



Attachment No. 11

Habilitation thesis reviewer's report

Masaryk University	
Faculty	Katerina Liskova
Field of study	Sociology, Gender Studies
Applicant	Katerina Liskova, Ph.D.
Unit	Sociology, Gender Studies
Habilitation thesis (title)	"Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style"
Reviewer	Kristen Ghodsee, Ph.D.
Unit	Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, Bowdoin College, USA

Reviewer's report (extent of text up to the reviewer)

This habilitation thesis is exceptional in its use of primary source material to explore the uses and abuses of scientific expertise under state socialism in Czechoslovakia. The author demonstrates a fascinating reverse chronology of sexual liberation after World War II. Rather than a conservative post-war order followed by a sexual revolution in the late 1960s, Czechoslovakia seems to have experienced the opposite. The 1950s and early 1960s were a time of utopian thinking that included radical reformation of gender roles and ideals about sexuality. Most notably, sexologists produced scientific discourses which justified more egalitarian relationships between men and women, positing that heterosexual sex would be most pleasurable in circumstances where love and companionship were based on equality. The author does an excellent job of examining the legal records of divorce cases to explore how courts dealt with intimate issues. Love and sexual satisfaction were heavily valued before 1968, and these depended largely on supporting women's emancipation within the accepted frameworks of state socialism.

Consistent with the experience of most East European countries, as well as many West European nations, birth rates plummeted in the 1960s, and women's formal employment outside the home was implicated as a cause. At the same time, concerns about child psychological welfare demanded that women return to their roles as primary caregivers for infants and younger toddlers once the "experts" shed doubt on the quality of institutionalized care. These trends combined with the political upheavals of the 1968 Prague Spring forced a return to traditional gender roles during the period known as "Normalization." During this later period, sexologists create a discourse justifying a retreat into the private sphere and the reassertion of male dominance in intimate relationships. Using the case studies of female orgasms and male sexual "deviance," the author clearly demonstrates how these different eras affected daily practice. The strengths of the thesis most definitely come from the detailed reviews of individual cases, and it clearly shows originality, excellent work with primary sources, and rigorous analytical thinking. This is a new and worthwhile contribution to the literature on sexuality in Europe, and a fascinating case, which complicates many received stereotypes about gender relations under state socialism.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)



1. The author makes the case that the sexologists often acted independently of the socialist state, and were not mere instruments of state policy. Can she elaborate on some instances when the sexologists disagreed with politicians, and how those conflicts were resolved?
2. Similarly, the author talks about “feedback loops” between the people and the state, but there isn’t a whole lot of discussion of how this worked in practice. Can the author provide one or two examples? How does this complicate Western notions of “totalitarianism” before 1989?
3. In the period after 1968, the author suggests that the retreat into the home is orchestrated from the top-down: elaborated by nomenclatura elites and justified by the knowledge production of scientific experts. Were there any bottom-up factors at play here? Perhaps ordinary Czechoslovaks wanted to retreat into the private sphere for other reasons. How could one study this, and would it be important to do oral history interviews with those alive during that era?
4. Methodologically, why focus exclusively on written records? Is there a reason that oral history sources might be considered unreliable?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis submitted by Katerina Liskova entitled “Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style” *meets* the requirements applicable to habilitation theses in the field of sociology and gender studies.

In Falmouth, Maine, USA on 25 March 2016