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Review

Review Essay: Disentangling Feminisms from the Cold War

Antoinette Burton, ***Africa in the Indian Imagination: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation*** **(Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). Originally published as** ***Brown over Black: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation*** **(Gurugram, India: Three Essays Collective, 2012) [citations refer to the Duke edition]**

Andrea Friedman, ***Citizenship in Cold War America: The National Security State and the Possibilities of Dissent*** **(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014)**

Kristen Ghodsee, ***Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War*** **(Durham: Duke University Press, 2019)**

Kateřina Lišková, ***Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989*** **(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)**

Anna Müller, ***If the Walls Could Speak: Inside a Women's Prison in Communist Poland*** **(New York: Oxford University Press, 2018)**

Feminist thinkers have long argued for the centrality of sexuality, gender and women to the Cold War. They have critiqued the sexual language of 'deep penetration' and 'orgasmic whumps' used to describe nuclear arms race technology and argued that sexuality and gender were central to high-level political decision-making and everyday experiences of the conflict.[1] Scholars have also begun to question the inverse relationship: they have used the politics of the Cold War as a lens into the history of feminist knowledge production itself. Kelly Coogan-Gehr's 2011 monograph, for example, challenges conventional genealogies tracing feminist scholarship in the 'West' back to the 'new social movements' of the 1960s and to women's movements, in particular.[2] She argues Cold War pressures have privileged certain ideologies (neoliberal capitalism) and knowledge producers (white women) at the expense of others (socialism, communism and black feminist thinkers) in the preeminent feminist journal, *Signs,* since its inception in 1975.

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Following in the footsteps of both aforementioned feminist intellectual traditions, this essay examines the interplay between feminist approaches to the Cold War and Cold War approaches to feminisms. It does so by placing into conversation with one another five recent monographs that use feminist methodologies to historicise the Cold War and to question the impact of the Cold War on feminist thought and historical writing. The first two books, by Kristen Ghodsee and Antoinette Burton, explore the possibilities and limitations of transnational Cold War political alliances. Both use self-described feminist methodologies and reflect on what it means to write feminist global histories of the Cold War, to different ends. Monographs by Anna Müller, Andrea Friedman and Kateřina Lišková apply feminist methodologies to national case studies of early Cold War states. These works question various narratives of the exceptionalism of the 'long 1950s'. Like Ghodsee, they also interrogate how feminist historians have approached the relationship between the individual and the state, a core problematic structuring the long-utilised feminist analytical category, 'agency'.[3] Reading these five histories of the Cold War side by side helps us understand what feminist thought can offer the study of the global Cold War, what the global Cold War has done to feminist thought and how to write feminist histories that self-critically reflect on the fraught political pasts and presents of our own disciplines.

Published in 2019, ethnographer Ghodsee's eighth academic book looks at Bulgarian-Zambian organising during the United Nations Decade for Women. Held from 1975 to 1985, the Women's Decade both reflected and drove a global set of women's movements. Ghodsee's exploration of cross-socialist alliances surrounding the Women's Decade hinges on three core components. First, she argues women's movements from state socialist countries have been 'disappeared' from histories of the UN Women's Decade and global feminisms.[4] Ghodsee claims this is partially because of stubbornly persistent Cold War ideologies in feminist historiography. One such ideology, espoused by philosopher Nanette Funk in a 2014 article on 'agency' Ghodsee quotes, holds that the all-encompassing role of the socialist state in Eastern Europe meant members of women's organizations 'were not agents of their own actions, proactive, but instruments' of communist parties during the Cold War.[5] Ghodsee methodically picks apart this fantasy of state socialist women as instruments, dupes or victims of the state, implicitly critiquing the capitalist-embedded concept of agency in the process. She also takes on the related narrative of 'second wave' women's rights as a set of movements originating in the capitalistic 'West'. Before the 1970s, Ghodsee argues, 'the Soviet Union and its allies dominated the international discussion of women's issues at the United Nations and at their world congresses on women, organised and sponsored by the Women's International Democratic Federation', or WIDF.[6] Here, Ghodsee builds on a rich and recent set of scholarly contributions on the communist-leaning WIDF, the leftist economic origins of the UN Women's Decade itself and much longer histories of socialist and communist women's activism in the early twentieth century.[7]

