studiu privind situația natalității* was finalized at the beginning of July 1966 and was disseminated among the members of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the PCR on 26 July 1966. The final study was twenty-five pages long and was accompanied by a thirty-page appendix containing a set of recommendations for "Regulating the termination of pregnancies." The study and its appendix were marked "for internal use only."[25]

In 1965, birthrates stood at a record low of 14.6, compared to 23.9 in 1948 and 29.5 in 1938.[26] Romania's record was also one of the lowest in Europe, exceeding only that of Hungary (13.1).[27] Abortion had been legal in Romania since 1957,[28] and available on demand. Although the *Studiu privind situația natalității* repeatedly emphasized the gravity of the problem of falling birthrates, its conclusions recommended "complex measures" for improving the demographic situation. Eleven such measures were suggested: (1) to introduce birth allowances; (2) to increase the number of available places in nurseries and to improve the quality of the nurseries; (3) to extend the maternity leave for working mothers; (4) to extend regular leave for working mothers and to create some advantages for them when scheduling working hours and deciding on shifts; (5) to introduce different retirement specifications for working mothers; (6) to offer health-care benefits for unemployed parents who are raising two or more children; (7) to raise the age limit for child allowances; (8) to improve cultural and educational activities; (9) to increase the production of contraceptives; (10) to coordinate the study of the demographic problems; and finally (11) to improve legislation in order to increase birthrates. The *Studiu privind situația natalității* of July 1966 also stated that "the use of contraceptive means is clearly recommended over abortion, because contraceptives are highly effective and they cause practically no harm to women's bodies."[29] It went on to emphasize that the use of contraceptives was the most appropriate method for preventing unwanted pregnancies, and raised the problem of their limited availability, as well as lack of education among the general population about their use.

As Manolescu mentioned during our interview, the communist leaders present at the Executive Committee meeting on 2 August 1966, and especially Nicolae Ceaușescu, were utterly displeased with the *Studiu privind situația natalității.* Ceaușescu expressed dissatisfaction with the content of the study, particularly because the material was not

recommending restrictions on abortions as a solution to falling birthrates. Disregarding the wide-ranging recommendations of the July 1966 study, Nicolae Ceaușescu also made the final decision: "I believe the time has come to stop all abortions. … Let us request that a draft decree be written within two weeks that would only offer some of all the incentives that were recommended … and otherwise *ban all abortions.*"[30] Ceaușescu also rejected all financial and social "incentives" that had been suggested in the *Studiu privind situația natalității.* All proposals for measures to encourage families to have children that had been formulated in the study were rejected by the Executive Committee on the grounds that they were too costly.

Although the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the PCR of 2 August 1966 do not direct any extensive criticism to the National Council of Women, one reference in the discussion does point to dissatisfaction among PCR leaders with the CNF's position. One of the participants (Leonte Răutu) reminded the other members of the Executive Committee that "when the problem was discussed at the National Council of Women, they said that access to abortion was a great victory of the communist regime."[31] In other words, according to the CNF, the right to abortion was an achievement of communism that should be kept rather than being abolished.

Later in our interview Manolescu recalled that after the July study, "there was the discussion in September [1966][32] with the doctors, where Ceaușescu was dissatisfied with the Council's assessment that access to abortion was a benefit of the socialist regime." "Many doctors," she continued, "actually supported the ban on abortion, because the previous access to abortion had generated too much work for them. The fee women had to pay to have an abortion was really small and doctors were working around the clock; later on, they could charge much more for an abortion."[33]

Decree 770/1966 was published in the *Buletinul Oficial al Republicii Socialiste România* (Official bulletin of the Socialist Republic of Romania) on 1 October 1966 and remained in effect until the end of the socialist regime. Until 1989, therefore, Romania had one of the most repressive antiabortion legislations in the world.[34] Decree no. 770/1966 banned abortion in all cases, except when: (a) the pregnant woman's life was in danger because of the pregnancy; (b) one of the parents suffered from a hereditary transmitted illness; (c) the pregnant woman was severely physically or mentally disabled; (d) the pregnant woman was more than forty-five years old; (e) the pregnant woman had already given birth to four children, whom she was also raising at the time of the pregnancy; or (f) the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest.

