Men & Masculinities under Socialism: A Social and Cultural History

International Workshop
Workshop Global Studies | GS
Organized by: Dr. Peter Hallama (University of Bern)
Date: Th, May 14, 2020
Room: F-113, Unitobler, Lerchenweg 36
ECTS: 1
Registration: By May 14, 2020 to virginia.holzer@cgs.unibe.ch and in KSL: https://www.ksl.unibe.ch/ (Login with UniBe-Account, search by title)

Workshop Contents and Objectives

For several decades now, scholars have taken an interest in analyzing the socialist attempt to transform traditional gender arrangements and revolutionize the family. In contrasting the ideal of women’s emancipation with everyday experience under socialism, studies have demonstrated the limits of the socialist “solution” to “the woman question.” However, recent debates about the very notion, meaning, and existence of feminism(s) under socialist rule show the ongoing relevance of the topic. Central and Eastern European gender history is a dynamic field and recent efforts include overcoming the continuing Cold War stereotypes and paradigms and writing a nonlinear history of socialist feminism.

Another current challenge is to consider critical men’s studies and the history of masculinities, and to make these approaches fruitful for Eastern European gender studies and the gender history of socialism. The understanding of masculinities—like femininities—as a social and cultural construct that necessarily underlies historical change, and the performative and multifaceted view on male domination (over women and over other men), provide important avenues to write a truly relational, interactive, and dynamic gender history. Applying critical men’s studies and the history of masculinities to the history of state-socialist Eastern Europe opens new possibilities for further research. What impact did the making of “new” women—better educated, economically independent, and enjoying more legal rights—have on the constructions of masculinity and fatherhood in state-socialist societies? How did men react to socialist gender agendas? What did socialism mean for men, and what did masculinity mean for socialists?

Currently most studies of masculinity in this region focus on artistic representations of masculinities or post-socialist transformations, while some scholars have analyzed socialist homosexualities. Geographically, the majority of research is done in Soviet and Russian history.

This workshop aims, therefore, to stimulate new paths for writing the histories of masculinities under socialism, focusing especially on examining the meanings of masculinities in everyday life. In particular, it seeks to address work and the workplace, family and fatherhood, (domestic) violence, the army, religion, health and medicine, sport and voluntary associations, and sexualities and homosexualities. It pays particular attention to the methodological challenges of writing a history of masculinities and intends to contribute to the theoretical and methodological debates in the field by proposing original ways to explore issues of gender and masculinity in the past. Therefore, it encourages research based on unexplored or newly accessible sources, such as company, military, and church archives; court records; the archives of different associations; personal narratives; and so on. The overall objective of the workshop is to engage in the ongoing debates about the gender history of socialism, to strengthen the history of masculinities in state-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, and to thus enter into an interdisciplinary discussion with historians, sociologists, anthropologists, demographers, and scholars from neighboring fields of research.

Keynote speakers:

Jürgen Martschukat (Professor of North American History, University of Erfurt, Germany)
Erica L. Fraser (Assistant Professor, Department of History, Carleton University, Canada)
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Academic Committee:

Erica L. Fraser (Carleton University), Fabio Giomi (CNRS, Paris), Pavel Kolář (University of Konstanz), Maike Lehmann (University of Cologne), Thomas Lindenberger (TU Dresden), Marianna Muravyeva (Aspasia / University of Helsinki), Julia Richers (University of Bern), Régis Schlagdenhauffen (EHESS, Paris), Brigitte Studer (University of Bern).

Peter Hallama is a historian and researcher at the University of Bern (Switzerland), as well as an associate researcher at the Centre d’études des mondes russe, caucasien et centre-européen (EHESS/CNRS). After completing a dissertation in Munich (Germany) on Czech representations of the Holocaust, he taught at the University of Freiburg (Germany), and obtained post-doctoral fellowships at the EHESS (Paris) and Walter Benjamin Kolleg at the University of Bern (Switzerland). His publications focus especially on the memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust in Central and Eastern Europe (Nationale Helden und jüdische Opfer. Tschechische Repräsentationen des Holocaust, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015; with Stephan Stach (ed.), Gegengeschichte. Zweiter Weltkrieg und Holocaust im ostmitteleuropäischen Dissens, Leipzig, Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2015). His current project explores the history of fatherhood in the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.