A second, linked component of Ghodsee's work focuses on retrieving the silenced voices of Bulgarian, Zambian and other state socialist women from the margins of the UN Women's Decade and global women's organising. By analysing a range of state archival sources from Bulgaria and Zambia, oral histories collected in the two countries and personal papers and published accounts of the United Nations Decade for Women, Ghodsee shows how cross-socialist and Eastern Bloc-Global South coalition building successfully brought issues such as state-sponsored childcare and maternity leave, economic 'development' and poverty, as well as Zionism and South African apartheid to the fore of the Decade for Women. A central aspect of this part of Ghodsee's narrative is that UN conferences on women were the turf on which broader Cold War battles were waged. Connected to this analysis, Ghodsee contends that UN-linked feminisms and women-focused activisms were more liberatory for women and less conservative, in part because of successful socialist alliances between the Eastern Bloc and Global South that frequently put delegations from the US (the government of which opposed various stages of the organisation of the Women's Decade) and its allies on the defensive. On this point, she argues state socialist women's organising was a 'catalyst for the rapid expansion of women's rights in the second half of the twentieth century'.[8]

Finally, Ghodsee's book sets out to 'rescue feminism from its current role as handmaiden to neoliberalism'.[9] Here, we see her explicitly using women's history methodologies in ways old and new: she retrieves particular kinds of women and certain intellectual histories from the edges of feminist historiography itself. For Ghodsee, activists from state socialist countries like Bulgaria and Zambia have been sidelined or erased from contemporary histories of the UN women's movement and global feminisms attached to it, in service of the suturing of a dominant strand of global feminism with capitalism. The act of retrieving women's voices and transnational, socialist, East-South alliances serves as a corrective to fallacious histories and pushes back against a dominant strand of global (US-inflected), neoliberal feminism. Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* represents the widely recognised punching bag for the types of neoliberal feminisms Ghodsee and a bevy of other scholars, such as Nancy Fraser, have critiqued in recent years.[10]

In *Africa in the Indian Imagination* (originally published as *Brown over Black* by Three Essays Collective in India in 2012 and released under the new title by Duke in 2016), Antoinette Burton sets forth another model of feminist, global Cold War scholarship: one that explores constraints to transnational solidarities during the Cold War and what this means for the writing of feminist postcolonial history. The focus of Burton's work is the limits of 'Afro-Asian solidarity' and 'Third-Worldism'. The Bandung Conference took place in Indonesia in 1955 in order to promote cooperation between the governments of twenty-nine attending Asian and African countries, many of which had recently gained formal independence from Western European empires. Championed in the wake of the conference, Afro-Asian alliances signified a crucial aspect of what would come to be known as the Non-Aligned Movement. Members of the movement attempted to resist or selectively utilise political pressures from the USSR and the US in the Cold War. As Burton points out, Afro-Asian solidarities are 'often cited as the very foundation of postcolonial politics in a global frame'.[11] Yet, for Burton, these alliances were fractured by internal racism and the connected politics of postcolonial development and South African apartheid, all of which played out in sexualised and gendered ways. Her sources are the fictional and non-fictional writings of Ansuyah R. Sing, Frank Moraes, Chanakya Sen and Phyllis Naidoo. Sing and Naidoo were both South African-born women of Indian descent, while Moraes and Sen were Indian men writing from 'the heart of the [Indian] subcontinent itself'.[12]

