

Kristen Ghodsee, *Red Hangover: Legacies of Twentieth-Century Communism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017)

## RECONSIDERING STATE SOCIALISM AND SAVING THE LEFT

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“Question: What was the worst thing about communism?”

“Answer: The thing that came after it.”<sup>1</sup>

“You know, if the Americans discovered oil near the South Pole, they would send an army to end the cruel tyranny of the Emperor Penguin and bring democracy to Antarctica.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, an American woman imagines herself as the American girl she was in 1985, imagining herself as an East German girl, who was perhaps, in turn, imagining herself as an American girl. So begins the literary adventure of Kristen Ghodsee as she traverses the psychic life of post-communist Germany and Bulgaria in her ethnography *Red Hangover: Legacies of Twentieth Century Communism* (2017). The analogy of a hangover is appropriate for the project as a whole: across 14 vignettes separated into four parts, Ghodsee reflects on the tinny headache and bad taste left over from a state that crumbled in a day, the author’s own interpellation as citizen and scholar in a world that no longer exists, and a leftist movement that refuses to recover from its first failed experiment. *Red Hangover* is an exercise in “radical empathy” on these three fronts.<sup>3</sup> It is also an attempt to historicize the postsocialist subject: now that the walls of youth and ideology are down, what more can the ethnographer glean from experience across and after the Iron Curtain? Ultimately, Ghodsee’s narrative experiment urges the Left to “get over [its] red hangover” and seriously consider what is lost when state socialism is condemned to the rubble of the past.<sup>4</sup> *Red Hangover* emphasizes the consequences of collective psychic trauma on our present, and is a non-apologetic voyage through 20<sup>th</sup> century state socialism. This text is as rich as it is complex, despite—or perhaps because of—its claim to simplicity. Although it falls short of its mission in some respects, *Red Hangover*

offers leftists and academics alike the incitement we need for effective resistance against the rise of authoritarianism in the 21st century.

Ghodsee's writing begins and ends in Germany 25 years after *Mauerfall* ("wall fall"—the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989), reflecting on the rise of neofascist rule in a nation still grappling with its history of genocide. She often travels back in time and place within the text to her primary ethnographical subject, Bulgaria, to investigate how its citizens have coped psychologically (or not, as the case seems to be) with the fall of the socialist state. *Red Hangover* is the seventh of Ghodsee's books, and an admirable experiment in both her typical genre (ethnography) and topic (Eastern Europe). Such formal innovation is of course not an unexpected project from this author: her 2011 *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism* is similarly composed of first-person narrated field notes and short stories, but is much more discernable as an ethnography, as the title suggests.<sup>5</sup> Her reader will recognize in *Red Hangover* many of the topics Ghodsee often takes on—female pleasure, postsocialist subjectivity, and everyday life. Unique to this book, however, is Ghodsee's deliberate mixing of fiction with ethnography, and past with present and future.

Indeed, Ghodsee provocatively breaks the traditional chapter-by-chapter, thesis-by-thesis form, and instead narrates the unrecorded psychic life of the postsocialist subject by weaving between memoir, essay, and fiction. By blurring the lines between genres and forms, the author's subject position fuses with the lives she witnesses. *Red Hangover* is written for "nonexperts" born after 1989 who are "curious about how the legacies of the Cold War impact European politics today."<sup>6</sup> This is a valuable experiment on several fronts: it aims to record unrecorded lives, humanize efforts to disentangle communism's past with the looming figure of Stalin, and reignite interest in Eastern Europe after the drama of the Cold War.

*Red Hangover's* four parts have titles that set the reader up for unmet expectations—much as did the shift to unplanned economies for citizens of the disappeared Soviet Union. The first section, "Postsocialist Freedoms," explores the psychic trauma of economic shock therapy after 1991 through a series of short stories and fictionalized narratives of strangers' lives. The second part, "Reuniting the Divided," narrates the parallelisms with the two Germanies: between the Left that is willing to think about the socialist past and the Left that fears it, and between the pre- and post-1989 worlds. The third part, "Blackwashing History," experiments with thinking of the

pleasures of state socialism through art and women's orgasms. The final part, "Democracy Is the Worst Form of Government, Except All Those Other Forms that Have Been Tried from Time to Time," is a thought experiment in the dangers of discarding state socialism wholesale and of the possibilities opened up by using the past to address the frightening present. In the hierarchy of Ghodsee's concerns, the issue of the postsocialist subject comes last—surprising, given that she proclaims to center this subject's psyche in the text. She begins her ethnography with the chapter "Fires." She invites her reader into the lives of postsocialist subjects in contemporary Bulgaria, where the only freedom is that of self-immolation. The number of people who set themselves on fire (5 in 45 days) is accounted for just as the cost of living in contemporary Bulgaria is (heat: 300 leva, electricity: 220 leva, water: 120 leva, all on a salary of 270 leva).<sup>7</sup> Ghodsee thus raises a key question right at the start: What does freedom look like when basic material needs are not met? As one survivor of self-immolation points out: "Under Communism, we had money, but there was nothing to buy. Now, there is everything to buy but no money."<sup>8</sup> The point is not that state socialism was better by any concrete index, nor that democracy or its values ever existed in any authentic form in the West. Rather, Ghodsee, in trying to answer the question of why a country with no political history of self-immolation has begun to resort to such extreme measures, wants to investigate what Wendy Brown calls the "degrada[tion] of the value of values" that accompanies the rise of neoliberal regimes where not even the idea of democratic values can sustain the spirit of the citizen-subject.<sup>9</sup> "Fires" ends with Ghodsee's macabre observation that the only cost that has dropped in Bulgaria is the price of gasoline.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the issue most troubling Ghodsee's effort to center the postsocialist subject is the text's vacillation around how to date the "post." The author's attempt to write in the genre of public scholarship—and therefore to avoid topics that feel too academic—comes at the expense of a discussion about where and how to mark the end of the communist experiment and the beginning of the "postsocialist" period. Given that *Red Hangover* begins and concludes with *Mauerfall*, the reader might assume that the "post" of "postsocialist" is inaugurated with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Is *Mauerfall* the end of state socialism, the end of the Cold War, or both? Ghodsee no doubt appeals to the public reader when she bypasses this decades-long scholarly debate, but readers in her field will notice its absence. In the end, such readers get the impression that Ghodsee