In our interview, Manolescu clearly expressed pride in the position taken by the National Council of Women at the time of the adoption of this infamous piece of legislation:

> I was not sorry we wrote this study, because we said what had to be said. The National Council of Women was the only institution that expressed a different opinion when the decree was being discussed. We were saying that such a regulation could not be made; we knew children would die, 20,000 per year, they would be born with disabilities. Low-income women were the worst affected. Women with higher income could afford abortions. Those who couldn't afford it had to resort to other, often life-threatening measures.[35]

According to Manolescu, the clash of opinions between the National Council of Women and the Romanian Communist Party and especially its leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, over the proposal to restrict abortions had long-term and severe consequences for the National Council of Women. In our interview, she recounted the severe reprisal that followed their opposition to the decree: "The effect of our study was that the Council severely shrank. I left. Everybody left. The Council was severely reduced. It was left to fulfill a mere representative function (mainly abroad)."[36]

In 1967, the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the PCR approved a decision regarding the improvement of political-educational activity among women.[37] One of the important provisions of the decision was the reorganization of activism among women from paid to unpaid activity. Only the central women's organization, the National Council of Women, continued to receive financial support, whereas local activists had to work on a voluntary basis. In the terms of the PCR leadership, it meant "bringing activism among women back to its civic basis." One year after the implementation of the decision, the Party proudly reported that due to the decision to improve political-educational activity among women, it "had saved 6,000,000 lei,"[38] which at the time meant about $1 million.[39]

The archival records I was able to consult do not extensively present the motivation for disbanding the local structures of the National Council of Women. Therefore, I was not able to verify Manolescu's assertion that the significant diminishing of support from the Communist Party to the National Council of Women was in fact related to their opposition to the 1966 abortion decree. According to this former secretary of the National Council of Women, this was a unique moment of opposition to what was already then, in 1966, a very repressive regime. According to Manolescu, the National Council of Women paid a heavy price for not supporting the decree banning abortion in Romania and was never able to recover either its resources or its political stance. Over the ensuing years, the National Council of Women became a much more politicized structure, as membership came to be dependent on membership in the Communist Party, which had not been the case previously. The CNF also became more and more involved in supporting the demographic propaganda that intensified over the 1970s and 1980s.[40]

The case I discussed here demonstrates the difficulties involved in recovering the history of communist women's organizations. These difficulties are due to the limited availability of archival sources, reluctance of former members or activists to be interviewed, and finally the unexamined assumptions that go into the interpretation of existing records. In Romania more effort should be devoted to oral histories with former members of the women's organizations during state socialism, both because of the limited archival records of their work and because interviews can produce different and additional insights. These interviews should at the very least start from an open position regarding the work of the council and its women's agency, rather than assuming that we already know they were mere instruments of the Party.

◊ Notes

I am grateful to Francisca de Haan for the invitation to contribute to this Forum, her guidance in writing this contribution, and very useful comments on different drafts. I also warmly

thank Maria Manolescu for her interview and for challenging previous ideas about the role of the National Council of Women in communist Romania.

1. This is the term Nanette Funk uses in her recent essay, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (2014): 344–360.

2. Barbara Einhorn, "Mass Dictatorship and Gender Politics: Is the Outcome Predictable?" in *Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorship,* ed. Jie-Hyun Lim and Karen Petrone (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 34–62, 55. I thank Francisca de Haan for this reference.

3. Luciana Jinga discusses the absence of an archive of the central organization in the introduction to her monograph *Gen și reprezentare în România comunistă: 1944–1989* [Gender and representation in Communist Romania, 1944–1989] (Bucharest: Polirom, 2015). She has used a variety of sources for her monograph, including extensive records of the Romanian Communist Party, archives of several ministries, and archives of various local branches of the communist women's organizations, but has not conducted interviews with former members or leaders of the communist women's organizations or their personal archives, to the extent that they exist.

4. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 356.

5. Nicolae Ceaușescu (26 January 1918–25 December 1989) was a Romanian communist leader who ruled the Romanian Communist Party and the Romanian state for much of the state-socialist period. He became general secretary of the PCR in 1965 and president of Romania in 1967 and he held both positions until 22 December 1989, when he was overthrown in a violent revolution. He was executed by a squad of soldiers on 25 December 1989.

6. These archival records are available in a special study room of the Arhivele Naționale ale României [National Archives of Romania, ANR] in Bucharest, in the Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu room.

7. For the pre–World War II National Council of Romanian Women, see, for example, Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loutfi, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006). Created in 1922, the pre–World War II National Council of Women was presided over by Princess Alexandrina Cantacuzino (1876–1944).

8. Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrincu, and Cristian Vasile, eds., *Raport Final: Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România* [Final report: Presidential Commission for the analysis of Communist dictatorship in Romania] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 197.

