

Sociology 455: Post-Socialist Societies¹

Fall 2023

Class Location: LEA 808

Class Meeting Time: Tuesdays 9:35-11:25 a.m.

Professor: Elaine Weiner

Office Address: LEA 732

Office Hours: Fridays 12:30-1:30 p.m. or by appointment

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Course Description

The demise of Communist Party rule transpiring between 1989 and 1991 throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union meant that the systemic communist-capitalist (and democratic) rivalry which typified much of the twentieth century gave way to new economic, political and social realities. In this course, we consider some of the societal consequences of these dramatic economic and political changes. We begin by examining some of the conditions which led to state socialism's collapse. For the majority of the course, however, we will focus on the social ramifications of the triad of reforms in the post-socialist world known as privatization, marketization and democratization and how the post-1989 period can be understood as success and/or failure.

Course Materials

Most course materials are available via *myCourses*. You should, however, use the URL links on this syllabus to link to assigned podcasts, videos, documentaries, etc. for listening and/or viewing.

I would recommend that you consider purchasing a copy of the following book (though it is available as an e-book from the HSSL library): **Mitchell Orenstein and Kristen Ghodsee. 2021. *Taking Stock of Shock: Social Consequences of the 1989 Revolutions*. New York: Oxford University Press.**

Course Organization and Requirements

Class format: Seminar

Watch & Read

These are the kinds of questions you should be thinking about as you are watching and reading assigned materials in order to best process them:

1. What is/are the main point(s)?
2. What kind of evidence is relied on in order to make the point(s)? What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of evidence used/arguments made?
3. What are the larger implications of the point(s) made?

Course Requirements:

Attendance = 10%

Participation = 10%

Discussion Facilitation = 10%

Paper #1 (Considering 'Consumption') = 20% (due November 3rd, submit via *myCourses* 'Assignments' link)

Paper #2 (Is 'Post-Socialism' Still Relevant?) = 25% (due Tuesday, December 12th, submit via *myCourses* 'Assignments' link)

'Taking Stock of Shock' Presentations = 25% (Note: 25% of this grade will be based on peer evaluation)

¹ In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Note: If you have a disability and require any special accommodations, please let me know.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

Late Submission Policy For each day that an assignment is late, the grade will be lowered by half a grade (e.g., if the initial grade is a B- and you submit the assignment a day late, your final paper grade will be a C+).

Participation Class participation is an integral component of this course. The goal, for all of us, is to create a mutually respectful space in which everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas, asking questions, etc... (even if they are not, in your estimation, particularly brilliant or profound).

Discussion Facilitation Every student is required to act as a discussion facilitator once during the semester. Listed below are some guidelines as to how to prepare for this role.

Guidelines:

Facilitating a discussion requires that you be familiar with the assigned materials. Familiarity does not, however, mean mastery. The main purpose of class discussion is to move everyone together towards mastery. In order to prepare yourself to facilitate you should:

- read and study the assigned materials (e.g., underlining important and/or interesting points, writing notes/comments/questions in the margins)
- contemplate and jot down the main issues raised by the author(s) and a few questions relating to these issues (e.g., what do you find provocative, controversial, confusing, etc...?)
- prepare a ~10-15 minute presentation which:
 - summarizes the main points/issues/arguments of assigned readings (*providing an outline to your classmates may be helpful*) – **NO WRITTEN SUMMARIES**
 - relates the readings to ideas covered in previous discussions, etc.
 - ends with the identification of several discussion questions/issues in order to launch the class discussion (*again, providing a list of questions/issues to your classmates might be beneficial in facilitating discussion*)

Papers

#1 CONSIDERING 'CONSUMPTION'

Drawing on readings from weeks #7 and #8 and one of the two films below (available online or via the HSSL library), you are to address to the following in essay format:

The lives of people in North America are so saturated with ideas and practices relating to consumption that we might not see how introducing these ideas and practices into another context, such as Eastern Europe, might prove challenging. Explain how consumption has been (and continues to be) transformed in the region in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1989 and 1991.

Due Friday, November 3rd by midnight (submit via via *myCourses* 'Assignments' link).

FILMS (choose one):

Goodbye Lenin! (2003) available via various streaming platforms (e.g., *AppleTV*)

Česky Sen (*The Czech Dream*) (2004) available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cWrl3AAkYY>

#2 IS 'POSTSOCIALISM' STILL RELEVANT?

