

in conversation with other publications¹ in this flourishing research field, which in turn would lead to a well-founded expectation of a third edition to be published in the near future.

Vác

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- 1 ÉLEAZAR ALEKSANDROVICH BALLER: *Communism and Cultural Heritage*, Moscow 1984; MICHAEL DAVID-FOX: *Multiple Modernities Vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge* 54 (2006), 4, pp. 535–555; MATTHEW RAMPLEY. (ed.): *Heritage, Ideology, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe: Contested Pasts, Contested Presents*, Woodbridge 2012; PABLO ALONSO GONZALEZ: *Communism and Cultural Heritage: The Quest for Continuity*, in: *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 22 (2016), 9, pp. 653–663; JULIE DESCHEPPER: *Between Future and Eternity: A Soviet Conception of Heritage*, in: *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25 (2019), 5, pp. 491–506; NELLY BEKUS, KATE COWCHER: *Socialism, Heritage and Internationalism after 1945: The Second World and Beyond*, in: *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26 (2020), 12, pp. 1123–1131; JAKUB BACHTÍK, TEREZA JOHANIDESOVÁ et al. (eds.): *In the Name of Socialism, in the Shadow of the Monarchy: Post-War Monument Care in Central Europe*, Prague 2022.

Agnieszka Kościńska: To See a Moose. *The History of Polish Sex Education.* Aus dem Poln. von Philip Palmer. (European Anthropology in Translation, Bd. 9.) Berghahn. New York 2021. 354 S. ISBN 978-1-80073-060-1. (\$ 145,-)

“I am asking and begging you [...] for the fastest possible help,” pleaded a pregnant teenage victim of domestic violence from Silesia in a letter to a sexual expert in 1986 (p. 123). This harrowing story is just one among many that Agnieszka Kościńska, Professor of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, presents in her book, which, despite its high academic value, is addressed to a wider audience. Although K. places the publications of sexual experts at the center of her study, she adeptly complements these with sources such as press articles, court records, interviews, and material gathered through participant observation. She brilliantly juxtaposes the sexual educators’ works with the letters they received from their young readers, like the one quoted above. In doing so, K. reveals a yawning gap between what the experts preached and what the youth needed and sought.

The sex educators’ guidance, which they authoritatively presented as objective science, was often misinformed, ideologically driven, internally contradictory, or vague whenever the subject was deemed too controversial. Frequently, it was laden with sex negativity (e.g., presenting premarital sex as an addiction; p. 257), harmful gender stereotypes (p. 84), bias against contraception (p. 127), homophobia (p. 203), and sometimes outright falsehoods (pp. 208, 259–260). The letters from the young people are particularly thought-provoking when their authors exhibit more open-minded, affirmative, and accepting visions of sex and sexual self than the sex educators. While sex-negativity and harmful opinions were typical among Catholic authors, it is striking that such attitudes became even more pronounced after the fall of Communism in 1989. For instance, a sex education handbook published as late as 2001 and approved by the Ministry of Education informed students that homosexuality is “a deviation” and “a dysfunction of the sex drive” (p. 207).

The book consists of three parts, with the first one being its most substantial component (p. xiv). Part I provides a comprehensive history of sex education in Poland throughout the long twentieth century, which defies the popular expectation of a linear progression from repression to liberation. Instead, it reflects the country’s tumultuous journey through political extremities, totalitarian episodes, and both authoritarian and democratic systems with their respective socio-economic ideologies. The author skillfully intertwines past and present in her narrative, illustrating that sexual reform activists in interwar Poland faced chal-

lenges and obstacles similar to those encountered by their counterparts in the early twenty-first century (p. 108). In some instances, despite technological and scientific advancements that had the potential to improve Poles' sex lives (such as the contraceptive pill and antibiotics), the vision of sexuality as an inherently dark force seemed to grow stronger, particularly in the 1990s.

By covering a broad range of topics—contraception, abortion, queerness, sexual pleasure, gender equality, access to sexual knowledge, pornography, sex work, and sexually transmitted diseases—K. demonstrates how positive developments in one sphere could be accompanied by negative changes in another. Therefore, significant achievements of the book include its challenge to common notions of progress, its offering of more nuanced interpretations of Polish history, and its intriguing examination of the relationship between the Polish state and the Catholic Church through the lens of sex education. This single characteristic makes *To See a Moose* a valuable addition to any curriculum aiming to present more nuanced versions of European history in the classroom.

The book demonstrates that the democracy established after 1989 significantly limited access to abortions, contraception, and in vitro fertilization, while also facilitating the spread of harmful sexual stereotypes and homophobia. The legal situation and access to healthcare for transgender people have deteriorated markedly since the country's transition to capitalist democracy. It also becomes evident that the communist regime was surprisingly often eager to align with the Catholic Church's stance on issues related to sexuality. Conversely, the infamous operation "Hyacinth," a state-led persecution of homosexual men, occurred during the final years of state socialism in the 1980s, when the government was determined to thwart the formation of any LGBTQ+ movement. Only in the democratic republic did the visibility of queer individuals gradually increase, as they gained the freedom to associate and advocate for their rights.