9. Such conclusions have been formulated by Western, Central, and Eastern European scholars alike. See, for example, most recently Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot." For earlier similar assessments, see Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, eds., *Gender Politics and Post-communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Tanya Renne, ed. *Ana's Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); and Cristina Liana Olteanu, Elena-Simona Gheonea, and Valentin Gheonea, *Femeile în România comunistă* [Women in communist Romania] (Bucharest: Politeia, 2003).

10. See Mihaela Miroiu, "Communism was a State Patriarchy, not State Feminism" *Aspasia* (2007): 197–201. Her contribution was part of a forum for which eight authors tried to answer the question "Is 'Communist Feminism' a *Contradictio in Terminis*?"

11. Florin-Răzvan Mihai, "Consiliul Național al Femeilor" [The National Council of Women], in *România 1945–1989*: *Enciclopedia regimului comunist: Instituții de partid, de stat, obștești și cooperatiste* [Romania 1945–1989: Encyclopedia of the communist regime: Party, state, community, and cooperative institutions], ed. Dan Cătănuș (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2012), 173–183.

12. Jinga, *Gen și reprezentare în România comunistă,* 21.

13. Chivu Stoica (1908–1975) was a member of the Central Committee of the Romanian

Communist Party (1945–1975), Politburo prime minister (1955–1961), and president of the State Council (1965–1967). He died in 1975, in what appeared to be suicide.

14. As Manolescu explained in our interview, the factory no longer exists today because it tried to resist privatization at the beginning of the 1990s, and the new decision makers in Romania, who were trying to do away with the communist past of the country, would not support the communist industries any longer.

15. Maria (Mia) Groza (1918–2003) was vice-president of the National Council of Women and she held numerous official functions and appointments: vice-minister for foreign affairs (1978–1987), and vice-minister of defense, delegate of Romania to the United Nations General Assembly meetings. She was the daughter of Petru Groza, prime minister of Romania (1945–1952).

16. Author's interview with Maria Manolescu on 4 February 2013.

17. Ministerul Sănătății și Protecției Sociale, *Studiu privind situația natalității din Republica Socialistă România și măsuri de redresare a natalității din țara noastră* [Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Study on the situation of natality in the Socialist Republic of Romania and measures to improve natality in our country], 1966, in ANR, fond CC of PCR Chancellery, no. 2574, file 102/1966, 102–127. The inference that this is the study that Manolescu mentioned in our interview is my own and I have not had the opportunity to directly verify with her that this is the text she recalls. However, based on what she says about the study, its content, and its reception, I am confident that this is the study she talks about.

18. ANR, fond CC of PCR, Chancellery, file 101/ 1966, 102–152.

19. The documents have since been discussed, to my knowledge, in the following studies: Raluca Popa, "Female Bodies, Masculine Power: A Case Study of the Adoption of Anti-abortion Legislation in Communist Romania (1966)," in *Gen si putere* [Gender and power], ed. Oana Băluță (Iași: Polirom, 2006), 93–116; Florin Soare, "Ceausescu's Population Policy: A Moral or an Economic Choice between Compulsory and Voluntary Incentivised Motherhood?" *European Journal of Government and Economics* 2, no. 1 (June 2013): 59–78.

20. Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

21. Suzana Gâdea, "Raportul Consiliului Național al Femeilor din Republica Socialistă România" [Report of the National Council of Women from the Socialist Republic of Romania], *Femeia* [The Woman], no. 7 (1967), quoted in Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity*, 121.

22. Commenting on Gâdea's remarks about the abortion legislation, Kligman says "her raising of these matters did not, on the surface, suggest nefarious state interests; to the contrary" (*The Politics of Duplicity*, 121).

23. Ministerul Sănătății și Protecției Sociale, *Unele probleme privind dinamica sporului natural al populației din Republica Socialistă România* (broșură) [Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Some problems concerning the natural population growth dynamics in the Socialist Republic of Romania (brochure)], 1965. Arhiva Ministerului Sănătății [Archive of the Ministry of Health] fond Cabinet 1, file 69/1966, unnumbered. Quoted in Soare, "Ceausescu's Population Policy," 65.

24. According to the Report of the Education and Health Section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, 26 July 1966, ANR, fond CC of PCR, Chancellery, no. 2574, file 101/1966, 42–44.

25. ANR, fond CC of PCR Chancellery, no. 2574, file 102/1966. The study and its appendix are on pages 102–157.

26. Birthrates are expressed as the total number of live births per 1,000 of population per year. Figures here are quoted from *Studiu privind situația natalității.*

27. Ibid., 6.

28. Decree no. 463/1957 allowed access to abortions on request.

29. *Studiu privind situația natalității,* 13.

30. Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of CC of PCR, 2 August 1966, in ANR, fond CC of PCR Chancellery, no. 2574, file 102/1966. Emphasis added.

31. Ibid.

32. On 21 September 1966, the official newspaper *Scânteia* (The spark) reported that a working meeting "on the issues of raising birthrates and improving the protection of mother and child" had taken place the previous day at the Central Committee of the PCR. The article emphasized that those present at the discussions had debated "the damaging nature of current legislation on abortion, which posed a threat to women's health and to the natural growth of the population."

33. Author's interview with Manolescu, 4 February 2013.

34. For the consequences of the banning of abortion, see Kligman *The Politics of Duplicity.*

35. Author's interview with Manolescu, 4 February 2013.

36. Ibid. By mentioning the "shrinking" of the CNF, Manolescu is referring to the fact that several positions in the central secretariat of the organization were cut, including her own.

37. Decision of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of PCR no. 2776/ 3–23 September 1967 regarding improvements of political-educational activity among women.

38. *Referat cu privire la proiectul de buget al partidului pe anul 1968* [Report on the draft party budget for the year 1968], ANR, fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie, no. 2574, file 187/ 1967, 18.

39. According to the Order of the National Bank of Romania no. 4/24555 of 5 August 2003 regarding the official exchange rate between leu and US dollar in the period 1945–1989.

40. Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity,* ch. 5: "Spreading the Word: Propaganda," 116–147; Jinga, *Gen și Reprezentare,* 139–145.

Partisan Potential

Researching Communist Women's Organizations in Eastern Europe

Alexandra Ghit

What else can be said about communism and feminism in Eastern Europe depends to a certain extent on the discursive space created by previous research and debates on the topic. At the moment, the space of "what else" is generated by discussions of whether dominant historical narratives about state-backed women's organizations functioning between 1945 and 1989 in the region can or should be challenged. In this piece, I refer to the precedents, potentials, pitfalls, and partisanships that frame scholarly narratives of communist women's organizations in Eastern Europe. I show that these histories intervene in complicated political and scholarly contexts, are shaped by researchers' different decolonial strategies, and replicate concepts and explanatory devices common in the global field of gender history/studies. I advocate future clarity in conceptual positioning, as a research strategy but also as a political one.

Precedents

In 2011, I presented part of a workshop paper on the historiography of women and gender in Central and Eastern Europe. I argued then that a welcome, "revisionist," "paradigm shift"—resembling the phenomenon discussed a few years earlier by Sheila Fitzpatrick for Soviet history—was occurring in my new subdiscipline. The paper saluted the accumulation of scholarship critical of the totalitarianist approaches that had shaped the subdiscipline's historiography in the region.[1] In making my argument, I drew on Fitzpatrick's 2007 account of how the "revisionist" label was lobbed in the 1970s at US-based historians who wanted to write social histories of the Soviet Union "from below." The label was appropriated by the accused and turned into a mark of their scholarly independence, New Left ideals, or commitment to the evidence-based reinterpretation process characteristic of the historical discipline. Fitzpatrick states that largely due to the dynamics of academic production and professional socialization, in time, "revisionism" became the dominant interpretative paradigm in Soviet studies. By the 1990s it had been largely displaced by a cultural-theory-driven "post-revisionism."[2] For many historians with expertise on the area, even before the end of the Cold War, totalitarianism was analytically unuseful and stylistically passé.

Interestingly, Fitzpatrick mentioned that these changes in scholarly trends in English-speaking academia occurred "paradoxically as the glasnost generation of Russians, hitherto deprived of access to theories of totalitarianism and Western 'Cold War' scholarship were coming to embrace Orwell's *1984*."[3] Political changes had thus contributed to a kind of disconnect between the (US-academia-dominated, certainly) state of the art in the discipline and the postsocialist political commitments of many historians from the postsocialist space or of scholars interested in system change and political transitions in the area. Partly because of this disjuncture, until recently, the historiography of East European, post-1945 socialisms has been conceptually poorer and methodologically less innovative than work on Russia, and cross-fertilization with the more sophisticated field of Soviet history has been rare.[4] In different postsocialist states, anticommunist scholarship drawing on the totalitarian paradigm was encouraged due to its capacity to legitimate neoliberal elites and policies. Historians working on state-socialist Eastern Europe face the peculiarly subaltern task of having to construct their research around either the globally hegemonic "state of the art" (marked by an ambivalent assessment of communism) or the regionally hegemonic discourse (condemnation of communisms as criminal regimes). A body of recent research on communist women's organizations seems to be creating, via the assumptions and methodologies of women's and gender history, positionings that do not quite fit or construct a rapport with either camp. Much like the communist activists they sometimes study, these scholars elicit very different reactions from their publics.