While some contend that the postsocialist era is 'over and done' (and so enough talking about it!), others contend that it remains a useful "analytic" (Dunn and Verdery 2015). Your task in this reaction paper (~8 pages + references) is to argue for or against the continued relevance of this concept. You should rely on the readings from Week #13 as well as any other readings from the course that you find useful. However,

I also expect you to do a bit of additional research in order to answer this question as there are certainly a number of other scholars who have weighed in on this question (i.e., incorporate at least additional two scholarly works).

Due Tuesday, December 12, by midnight ((submit via via *myCourses* 'Assignments' link).

FORMATTING GUIDELINES (FOR RESPONSE PAPERS):

- 11-12 point font
- double-spaced
- 1-inch margins
- citations required (APA or ASA style)

"Taking Stock of Shock"

Mitchell Orenstein and Kristen Ghodsee's 2021 book, *Taking Stock of Shock: Social Consequences of the 1989 Revolutions* (New York: Oxford University Press) considers, from various perspectives, how the demise of Community party rule in Eastern Europe can be variably understood as a success and/or failure. You will be divided into four groups. Each group will be responsible for 'teaching' the content of one of the book's four parts to the class, during weeks 11 and 12. Each group will have 30 minutes of teaching time and 10 minutes for Q & A. (Note: you may also find this presentation by the authors given at the University of Cologne in December 2021 interesting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-hKB9CpJ3o>).

General Academic Policies

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

Course Schedule

Week 1: September 5 INTRODUCTION

NO MATERIALS ASSIGNED

Week 2: September 12 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOCIALISM



- 📺 1998. "Episode #2: Iron Curtain" CNN Cold War Series ~ 45 minutes (on reserve at HSSL library - can be viewed in the HSSL course reserves room with the remote controls available at the front desk – or you may find online)



- 📖 Crompton, R.J. 1994. "The Communist System." Pp. 240-54 in *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* by R.J. Crompton. New York: Routledge.
- 📖 Ledeneva, Alena. 1998. "*Blat*: The Unknown Commonplace." Pp. 11-38 in *Russia's Economy of Favors: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange* by Alena Ledeneva. Oxford: Cambridge University Press.
- 📖 Sampson, Steven. 1987. "The Second Economy of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 493:120-36.

Week 3: September 19 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOCIALISM (continued)



- ✚ 1998. “Episode 23 and 24: The Wall Comes Down” and “Conclusions” CNN Cold War Series ~ 45 minutes each (on reserve at HSSL library - can be viewed in the HSSL course reserves room with the remote controls available at the front desk – or you may find online)



- ✚ Szakolczai, Arpád and Agnes Horvath. 1991. “Information Management in Bolshevik-type Party States: A Version of the Information Society.” *East European Politics and Societies* 5(2): 268-305.
- ✚ Verdery, Katherine. 1996. “What Was Socialism and Why Did it Fall?” Pp. 19-38 in *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* by Katherine Verdery. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Week 4: September 26 COMMUNISM’S COLLAPSE



- ✚ White, Stephen. 2000. *Communism and its Collapse*. New York: Routledge.

Week 5: October 3 PRIVATIZATION



- ✚ Dunn, Elizabeth. 2004. “Accountability, Corruption, and the Privatization of Alima.” Pp. 28-57 in *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* by Elizabeth Dunn. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- ✚ Verdery, Katherine. 1999. “Fuzzy Property: Rights, Power, and Identity in Transylvania’s Decollectivization.” Pp. 53-82 in *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Post-Socialist World*, edited by Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

In-Class Exercise: Privatizing “Balima”

Week 6: October 17 CORRUPTION AND CRIME



- ✚ Altshuler, David. 2001. “Tunneling Towards Capitalism in the Czech Republic.” *Ethnography* 2(1): 115-38.
- ✚ Ries, Nancy. 2002. “‘Honest Bandits’ and ‘Warped People’: Russian Narratives about Money, Corruption and Moral Decay.” Pp. 276-314 in *Ethnography in Unstable Places: Everyday Lives in the Contexts of Dramatic Political Change*, edited by Carol Greenhouse, Elizabeth Mertz and Kay B. Warren. North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- ✚ Verdery, Katherine. 1996. “Faith, Hope and Caritas in the Land of the Pyramids, Romania, 1990-1994.” Pp. 168-203 in *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* by Katherine Verdery. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Week 7: October 24 MARKETIZATION: CREATING CONSUMERS