The author skillfully challenges the common portrayal of Poland as perennially conservative in a vein defined by the Catholic Church. She recounts the 1932 Criminal Code that decriminalized homosexual acts and liberalized access to abortion, discusses the work of Stanisław Kurkiewicz, a surprisingly sex-positive expert active in the late 1910s, and the accomplishments of the Polish chapter of the World League for Sexual Reform in the 1930s. Despite the rather murky outlook of the socialist sex experts' publications, K. praises a 1987 handbook that had the potential to transform Polish sex education, had it not been thwarted by adverse circumstances during a turbulent historical moment. Finally, the book argues, even more so in Part III, that the majority of Poles, apart from a segment of the intellectual elite, has not been particularly influenced by the Catholic Church's negative perception of sex. In doing so, K. reiterates the thesis of some scholars, including Mirosława Grabowska and José Casanova, that Poland had not been "in earnest" Christianized until at least the 1970s.¹

Part II of the book, dedicated to "sex education the Catholic way" (p. 229), is illuminating in several regards. K.'s analysis of the influence that a circle of sex-hostile friends of Karol Wojtyła (later John Paul II) had on his opinions demonstrates how a fortuitous sequence of events led a narrow group of people from a peripheral nation to lastingly impact the global community of Catholics. Another interesting subject emerging from Part II is the striking similarity between some authoritarian *modi operandi* of the Communist regime

1 MIROSLAWA GRABOWSKA: *Bóg a sprawa polska: Poza granicami teorii sekularyzacji* [God and the Polish Case: Beyond the Limits of Secularization Theory], Warszawa 2018, pp. 125–126; MIROSLAWA GRABOWSKA: *Ruchy odnowy religijnej przełomu lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych: Społeczne przyczyny i konsekwencje* [Religious Renewal Movements of the Late 1970s and Early 1980s: Social Causes and Consequences], in: TADEUSZ SZAWIEL (ed.): *Pokolenie JP2: Przeszłość i przyszłość zjawiska religijnego*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 22–49; JOSÉ CASANOVA: *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago 1994, pp. 162–168.

and the Catholic Church. The manner in which government-backed sex experts in Socialist Poland had to navigate censorship and pressure exerted by power centers mirrored the struggles of Catholic authors under the control of Catholic bishops. In both cases, ideology trumped the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge and honest communication with the public.

Interestingly, K. traces how, throughout the twentieth century, the language of Catholic sex experts shifted away from ethical and spiritual arguments towards medicalization. Consequently, in its form, it began to resemble the discourse of the left while remaining ideologically defined by the pope's teachings. Finally, K. debunks the common claims of Catholic sex educators about the negative influence of the West on Poles' sexual morality. She demonstrates that the conservative radicalization of these authors is, in fact, significantly indebted to Western, particularly American, Christian extremists.

K. closes her book with Part III, shifting her focus from the nation's elites and Warsaw towards its lower, rural classes. Here, she relies heavily on ethnographic material, such as folk songs, to argue that until very recently, most of Poland's inhabitants, even if attached to Catholic institutions, remained rather lukewarm about the Church's preaching on sexuality. In some parts of Poland, pre-marital sexual relations were commonly accepted and approved, as were various traditional methods of birth control. By turning to the countryside and rural classes of a nation often perceived as the periphery of the West, K. addresses an important aspect of the global history of sexuality. While some Western observers have seen Poland as inherently backward, Polish intelligentsia has long viewed the Polish rural classes in a strikingly similar manner. The book demonstrates that it has been the intelligentsia, with their paternalistic and ignorant view of the countryside, who have often destructively interfered with the sex-positivity, tolerance, and traditionally liberal sexual cultures of Polish rural classes.

To See a Moose will be a valuable addition to any course on European history and the history of sexuality. What is more, the book provides an opportunity for Western historians to include Poland in these fields' narratives. It also suggests avenues for future research, particularly the need for more transnational and comparative studies in the history of sexuality. In closing, it is important to recognize that K.'s work delves far deeper than the title—taken from one of her sources and intended to provoke the reader to uncover its ironic meaning—may suggest. By focusing on Polish sex education, she tells a story of century-long arguments among Poles over the subject of sex, particularly over what kind of sex makes one a modern and "civilized" citizen.

London

Kamil Karczewski

Věra Sokolová: Queer Encounters with Communist Power. Non-Heterosexual Lives and the State in Czechoslovakia, 1948–1989. Karolinum Press. Prague 2021. 242 S. ISBN 978-80-246-4266-6. (Kč 380,–.)

While for a long time many scholars of history and sexuality have accepted a persistent Cold War driven narrative of persecution of queer people and diminished possibilities to express queerness in state socialist states, recent scholarship has begun to challenge such premises. Among the newest research debunking the myth of queerness and state socialism is the volume under review here by Věra Sokolová, a Czech historian, cultural anthropologist, and chair of the Department of Gender Studies at Charles University in Prague. Her ground-breaking book on queer history in state socialist Czechoslovakia interlinks a queer oral history project with detailed discourse analyses of scientific sexologist knowledge, legal history and political transitions in views on homosexuality and transsexuality in Czechoslovakia from 1948 to 1989. The author dives deep into identity policy and the realization and construction of a person's non-heterosexual sexuality in the repressive context of East Central European state socialist regimes.

The book is a valuable contribution to the under-researched subjects of non-heterosexual sexuality in post-war Europe, and the social history of the Eastern bloc (Czechoslo-