A central metaphor of Burton's book is what she calls the 'jagged hyphen' found between Afro-Asian.[13] She highlights the fractures, resentments, angers and fears of black Africans that appeared in Indians' Cold War writings. Intimacies receive particularly close attention in the monograph, one example of which we can see in Burton's analysis of Chanakya Sen's *The Morning After* (originally published in Bengali in 1960 and revised and translated into English in 1973). In the English version of the novel that Burton analyzes, Solomon Kuchiro, a young Ugandan man, goes to Delhi as part of an Indian state-sponsored educational training programme. Burton situates the educational initiative at the heart of postcolonial, Cold War politics and development schemes in India under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. As a university student in Delhi, Solomon lives with the family of an Indian civil servant. The multi-layered racial tensions in the novel are enacted through sexual fears and desires: the mother of the family, Sulochana, shows 'unabashed racist anxiety . . . that Solomon is a sexual predator stalking her young virginal daughter', Sheila. Meanwhile, Sheila's attraction to Solomon is rooted in her desire to 'rebel against her parents' bourgeois respectability' and her 'mother's provincialism' in particular.[14] By analysing the fraught sexual taboos, fears and fantasies that structure the relationships among Solomon, Sheila and Sheila's parents, Burton reveals how iterations of racism, caste, class and sexuality converged to threaten the morally upright, Indian nuclear family and its relationship to the developing Indian Cold War state.

Crucially, however, the ruptures at the heart of Burton's 'critically postcolonial feminist method' did not only produce distance. They also fostered new forms of intimacy, albeit ones laced with violence. To continue with Sen's tale of Simon Kuchiro in Delhi, Burton shows us 'collaborative patriarchy' between the father of Simon's host family and Simon's friend, Peter Kabaku of Kenya. In the novel, this patriarchy took place 'over the body of [a formerly imprisoned] Indian woman', part of what leads Burton to conclude, 'when it does happen, Afro-Asian solidarity is a homosocial experience at the expense of a brown woman – all in the name of the transfer of postcolonial knowledge in a developmentalist register'.[15]

We see other forms of fraught alliances and, as Burton uses Lisa Lowe's work to articulate, 'new narratives of affirmation and presence' in the monograph, notably in Burton's section on the writings of Phyllis Naidoo, an Indian-South African anti-apartheid activist and attorney.[16] Burton discusses the archives Naidoo has created when writing first-person histories of anti-apartheid struggle in the early 2000s. She foregrounds Naidoo's discussion of Poomoney 'Poo' Moodley, a young, black, South African woman who was a trade unionist, health care worker and, like Naidoo, a member of the armed branch of the African National Congress. During her life, Poo was imprisoned by the South African apartheid state and later became an advocate for prisoners on Robben Island. Burton shows that Naidoo wrote in detail about various intimacies between Poo and anti-apartheid activists of South Asian descent. When Poo and Naidoo lived together in the latter's studio apartment in 1960, Naidoo would listen to Poo's strained breathing, due to poor health, as Poo slept nearby. We later hear about the 'possibility, at least, that Poo was sexually assaulted in prison'. Another prisoner, Dawood Seedat, overheard Poo's screams and yelled encouragement to her during the presumed assault through an open window.[17] These are the kinds of intimacies, 'irritative, chafing, edgy, [and] uneasily friendly', that Burton argues affectively sutured together Afro-Asian communities in the Cold War.[18] Partially because Naidoo showed these barbed intimacies in her own histories of anti-apartheid activism in South Africa, Burton uses Naidoo's works as one example of what feminist, postcolonial histories of transnational alliances can and should resemble.