- ✚ Barker, Adele Marie. 1999. "Going to the Dogs: Pet Life in the New Russia." Pp. 266-77 in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex and Society Since Gorbachev*, edited by Adele Marie Barker. North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- ✚ Fehérváry, Krisztina. 2002. "American Kitchens, Luxury Bathrooms, and the Search for a 'Normal' Life in Postsocialist Hungary." *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 67(3): 369-400.
- ✚ Fischer, Lisa Pope. 2015. "Washing Machine Races, Gulag Pizza and McLenin Kitsch-ification in Post-Socialist Hungary." *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 82(2): 331-65.
- ✚ Harper, Krista. 1999. "Citizens or Consumers: Environmentalism and the Public Sphere in Postsocialist Hungary." *Radical History Review* 74: 96-111.

Week 8: October 31 (N)OSTALGIE



- ✚ Ghodsee, Kristen. 2018. "Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism." Politics and Prose <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrdisOZdsTo> ~ 65 minutes



- ✚ Berdahl, Daphne. 1999. "(N)Ostalgie for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things" *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 64(2): 192-211.
- ✚ Lankauskas, Gediminas. 2014. "Missing Socialism Again? The Malaise of Nostalgia in Post-Communist Lithuania." Pp. 35-50 in *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, edited Olivia Angé and David Berliner. New York: Berghan Books.
- ✚ Nadakarni, Maya. 2010. "'But It's Ours': Nostalgia and the Politics of Authenticity in Post-Socialist Hungary." Pp. 190-214 in *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, edited by Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille. New York: Berghan Books.

Week 9: November 7 DEMOCRATIZATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY



- ✚ Howard, Marc Morjé. 2002. "The Weakness of Postcommunist Civil Society." *Journal of Democracy* 13(1): 157-69.
- ✚ Mandel, Ruth. 2002. "Seeding Civil Society." Pp. 279-96 in *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia*, edited by C.M. Hann. New York: Routledge.
- ✚ Weinthal, Erika and Pauline Jones Luong. 2002. "Environmental NGOs in Kazakhstan: Democratic Goals and Nondemocratic Outcomes." Pp. 152-75 in *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, edited by Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn. New York: Routledge.

Week 10: November 14 (GENDER) BACKLASH



- ✚ Graff, Agnieszka. 2014. "Report from the Trenches: War Against 'Genderism in Poland.'" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21(4): 431-42.
- ✚ Kováts, Eszter. 2017. "The Emergence of Powerful Anti-Gender Movements in Europe and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy." Pp. 175-89 in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, edited by Michaela Köttig et al. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- ✚ Weiner, Elaine. 2009. "Eastern Houses, Western Bricks? (Re)Constructing Gender Sensibilities in the EU's Eastward Enlargement." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 16(3): 303-26.

Weeks 11 and 12: November 21 and November 28 "TAKING STOCK OF SHOCK"



- ✚ Orenstein, Mitchell and Kristen Ghodsee. 2021. *Taking Stock of Shock: Social Consequences of the 1989 Revolutions*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Note: see <https://www.takingstockofshock.com/data> for more materials pertaining to the book).

Week 13: December 5 IS 'POST-SOCIALISM' STILL RELEVANT TODAY?



- ✚ Dunn, Elizabeth and Katherine Verdery. 2015. "Postsocialism." in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, edited by Robert Scott and Stephen Kosslyn. Oxford: Wiley.
- ✚ Gille, Zsuzsa. 2010. "Is There a Global Postsocialist Condition?" *Global Society* 24(1): 9-30.
- ✚ Müller, Martin. 2019. "Goodbye, Postsocialism!" *Europe-Asia Studies* 71(4): 533-550.
- ✚ Ost, David. 2018. "The Endless Innovations of the Semiperiphery and the Peculiar Power of Eastern Europe." Pp. 19-51 in *The Future of (Post)Socialism: East European Perspectives*, edited by John Frederick Bailyn, Dijana Jelača and Daniela Lugarac. New York: SUNY Press.