The issue of "revisionism" and specifically "feminist revisionism" as applied to Eastern Europe's history was raised again by Nanette Funk in 2014. In an article on the historiography of communist women's organizations in Eastern Europe, she argues that a number of "Feminist Revisionist Scholars" have published work that overstresses the positive influence of these organizations on women's lives.[5] Her article seems to suggest that research published (roughly) before the 2000s on women's mass organiza-

tions in the USSR and Eastern Europe provides evidence that such bodies had a record of both positive and negative actions but that in a final evaluation these organizations only rarely exercised a truly ethical type of "proactive agency."[6] In my reading, Nanette Funk appears to argue that writing against the grain of an existing corpus of scholarship on women's organizations and socialist gender policies is best not attempted unless one reproduces the conclusions of previous Western left-feminist writing on the topic.[7]

In fact, "feminist revisionism" (whether a label assigned or claimed) seems to oversimplify and teleologize a complicated crisscrossing of scholarly trends, political contexts, and individual intellectual projects. Nevertheless, the weight of the term and its accusatory connotations underscore the need for clear conceptual and political positioning of gender and women's historians working on the state-socialist period in Eastern Europe and a stronger acknowledgment of previous research or research from adjacent subfields. On the other hand, the topic of communist women's organizations active in Eastern Europe has not been exhausted and continues to have great potential for opening up research on key issues in the history of the past century.

Potentials and Pitfalls

The recent scholarship cannot simply be dismissed as an almost naive "reaction formation" to the neoliberalism experienced by Eastern Europeans in the region.[8] Of course, often, there is a political point to make here, as there was when feminists in Western Europe and the United States pointed to some of the gender equality achievements of state-socialist regimes and implicitly asked what if anything their own governments and movements were planning to do about the existing disparities. Yet the recent "revisionist" body of historical research also partakes discursively in the current scholarly (re)investigation of "Cold War cultures" and "socialist globalization."[9] As case studies, state-socialist women's organizations are excellent entry points for exploring in a gender-sensitive and decolonial manner transnational processes and themes that defined the twentieth century: mass democracy and mobilization, the global history of leftist social movements, postwar reconstruction, and the history of social policy and welfare states or state interventionism. Although the above-mentioned scholarly entanglement with reassessments of the global Cold War could be made even more explicit in "revisionist" work, the strength of tone in this body of work, the insistence that gender equality policies and women's mobilization were a crucial Cold War battleground already have the potential for an original and, importantly, women- or gender-centered intervention within this emerging field.[10] No small feat.

The topic of communist women's organizations and its usually considerable archival fonds can draw into the conversation historians of women and gender working on regions other than Eastern Europe, historians focusing on state socialism, and those exploring from different angles or locations the potentials of "global history." As others have shown, this dialogue has surprisingly few precedents and channels.[11] Of course, the task of interpellating these other fields will most likely fall on the scholars doing work "from the margins." This is why it is especially important now for "revisionists" to more systematically and transparently address how we see communist

women's activism as part of the evolving political and economic landscape of "the Bloc" during state socialism.

A focus on systemic functions of these organizations might be one way to productively integrate or entangle the history of women's organizations with the histories of other socialist and nonsocialist modernization projects. By making gender visible in governmentality dynamics we can contribute to rethinking the relationship between the "(state-socialist) state" and the "(state-socialist) subjects" more broadly. For example, besides conceptualizing "women's democratic organizations" as ideologically driven, whether they are for the purposes of indoctrination or consciousness-raising, it is possible to conceive of them (at least for the immediate postwar period) as among a string of socialist-specific welfare institutions. Drawing on the work of Linda Gordon, John Dixon and David Macarov, and Lynne Haney, it could be argued that, similarly to trade unions, such "mass organizations" could be seen as part of the socialist version of the welfare state if they contributed to shaping welfare policies, to the socialization of care, and the process of defining needs and the needy.[12] In postwar Romania, these organizations, exactly because of their centralization, had a significant role in organizing nationwide child-care provision and disbursing other kinds of entitlements.[13] They thus participated in the management of the labor force and its decommodification and not simply in the enforcement of policy through propaganda. Activists contributed to interpreting welfare needs, creating welfare subjects, and instilling norms through practices that transcended individual intentions, good or bad. Parallels and interconnections with other polities and the effects of these functions on the activism of the transnational Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) can be sought. Could we speak of systematic tensions and distinctions between priorities of the WIDF and the local chapters of mass organizations from different countries? Did these two scales produce different relationships to "the state" of the same putative entity—the "women's mass organization"?