In addition to using feminist methods to historicise transnational and transracial solidarities in the Cold War, Burton also reflects on the Cold War politics of feminist knowledge production. Building on the ideas of Sara Ahmed, Burton writes of her ‘desire for histories’ that ‘estrange us from, as much as attach us to, celebratory, “happy” narratives of the past’. For Burton, what makes her monograph a ‘postcolonial feminist method’ is its very interrogation of ‘postcolonial work that presumes a sentimentalised, fraternal history of Afro-Asian solidarity’.[19] Rather than taking at face value and reproducing the Cold War ‘romance’ of emancipatory Afro-Asian alliances, Burton argues we must critically engage with them, teasing out not only the mistrust, racism and sexual cleavages, but also the uneasily homosocial, patriarchal and violence-fraught intimacies that resulted.[20]

If Ghodsee’s feminist history of the Cold War gives us a largely celebratory (and questionably romantic) story of transnational solidarity, Burton’s feminist postcolonial history provides us with a gut-churning tale of troubled alliances. Both approaches are important for disentangling the relationships between Cold War politics, the work of writing feminist history and feminisms as ongoing political projects. For Ghodsee, the history of successful organising between the Bulgarian and Zambian women’s movements shows how global feminisms grew in the crucible of Cold War politics and how the Cold War grew through the crucible of global women’s activism. More, her transnational history demonstrates the lingering impacts of Cold War economic politics on feminist historiography – one in which ‘agency’ has been used to falsely negate the possibility of feminist action under state socialism and to erase the importance of women living in socialist states from the history of feminisms. For Burton, the history of uneasy alliances between Indians and Africans emphasises the centrality of sexuality and intimacy to postcolonial, Cold War politics and the centrality of the postcolonial, Cold War world to sexual and intimate politics. More, she analyses how Cold War fantasies of uncomplicated Afro-Asian fraternity have continued to haunt historical scholarship and postcolonial politics in the present. Together, Ghodsee and Burton show us feminist historical approaches to transnational, Cold War alliances that follow different affective and analytical routes: celebratory alliance building versus grating solidarity. The books nevertheless end in similar places: they put sexuality, gender and/or women at the heart of global Cold War history and they put the global Cold War at the heart of existing problematic narratives of feminist and postcolonial history – narratives that can only be corrected through new practices of feminist scholarship that bring certain actors, ideas and methodologies back into view by disentangling the global Cold War and its legacies from the practice of writing feminist history.

The two works discussed above brought feminist methods and topics together with the global turn, particularly transnationalism, to study the Cold War. The remaining three books on which this essay centres, by Anna Müller, Andrea Friedman and Kateřina Lišková, foreground national cases from Cold War Poland, the US and Czechoslovakia. Unlike the previous two scholars, Müller, Friedman and Lišková do not call their books or themselves feminist in the monographs discussed here. I am wary of imposing on the books a label their authors do not use. I do, however, think it is fair to say that each monograph utilises a set of feminist methodologies that include: women’s history and the retrieval of lost voices from the margins of history; sexuality and gender as categories of analysis; intersectional methodologies discussing the interplay between race, class, religion, nationality, gender and sexuality; and/or topical discussions of the histories of feminisms and woman-focused movements. Moreover, these books collectively challenge feminist historiography vis-à-vis the Cold War, particularly in relation to the 'long 1950s'. They do so by fundamentally critiquing scholarly fantasies of the all-repressive states of the early Cold War and the meaning and usage of individual 'agency'. Whether or not we attach to them the label 'feminist', engaging these three books in conversation, first with each other and then with Ghodsee and Burton's publications, continues to work us toward the heart of our current task: to see the dynamic interplay between the Cold War and feminist historical knowledge production. The books show us how to write histories that complicate false binaries between individuals and Cold War states, repression and liberation.

