Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style

This is the first account of sexual liberation in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Kateřina Lišková reveals how, in the case of Czechoslovakia, important aspects of sexuality were already liberated during the 1950s – abortion was legalized, homosexuality decriminalized, the female orgasm came into experts’ focus – and all that was underscored by an emphasis on gender equality. However, with the coming of Normalization, gender discourses reversed and women were to aspire to be caring mothers and docile wives. Good sex was to cement a lasting marriage and family. In contrast to the usual Western accounts highlighting the importance of social movements to sexual and gender freedom, here we discover, through the analysis of rich archival sources covering forty years of state socialism in Czechoslovakia, how experts, including sexologists, demographers and psychologists, advised the state on population development, marriage and the family to shape the most intimate aspects of people’s lives.

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Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style

Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989

Kateřina Lišková
To my mother Hana and my grandmother Emilie
for teaching me what matters in life
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Acknowledgments

This book on Czechoslovakia would not have been possible without my having lived abroad and having been exposed to “foreign” ideas and unexpected influences. I conceived of this research during my semester at New York University, but it was my year as a visiting scholar at Columbia University that proved to be particularly formative. The epistemological groundwork for my project was laid in countless discussions about love, sex and socialism with Dagmar Herzog, in thought-provoking seminars on expertise with Gil Eyal, and during long nights out with my New York friends. The more cloistered existence in Jena, Germany provided refuge to write a major part of the manuscript which I finished, breathing the cosmopolitan air of Berlin.

All this, of course, means that I have been the beneficiary of the generous support of several agencies. Marie Curie, a research-advancing branch of the European Commission, provided funding twice: the first time, for my stay at Columbia and the subsequent year of research within their scheme of International Outgoing Fellowships; the second time, for my IPODI position at the Technische Universität in Berlin. The Imre Kertész Kolleg made my sojourn in Jena possible. Finally, this project gained its comparative dimension thanks to the Czech Science Foundation’s Junior Research Grant (16-10639Y).

Research is always a collective endeavor. Without my colleagues, peers and mentors alike, you would now be reading a much less engaging book. I take this opportunity to thank Gil Eyal, Kristen Ghodsee, Dagmar Herzog, Marianne Hirsch, Stanislav Holubec, Lucie Jarkovská, Janet Elise Johnson, Agnieszka Kościańska, Martin Kreidl, Pat Manning, Sharon Marcus, Hadley Renkin, Tereza Stöckelová, Dennis Tenen, Steven Saxonberg, Mat Savelli and Gábor Szegedi for reading and commenting on previous versions of these chapters (and, in some cases, the entire manuscript). Lynne Haney, Sabine Hark, Dan Healy, George Chauncey, Mark Cornwall, Melissa Feinberg, Lesley Hall and Gail Kligman provided advice and encouragement during various stages of my project. Many more proved to be insightful interlocutors,
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On its cover, you can see a poster that I chose from the wealth of Czechoslovak graphic art. The striking image created by František Zálešák captures much of what this book is about: the equality of women and men (as it was being declared and achieved, however ambiguously at times), strong socialist influences as they travelled across borders (it is an image of a famous sculpture in Moscow, yet drawn by a hand of a Czechoslovak artist), the shifts as they occurred over time (the image was drawn in the 1970s, yet it appears to convey an aesthetics of the 1950s while using art techniques of the 1960s). I would like to thank the heirs of František Zálešák for allowing me to use his art that, I hope, brings some of my points across.

Questions and comments from participants in many talks and conferences helped me clarify my points and sharpen my arguments. The following were particularly productive: European Social Science History Conferences in Vienna and Valencia (2014 and 2016); the “From the New Socialist Person to Global Mental Health: The Psyches and Mental Health in East Central Europe and Eurasia”
While I presented this research at various fora, only a small part of this book has appeared previously in print. First, I laid out my argument about the change in tone between the 1950s and 1970s in my *Sexualities* piece “Sex under Socialism: From Emancipation of Women to Normalized Families in Czechoslovakia.” However, Chapters 2 and 4 of this book bring it out in much more detail and are supported by more robust evidence that could never fit into a journal article. Second, Chapter 5 is an improved version of my paper “‘Now you see them, now you don’t.’ Sexual deviants and sexological expertise in communist Czechoslovakia” originally published in the *History of the Human Sciences*.

My world-hopping while doing this research was greatly enabled by friends and family who offered their couches, shared meals and talked (and danced!) until the wee hours. Among my enablers, two formidable couples shine: Marcela Linková and Tobiáš Jirous, Ivka Kalus and Pavel Bystrický. Friends are family to me – I am greatly indebted to Petra Valentová, Lucie Jarkovská, Marcela Kvardová, Tereza Stöckelová and Anna Bystricky for their love and friendship that has spanned most of our lives, and sustains me in everything I do.

In a way, my interest in communist intimacies dates back to my childhood in the 1980s when my mom and my grandma talked with me about the relationships they had, the marriage they each entered and all the work involved in being a wife, a mother, a worker – and I listened and asked questions, my ideas about what is important in life having been formed in these conversations. This book, in fact, would not have been imaginable without these two wonderful women.