Although all the "Feminist Revisionist Scholars" pursue, I would argue, projects of decolonizing canonized historical accounts, there are important differences in the strategies employed and the arguments seen as most in need of revision. My main interest is in the process of mobilization of women through mass organizations in the postwar period as emblematic of a twentieth-century global political landscape defined by interventionism, rationalization, and the incitement to self-government. I believe research in this vein can decenter nation-state–based narratives and insistently gender emerging histories of social regulation as transnational processes. For others, researching communist activism as part of the global history of women's movements may be a way to challenge the "two wave" narrative of feminism made possible by the invisibility of mobilization for social justice goals outside liberal democracies. Other revisionists are confident in the democratizing potentials of oral histories and I would venture, the "prickly" political capacities of popular (n)ostalgia in our current historical juncture.[14] These decentering projects are clearly not contradictory but the extent of their actual overlap, especially since they address different canonized discourses, does need to be clarified. Perhaps it is time for one of those dreaded internal debates.

Although I am no longer very invested in issues of agency and resistance during communism, exploring the motivations and biographies of "gender activists" remains

an important project in general.[15] To show that the women emerging out of rural illiteracy, interwar left-activism, wartime resistance movements, or the Holocaust as communist activists may not have simply been prisoners of Stalinism qua political religion means to attempt a timely, common sense revision of highly dubious historical narratives dominant especially in scholarship produced in different East European states. It would be equally wise to treat members of these organizations as politicians and policy actors in complex, transnationally connected political systems. Intentionalist accounts have strong limits. These limits are compounded and not lessened by admitting as agentic only those actors recognizable as moral by present standards or on the basis of an axiomatic rather than historically nuanced interpretation, as Nanette Funk seems, in the final instance, to propose.[16]

At the same time, neither decolonial projects nor global histories can be successfully pursued without attention to periodization, context, or curiosity for unsavory histories. Communist women's organizations in socialist states did have variable degrees of autonomy and influence, they were often heavy-handed in their interventions, and activists did often become established members of bureaucracies that maintained the functioning of authoritarian systems. Recent research argues that although they had an internationalist and antiracist agenda, the publications of these organizations were often functioning on the basis of an Orientalizing gaze.[17] Pointing to the social sources and consequences of such dynamics is also part of the task of decolonizing gender history. It would also be a way of responsibly answering accusations of professional irresponsibility.

Partisanship

Yet does the new scholarship on state-socialist women's organizations truly have a problem of pitch, the fault of unpardonable bias? "Recuperative" histories as well as the insistence on "agency" were and remain central to gender history in general. The usefulness and relevance of these strategies and concepts deserves to be questioned globally and not simply when they make their way in discussions of socialist societies. Making sense of the weight of these interpretative frameworks involves the uneasy tasks of reckoning with Anglo-American gender history's Thompsonian heritage, a tradition of feminist political intervention insistent on reparation (whence the urgency of the "recuperative") or the beginnings of its institutionalization at a moment of distancing in academia from structuralist interpretation and an embracing of "little people's" agentic resistance tactics. Certainly, as Clare Hemmings's work has shown, the presence of a nostalgic discursive frame in feminist scholarship needs to be acknowledged and questioned.[18]

On the other hand, at a moment when feminists are turning their attention to "the material" and the issue of articulating strong political critiques of capitalism (rather than only of structuralism and "the old left"), daring to research differently the history of global socialism and feminism may revitalize the project of decolonizing feminist theorizing and the grand narratives of "the feminist movement." Such research would be a way of insisting on looking and seeing in other locations instead of limiting the decolonial project to the production of critiques of the global expansion of liberal

feminism. Acknowledging connections and allowing for the complications of postwar "Third World" and "Second World" left-ideological women's organizing are, in my view, preconditions for forging a feminist politics capable of escaping both organizational parochialism and the Orientalism of current transnational liberal and (often) socialist feminisms. As the discussions that have ensued show, it is also a topic that leads to the questioning and testing of methods and assumptions within gender and women's history as an academic field.