Müller's *If the Walls Could Speak*, published in 2018, provides a history of Polish and Ukrainian women political prisoners in Poland between the end of World War II and 1956. Müller calls this period 'the first, most brutal and intense phase of the building of Communism' in the country. She focuses on the lives of imprisoned women: their 'fears', 'small joys', relationships and 'routines'. For Müller, the intimacies and quotidian rituals of imprisoned women's lives were 'located precisely at the centre of the Stalinist experience' in Poland.[21] It is through the internal transformations that women prisoners experienced that Müller maps the impact of Communist state politics on identity. At the end of World War II, these women desired to be 'active citizens' in independent Poland and Ukraine. However, through their prison experiences, they became 'passive' and 'hopeless', feeling 'disillusionment' and 'alienation' after release.[22] A newfound 'distrust' of the 'public space' led most of the formerly imprisoned women to quit the realm of public life, as 'depoliticization was the bridge from the prison world to freedom'.[23]

Müller uses her monograph to push back against Polish nationalistic and right-wing historiographies; because many political prisoners in Communist Poland were celebrated partisan fighters during World War II, they have often appeared in existing scholarship as either 'Polish patriots' or 'doomed soldiers', flat caricatures in service of a political end (and when focused on the exceptionalism of women partisan fighters, an arguably femonationalist end).[24] Instead, Müller insists women political prisoners – partisans, suspected Nazi collaborators and other political deviants – experienced multidimensional relationships with the communist state. One way she captures this nuance is by focusing on the 'creative' ways that women engaged in 'life-sustaining activities' in the face of violence, confinement and hardship while incarcerated. Bodily practices feature prominently in the book. Whether in mundane acts, such as washing themselves and grooming each other, or through extreme behaviours, from hunger strikes to suicide, the women in Müller's gripping account used their bodies to feel a sense of 'control' and to variously engage with prison officials and, by proxy, the state.[25] So, too, did they foster various forms of intimacy, sexual and otherwise, with each other, with male prisoners housed in the same building, with prison guards, interrogators and torturers.

When viewed in the context of broader Cold War historiography, Müller plays with our fantasies of the all-consuming, repressive communist state. On one hand, Stalin, the Soviet Union and their Polish allies appear as the ultimate bad guys in this narrative, with Soviet-educated and aligned Polish communists implementing the repressive incarceration and interrogation/torture techniques that structured women's imprisonment from the mid-1940s onward. It was only due to Stalin's death in 1953 and the aftermath of his demise that a chain of events led to the mass release of political prisoners by 1956, as Müller mentions in the Epilogue. On the other hand, Müller shows us the ultimate failure of Soviet-coerced Polish Communism as a totalising influence. Despite the arguable success of prison in transforming a group of women from activists eager to engage with the state into alienated private citizens fearful of the state, most of the imprisoned women creatively engaged with their incarceration and, though we only hear about it briefly, with their post-prison lives. The women felt and enacted a range of emotions and behaviours. They held a variety of relationships with their interrogators and prison guards, the state agents with whom they were in daily contact. Müller neither underplays the hardships of life in prison nor fetishises its violence; she instead shows us how women continued to live in ways that were messy, celebratory, tragic and mundane. If the imprisonment of political prisoners is an example of the worst repression of the communist state during the long 1950s – commonly viewed in existing scholarship as the most repressive era of the entire Cold War in many places in the world – even this was not enough to be a totalising influence in the lives of the incarcerated women on whom Müller discusses in her study.

While this may sound like a familiar social history of women's agency in the face of state repression, Müller places said repression through incarceration at the centre of women's internal transformations and embodied practices. The women here did not overcome their imprisonment in celebratory tales of speaking truth to power or by acting in spaces created by an absence of state power: they were transformed by complexly engaging with their imprisonment (and therefore with the state), either by enduring or dying and through their construction of 'liminal' identities.[26] This is a different formulation than longstanding feminist deployments of women's 'agency' as impossible in the face of state communism or socialism (the conceptions of agency Ghodsee critiques in her book). It is also different from social historical depictions of agency as the means through which people have acted to shape their own futures to overcome structural oppression. Here, the very structures of the state prison literally and metaphorically provided the spaces in and *through* which women could act and define themselves. The state was successful in transforming women from 'active' citizens to 'private' homebodies; what the women contributed was creatively enacting and making sense of this top-down transformation.

