

Penn, Shana and Jill Massino (eds.). 2010. *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*. New York: Palgrave and Macmillan. 304 pp. Hb.: £55.00. ISBN: 9780230613003.

Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe edited by Shana Penn and Jill Massino, is a volume of a dozen contributions plus an introductory chapter. Both editors are distinguished researchers in the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary field of gender studies and state socialism or post-socialism respectively. The author of the prize-winning *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (2005), Shana Penn is a visiting scholar at the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley, California, while Jill Massino is an expert in East European and Cultural History, and a visiting scholar in the history department at Northwestern University. Owing to its multidisciplinary team of prominent contributors, the book presents variety of scholarly approaches and yields colourful comparisons about many aspects of gender politics and everyday life under the state socialism.

The volume is well balanced, considering the fact that state socialism at its peak included as many as nine European countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, The German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia). This volume covers seven countries except the Soviet Union, which was not considered as a 'proper' Eastern European country. Besides, it was the founder and the leader of global state-socialist movement, while other state socialist countries were considered merely as its 'trabants'. Notwithstanding the politically isolated Albania, the sole exception in a book's coverage was Yugoslavia, which was partially presented through the case of Serbia instead. Such a choice of omitting Albania and Yugoslavia is justifiable to reasonable degree, because of the lack of pertinent expertise (cf. p. 8). Though for this reason, the book brings together much more coherent and comparable perspective since it confines itself to the states under the exclusive Soviet domination.

As regards definitions, it is notable that in the authors' point of view the state socialism 'refers to the type of political, economic, and social welfare system that existed in post-war Eastern Europe' (p. 221, note 1). Furthermore, the authors implicitly reject the notion of Eastern-Central Europe as deterministic and maintain the more inclusive concept of Eastern and Central Europe (i.e. CEE option).

The book focuses on gender politics, policies, and the everyday lives of women and men under state socialism in Eastern and Central Europe. Despite the abundance of documentary and human sources, this field is, unexpectedly, still largely under-researched. In the authors' opinion, based on conversations with women and men, it is clear 'that socialism decisively shaped, and continues to shape, how individuals think about government, the economy, society, and their lives more generally' (p. 1).

The book is divided into four sections. The first section triad *Work, Activism, and Identity* examines the roles and perspectives of, broadly speaking, women workers and presents four chapters. In Chapter 1 (p. 13), Jill Massino analyses the reformulations of women's identities and their roles in gender relations in Romania. In Chapter 2, Eszter Zsófia Tóth, illuminates the Hungarian case of an award-winning workers brigade at a

Budapest hosiery factory (p. 33). Basia A. Nowak examines women's work in Poland's official League of Women in Chapter 3 (p. 45). The last chapter in this section, written by Raluca Maria Popa, explores the role of official women activists of Hungary and Romania at the International Women's Year summit of 1975.

The Section II *Sex, Reproduction, Family Relations, and Domestic Space* analyses the ambiguities of socialism as regards the state policies and propaganda, as well as experiences in daily life of women and men. In the successive order, Ulf Brunnbauer, Donna Harsch, Isabel Marcus, Joanna Z. Mishtal, and Kimberly Elman Zarecor provide five consecutive chapters devoted to the analyses of such tabooed topics as women's reproductive rights in Bulgaria (p. 77), the conflicts over marriage, divorce, and sexuality in the German Democratic Republic (p. 97), domestic violence, its ideology and practice in Hungary, Poland, and Romania (p. 115), the transgression of the Catholic Church in Poland as regards the women's reproductive rights (p. 133), and the socialist architecture in Czechoslovakia designed to compactly house the family and to enable the dual role of women as workers and homemakers (p. 151).

Section III *Consumption, Leisure, and Culture* depicts women's experiences of socialist culture, consumerism, and leisure. Furthermore, it emphasises the effect of these activities as regards the shaping of their identities. Małgorzata Fidelis examines young women's consumer culture in 1960's Poland (p. 171), while Ana Hofman depicts rural women's memories of socialism in Serbia (p. 185).

Section IV *Gender and Resistance* is represented by a chapter of Shana Penn, who explores the way feminism evolved in Poland. Two prominent feminists, Bożena Umińska-Keff and Małgorzata Tarasiewicz, and their formative factors are analysed together with an inclusion of a subchapter on Jewish identity. This, very informative chapter reveals strong anti-Semitic tendencies in post-socialist Poland with the evoked *Żydokomuna* (p. 209).

Applying diverse scholarly approaches, this very well-written work supplies the reader with the new insight in what might be understood as state socialism. Furthermore, it makes an essential contribution with respect to more nuanced perceiving of women's and men's subjectivities under the system. Thus, the famous question 'Did socialism liberate women?' cannot receive a straight and simple 'no' answer (cf. p. 3).

This book provides an excellent reading and a great collection of cases and examples across the Central and Eastern post-socialist Europe. Inasmuch it is oriented towards the position, the role, and the perspectives of women, it pictures men, too – as their counterparts. Rich in citations, cited references and sources, all of them compiled in the chapter-based notes (ps. 221–276), comprehensive in discussions, and clear in conclusions, this excellently equipped and diverse volume is a must for scholars of state socialism, gender studies, and post-socialism. Apart of them, this volume should be of great use for policy makers at different levels of decision-making in what we may learn from the socialism as a state system.

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