Conclusions

The relationship between communism and feminism should not be rendered unspeakable. Research on these topics should not have to be part of ritualized condemnations of communism in order to be seen as legitimate. In my contribution, I have sought to show that a recognition of mass women's organizations as part of twentieth-century global feminist politics can contribute to decolonizing gender and women's history and globalizing themes in the historiography of Eastern Europe. Of course, "feminism and communism" extends much beyond the issue of state-backed women's organizations and the question of their political authenticity. For instance, there have yet to be many studies on sexuality, imperialism, or cultural production in the East European context that engage with gendered histories that tackle the West European context or even the USSR one. Whether women's organizations remain the focus of "revisionist" work or not, clearer "paradigmatic" and historiographical positionings are necessary. Addressing questions of legitimacy and autonomy, defining "the state" and its relationship to "societies" during communisms, making visible theoretical scaffoldings and political allegiances appear to be increasingly unavoidable tasks. Although such answers are insistently required only of some scholars and topics, providing them (despite the inequity) might not only reduce the variability of responses to such research but also add to its already-existing depth and reach.

Notes

1. Susan Zimmermann and Alexandra Ghit, "Troubled Waters. Institutionalization, Paradigms, and Trends in Women's and Gender History," paper presented at the workshop on 20 Years of Change: Post-Communist Historiography in/on Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, 1989–2009, Budapest, 16 September 2011.

2. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 77–91.

3. Ibid., 87.

4. In a recent state of the art article on the histories of communism, Stephen Smith states that "the historiography of the Soviet Union is more developed and has been generally more innovative than that of other countries, with the exception of East Germany (German Democratic Republic)." Stephen Anthony Smith, "Introduction: Towards a Global History of Communism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–34, here 2; Michael David-Fox et al., "From the Editors: An Interview with Sheila Fitzpatrick," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 3 (2007): 479–486, here 484.

5. Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (2014): 344–360.

6. Ibid., 349.

7. Ibid., 354–355.

8. Ibid., 356.

9. Gordon Johnston, "Revisiting the Cultural Cold War," *Social History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 290–307; Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Smith, "Introduction: Towards a Global History of Communism."

10. On the explicit connection between the "western perception that eastern European countries were successfully addressing women's rights" and the 1961 establishment by President Kennedy of the President's Commission on the Status of Women, see Kristen Ghodsee and Adriana Zaharijevic, "Fantasies of Feminist History in Eastern Europe: A Response to Slavenka Drakulic," *Eurozine,* 31 July 2015, http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2015-07-31-ghodsee-en.html (accessed 15 August 2015).

11. David-Fox et al., "From the Editors"; Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann, "Women's and Gender History," in Edited by Irina Livezeanu and Arpad von Klimo, eds., *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming), http://history.ceu.edu/sites/history.ceu.hu/files/daskalovazimmermann2015-20140922shared.pdf (accessed 15 August 2015).

12. Linda Gordon, "What Does Welfare Regulate?" *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (1988): 609–630; Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890–1945," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (1991): 559–590; John E. Dixon and David Macarov, *Social Welfare in Socialist Countries* (London: Routledge, 1992); Lynne A. Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

13. For a recent, comprehensive study on women's organizations in state-socialist Romania, see Luciana M. Jinga, *Gen și reprezentare în România comunistă: 1944–1989* [Gender and representation in communist Romania: 1944–1989] (Bucharest: Polirom, 2015). On gendered social work and welfare provision in state socialist Yugoslavia, see Darja Zavirsek, "Women and Social Work in Central and Eastern Europe," in *Women and Gender in Postwar Europe: From Cold War to European Union,* ed. Joanna Regulska and Bonnie G. Smith (London: Routledge, 2012), 52–70.

14. I am drawing here on Tania Li's discussion of Kristy McClure's "prickly subjects" who resist development interventions wilfully and with suspicion. Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 2. Clare Hemmings, "Telling Feminist Stories," *Feminist Theory* 6, no. 2 (2005): 115–139.

15. I actually owe my interest in communist women's organizations to one of Francisca de Haan's classes on women's movements. The details of different activists' biographies raised in that and similar settings sent me to and kept me interested in working in my hometown's archives for my MA project. An interest in life histories, once formed, is difficult to abandon completely.

16. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 351.

17. Christine Varga-Harris, "Orientalism, Soviet-Style: Cultural Exchange and the Inevitability of Communism in the World of Soviet Woman," paper presented at the conference on Alternative Encounters: The "Second World" and the "Global South" 1945–1991, at Imre Kertész Kolleg, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, Jena, 3 November 2014).