Neither state repression nor creative engagement with it were unique to communist countries in the Cold War. In *Citizenship in Cold War America,* published in 2014, Friedman analytically takes on the US Cold War security state. Like Müller, Friedman argues 'intentionally repressive [state] strategies do not simply and solely create repressive outcomes'.[27] In pursuit of this point, she uses citizenship as a lens through which to view the fundamental contradictions and frequent 'capriciousness' of the US government in the long 1950s. Drawing on Michael Sherry's work and a larger body of scholarship that has long questioned the totalising influence of the Cold War state, Friedman notes 'the scattershot nature of Cold War repression had unintended effects, not only limiting the possibilities of dissent . . . but also sometimes opening them up'.[28] Friedman analyses the fundamental contradictions of the US national security state through contestations of citizenship. Gender and sexuality, along with race, religion and class, were at the nexus of these contestations, which Friedman places at the heart of Cold War politics.

The book focuses on four deeply researched ‘episodes’ or events in which various people challenged citizenship or made claims to its benefits and protections for a host of political reasons. We hear in one case about Annie Lee Moss, described by Friedman as an African American woman who waged a long battle to keep her job at the Pentagon after being accused of Communist Party membership. The case against Moss was largely based on the testimony of Mary Stalcup Markwad, a young white woman who was both a housewife and an FBI informant.[29] Markwad would infiltrate Communist Party chapters in the Washington, D.C. area and then feed names and information back to J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI – eventually, as Friedman shows, to public fanfare and fetishised acclaim. A high point of the accused Communist Party member Moss’s story was her successfully staring down Senator Joseph McCarthy and his chief counsel, Roy Cohn, at an anti-communist Senate hearing that was nationally broadcast on television. ‘Like a rat escaping a sinking ship’, McCarthy abandoned the hearing early and left the questioning to Cohn, reportedly because he could already read the sympathy Moss garnered as a witness. It was fun to read Friedman’s analysis of Moss’s many personas and how she and others leveraged them in various contexts: in the Senate hearing and to concerned members of the public, Moss was a confused, ignorant, ‘poor lady’ who allegedly replied to a question about Karl Marx, ‘Who’s that?’ The audience at the Senate hearing laughed in response.[30] In press accounts and letters people wrote after watching the televised hearing, Moss was a ‘negro’ woman who worked her way out of poverty and into the ranks of middle-class life as a civil servant and a devout Christian. To her neighbours and, ultimately, to Friedman, Moss was the go-getting community organiser whose work brought her into multiple forms of contact with a Communist Party that actively recruited black members in segregated Washington. Friedman’s deftly-layered history of Moss’s triumph against the Red Scare illustrates the simultaneous aggressiveness and fragility of the US Cold War state, one in which Friedman reminds us that Joe McCarthy hunted communists from his perch on the Senate’s Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations for a mere four years.[31]

Yet like Müller, Friedman is not overly celebratory of Moss as the ‘little woman’ who spoke truth to power or as an embodiment of the agency of individuals to overcome state and other forms of structural repression. Friedman demonstrates that Moss was successful in eventually keeping her job and winning public opinion because she represented the ‘twinned discourses of black upward mobility and white paternalism’. Moss exemplified the idea that with hard work and grit a ‘poor old coloured woman’ could pull herself up from her bootstraps if only the interfering state would get out of her way.[32] Friedman shows us that Moss’s individual success story served to erase the structural violence of intersecting racism, poverty and sexism in the US before and during the Cold War. Without serving the fantasy of the American dream, Moss’s story may well have ended differently. The three other cases Friedman provides, one of which has a similarly positive ending and two of which do not, show how claims to the protections and benefits of US citizenship were refracted through messy interactions of gender, sexuality, race, class, religion and colonialism (in Puerto Rico). It was through all of these interwoven categories that the relationships between the individuals and the state in the early Cold War US were negotiated, with complicated alliances, ruptures and outcomes resulting.

Let us briefly think about Müller and Friedman's works in conversation with those of Ghodsee and Burton, as well as Lynn Thomas's 2016 article on agency. Ghodsee points to the long history of feminist scholars who have argued that women living in socialist Cold War countries had no agency, in part because of the all-consuming nature of the state. How, then, do we come to terms with the contentions of both Müller and Friedman, that it was precisely the repression of the Cold War state (both socialist and anti-communist/capitalist) and the contradictions embodied in that repression that opened spaces for certain forms of action and belonging? These very contradictions made new pathways and identities possible for a variety of actors – women, prisoners, people of colour, immigrants, the colonised and more. What does it do to our understanding of feminisms and their adjacent histories if we see the long 1950s not only as a time of state repression, but also as one of new openings and of profound creativity through those openings? Among other things, it challenges a long-standing binary that the concept of 'agency' has given us in feminist scholarship: the idea of the individual exerting free will or making choices in the absence of state power or to overcome structural oppression, rather than dancing in contradictory ways with and through the state and other structures. In her article 'Historicizing Agency', Thomas reflects that when she was an undergraduate student in the 1980s, 'debates about structure versus agency were at the forefront of the Marxist, feminist and South African social history and anthropology' that responded to structuralism and on which she cut her teeth as a young scholar (such debates and pushback against structuralism were widespread in a number of fields).[33] Thomas implicitly shows that the oppositional relationship suggested by the phrase 'structure versus agency' has continued to dominate scholarly usage of agency as a concept into the present. The imagined oppositional relationship between individual action and structural forces is part of what Müller and Friedman complicate so eloquently. To borrow from Burton's language on uneasy alliances, the 'fraught, vexed' intimacies between individuals and structures – intertwined structures of the state and of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, religion and more – exist at the heart of Müller's and Friedman's Cold War histories.[34]

The final book discussed here further critiques feminist theorising of the individual versus the state while throwing new wrenches into existing feminist chronologies of the Cold War. For Lišková, scholarship of the long 1950s and the history of sexuality is simply inaccurate when applied to post-war Czechoslovakia. Building on the work of Dagmar Herzog, she writes, 'Commonly held beliefs about the history of sexuality all too often adhere to a linear narrative of emancipation marked by the consequent rise of consumerism, the invention of the birth control pill and various social movement struggles' – struggles many attribute to the new social movements of the 'West' in the 1960s and 1970s and to which a number of people attribute the origins of feminist academia.[35] To challenge this linear narrative, Lišková provides a history of expert knowledge on sexuality in Czechoslovakia since the 1920s. She focuses on the four decades of Soviet-backed Communist Party rule from 1948 to 1989. Her primary actors are the sexologists (psychiatrists and gynaecologists working or trained at the Sexological Institute in Prague), marriage counsellors, demographers, lawyers and family planning advocates who studied, wrote about and defined appropriate sexual practices. The people who variously engaged with sex focused recommendations also receive close attention.

The central arc of Lišková's book is that sexual liberation followed an opposite chronology to that posited in existing historiography elsewhere in the world. Both in the Western and Eastern Blocs, Lišková argues sexuality is generally portrayed as moving from the repressive conservatism of the long 1950s to more open liberalisation in the late 1960s and 1970s. However, in Communist Czechoslovakia, 'important – and in the West unprecedented – liberalising changes in understanding sexuality were already occurring in the 1950s'.[36] The Czechoslovakian state passed legal protections for abortion and decriminalised homosexuality. Experts portrayed gender equality as essential to marriage and were concerned with female pleasure, such as the female orgasm, in part because of pronatalist family planning policies. The long 1950s were years of opening, of better sex, of political possibilities and of utopian dreaming. The early Cold War in Czechoslovakia consisted of years when liberatory sexuality reflected a liberatory state.