18. Hemmings, "Telling Feminist Stories."

About the Authors

Chiara Bonfiglioli is currently Newfelpro postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Cultural and Historical Research of Socialism (CKPIS), Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Croatia. In 2012 she received a PhD from the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands, with a dissertation titled "Revolutionary Networks: Women's Political and Social Activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia (1945–1957)." She has published articles on women's and feminist history in the journals *Feminist Review, Women's Studies International Forum, Aspasia,* and *Contemporary Southeastern Europe.* From 2012 to 2014, she was a CITSEE research fellow at the University of Edinburgh. Her current research deals with the impact of postsocialist transition and deindustrialization on gender relations in the former Yugoslavia, with a specific focus on women working in the garment industry. Email: chiara.bonfiglioli@yahoo.it.

Krassimira Daskalova is a professor of modern European cultural history at St. Kliment Ohridski University in Sofia, Bulgaria. She has published extensively on women's and gender history, and the history of the book and of reading in modern Bulgaria and Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Her most recent monograph is *Zheni, pol i modernizatsia v Bulgaria, 1878-1944* (Women, gender and modernization in Bulgaria, 1878-1944), published by Sofia University Press in 2012. Between 2005 and 2010 Daskalova served as president of the International Federation for Research in Women's History (IFRWH). Since 2007 she has been editor and since 2011 also book review editor of *Aspasia.* Daskalova has received a number of prestigious fellowships and scholarships, most recently a Fulbright Fellowship and the Joy Fellowship of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University. Email: krassimira_daskalova@yahoo.com.

Magdalena Grabowska currently works at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences. Over the years Grabowska has been involved in a number of academic and nongovernmental organization studies on the history of feminism and women's movements in Central and Eastern Europe, including the National Science Center-funded research: "Bits of Freedom: Gender Equality through Women's Agency in State Socialist Poland and Georgia" (2011–2014). Her publications include "Exploring the Chronology and Intertextuality of Feminist Scholarship on Central and Eastern Europe," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* Signs@40, (http://signsat40.signsjournal.org/commentaries/#grabowska), and "Bringing the Second World In: Conservative Revolution(s), Socialist Legacies, and Transnational Silences in the Trajectories of Polish Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2012), 385–411. She is a cofounder of the Foundation for Equality and Emancipation STER, where she is currently conducting an EEA Grants-founded study on the prevalence of sexual violence, in particular rape, in Poland. Email: magdagrabowska@yahoo.com.

Alexandra Ghit is a doctoral candidate in Comparative Gender Studies at Central European University, Budapest. Her dissertation deals with gendered social reform and social regulation in interwar Bucharest placed in a global historical context. She

graduated in 2011 from the MATILDA European MA in Gender and Women's History program, also offered by CEU. In 2014–2015 she was the recipient of a Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) Research Grant for Doctoral Candidates and Young Academics and Scientists. Email: ghit_alexandra-maria@phd.ceu.edu.

Kristen Ghodsee is a professor of gender and women's studies at Bowdoin College. She is the author of five books, including *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism* (2011) and *The Left Side of History: World War II and the Unfulfilled Promise of Communism in Eastern Europe* (2015). Ghodsee has won residential research fellowships at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC; the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, New Jersey; the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany; the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University; and the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS) at the Albert-Ludwigs Universität in Freiburg, Germany. In 2012, Ghodsee was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship for her work in Anthropology and Cultural Studies. She is the current president of the Society for Humanistic Anthropology and the Association of Members of the Institute for Advanced Study (AMIAS). Email: kghodsee@bowdoin.edu.

Jasmina Lukić is an associate professor in the Department of Gender Studies at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. She was department head from 2009 to 2012, and since 2006 has been the CEU coordinator for GEMMA, Erasmus Mundus in Women's Studies and Gender Studies. In 2014–2015 she was Cornell Visiting Professor at Swarthmore College, Philadelphia. Her publications include two monographs, an edited volume, and multiple articles and book chapters in the fields of literary studies, women's studies, and Slavic studies. She has been editorial board member of the *European Journal of Women's Studies* (1998–2009), and is editorial board member of *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* (since 2006). Email: Lukicj@ceu.edu.

Raluca Maria Popa is a PhD candidate in Comparative Gender Studies at the Central European University, Budapest, with a thesis preliminarily titled "State Feminism within State Socialism: Rethinking Communist Women's Activism in Romania, 1944–1989." She has published articles in *Violence against Women, Social Politics, Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies, Roma Women's Journal/Nevi Sara Kali,* as well as chapters in several edited volumes. She currently works for the Gender Equality Unit of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, on issues related to women's access to justice and ending violence against women. She is also working with Andrea Krizsan on a book project analyzing the factors that influence domestic violence policy reforms in five countries in Central and Eastern Europe, over a period of fifteen years. Email: Raluca.maria.popa@gmail.com.