After the failed Prague Spring of 1967–1968, however, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia, bringing about a period of conservative 'normalisation' (Lišková's periodisation is stark, in part, because global youth protests in 1968 are an oft-cited point in histories of Cold War liberalisation, sexual and otherwise). During normalisation, sexologists and other experts maintained that good sex could only happen within patriarchal families. Women, according to the new expert-produced knowledge, would be happiest and most satisfied in subservient roles as mothers and wives within the 'privatised' family. New forms of sexual deviancy were defined and policed. Here, the fall of the Soviet Union and its allied states in and after 1989 appears not as an abrupt rupture, but as part of a longer turn toward 'atomised' individuals and families on both sides of the Iron Curtain before 1989 – what Lišková describes as a reflection of and an anticipation of neoliberal capitalism.[37]

Lišková frames her work as an explicit critique of existing feminist scholarship on the history of sexuality; scholarship that is still wrapped up in Cold War politics. Like Ghodsee, whom Lišková thanks in her book's acknowledgements, she argues that feminist notions of 'liberation' have long been conceived of in opposition to the socialist and/or Cold War state: 'For a mind shaped by the narratives of Western-style political liberalism, if people are given (let alone decreed) something "from above", it cannot be liberation. Yet, I would argue that people did feel liberated by policies affecting gender and sexuality in various countries across the communist East'. Lišková is particularly critical of the feminist scholarly commitment to 'agency', a concept too often assumed to be achieved 'from below' and that places the individual in inherent opposition to the state.[38] Embedded within this analysis, Lišková sets core feminist methodologies in the context of anti-socialist state Cold War knowledge production. It is enduring bias against the state, in particular the socialist state, that has obstructed feminist scholars' abilities to see more robust histories of sexuality and the dynamic and messy interplay between states and individuals in the creation of liberation, repression and everything in between. One conclusion which Lišková's book leaves us with is simple yet profound: the state and other structures of power are not always or only oppressive; they can be liberatory in some contexts, and they can offer opportunities, freedoms and joys. As Freedman and Burton beautifully show, these opportunities, freedoms and joys have often been deeply interwoven with repression, violence and pain during and after the Cold War.

The long 1950s are often held up as the model of state totalitarianism in the Cold War. The three books by Müller, Friedman and Lišková challenge this orthodoxy through sexual, gendered and/or women-focused analyses of overlapping topics of imprisonment, citizenship and sexological knowledge creation during the period. Moreover, these works critique the lingering impacts of the Cold War on knowledge creation, particularly by complicating scholarly and popular imaginings of state repression – imaginings tied to the politics of capitalism and socialism and to fantasies of the Cold War state's presence as an absence of individual freedom.

When placed in conversation with one another and with the works of Ghodsee and Burton, these books draw attention to the residues of such Cold War and capitalistic fantasies in contemporary feminist theory. These residues are particularly visible in scholarly chronologies of the long 1950s and in their erasures of socialist women from feminist histories. They are also visible in social histories of 'agency' that have searched for and celebrated individuals who make their lives in the absence of or to overcome structural oppression, often state-inflicted, rather than *through* the openings that structural repression has created, as in Poland and the US, or in tandem with state initiatives that were not primarily or only repressive, as in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Zambia. When unacknowledged, these Cold War residues leave us ill equipped to search for other kinds of history – the kinds foregrounded in the five aforementioned monographs, which emphasise the 'chafing' intimacies the Cold War created not only across categories of gender, race, nationality and class, but between individuals and states as well.[39] It is partially through their use of sexuality, gender and women's history to reflect on the uneasy alliances between the Cold War and feminist scholarship that these books ultimately suggest we need to partially re-think not only the history of the global Cold War through feminist thought, but the history of feminist thought through the politics of the global Cold War and beyond.

Notes

1. Carol Cohn, 'Sex and the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals', *Signs* 12 (1 July 1987), pp. 687–718.
2. Kelly Coogan-Gehr, *The Geopolitics of the Cold War and Narratives of Inclusion: Excavating A Feminist Archive* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), p. 1.
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SARAH BELLOWS-BLAKELY
Freie Universität Berlin