is equating the collapse of the Berlin Wall with the end of something for both Germany *and* Bulgaria (which seems a fallacious parallelism, given that the wall only existed in Germany). Moreover, the claim that the USSR's fall was sudden is arguable, as is whether it occurred in 1989, 1991, before, or even at all.<sup>11</sup> While I appreciate that Ghodsee does not rehash the interminable Slavic Studies debate about the “end,” her book leaves unfulfilled its potential *both* to challenge the field's fetishistic concern with that so-called end and to translate scholarly expertise on state socialism for contemporary audiences.

Second in the hierarchy of concerns is the author's relationship to her subject and her discipline, both of which she worries are relics of a world that no longer exists. She tries to address this personal psychic crisis in the semi-fictional piece “Cucumbers.” It begins: “Most Bulgarians think I'm a spy.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, while living in Bulgaria in 2009, Ghodsee was suspected of working for the CIA with a “non-official cover”—otherwise, why would she be so interested in Bulgaria?<sup>13</sup> The answer, it turns out, is “research.” But very much in keeping with the rest of the text, Ghodsee avoids the labor of self-reflection about what it means to exploit the fears of her ethnological subjects to acquire materials for her project. For that, the reader has Sheila Fitzpatrick's *A Spy in the Archives: A Memoir of Cold War Russia* (2013) and Katherine Verdery's *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File* (2018), both of which move deeply into auto-theoretical contemplation about whether ethnographical scholarship is always, or has always been, espionage, and whether the scholar can ever successfully make their various identities of surveillance cohere.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, David Price's *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology* (2016), Frances Stonor Saunders's *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (2013), Sigmund Diamond's *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955* (1992), and the collection *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies* (2002) all trace the financial and epistemological connections between the field of anthropology and Cold War foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> Ghodsee's avoidance of critical introspection is largely what makes *Red Hangover* such an enjoyable but demanding read.

Ghodsee recalls in “Cucumbers” a time when she uses her fictional spy cover to scare a Bulgarian teen away from a pile of documents they both find in a trash can. The mixture of Ghodsee's guilt and the teen's obvious fear paints

a scene where Ghodsee's Americanness holds enduring power over the Eastern European.<sup>16</sup> The discarded documents contain the personal records of a cucumber specialist working for the Soviet Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture and Food Production. Lingered over questions of production, disposal, and memory, this section concerns itself with the intergenerational inheritance of labor across the rupture of a collapsed system—from the cucumber man to the children Ghodsee assumes he had; from the cucumber man to Ghodsee; and from Ghodsee to her reader. The yellowed records symbolize the Soviet generation that will neither forget the old world nor fully experience the new. Reflecting on these records, Ghodsee wonders what her daughter might think if she heard that her mother is a spy, as well as what she has herself inherited from a discipline that served ideological interests even when its scholars had other intentions. Could Ghodsee be a spy and not know it? With "Cucumbers," Ghodsee lithely establishes a relationship between the reader and the text that mirrors her own intergenerational relationship to the discovered documents. What will the impact of her scholarship be? What interpretations will the reader impose on the text? Does it matter what Ghodsee claims as truth or lie, especially when the reader witnesses her deceive for her own benefit? How innocent is the ethnographical form's desire to access the lives of its subjects? Such paratextual questions are never exhausted for Ghodsee or her Area Studies colleagues.

In "A Tale of Two Typewriters," Ghodsee follows the production history of her two favorite typewriters. Through these histories, Ghodsee reflects on "the broader trials and tribulations of German industry" fossilized in these machines that were never made to be obsolete.<sup>17</sup> She writes a script for the kind of dialogue she imagines the two typewriters might have with each other: the Olympia, made in West Germany, would praise her origins in the "free West," and the Rheinmetall, made in East Germany, would respond by condemning the Olympia's bourgeois birth.<sup>18</sup> Their histories are immaterial but for the enjoyment of their users: East and West are gone; both typewriters have been unwillingly retired from their posts and now work interchangeably for the same purpose—recording their own histories. In the present, the typewriters are somewhat equal: they are both owned by the author and allow her to disconnect from the contemporary world.<sup>19</sup> Yet the section confuses the reader, since its romantic tone obscures the author's geopolitical, temporal, and economic distance from the typewriters' original

uses (“Sometimes I set them side by side, like an old married couple in a retirement home”).<sup>20</sup> Ghodsee is able to enjoy these antiques because she can pay 20–30 euros to buy them. Her ability to pay testifies to how far out of time and place each object is respectively. Together, however, they unite the old East and West to produce a text and a scholar that hopes to unite the factions of the past with the present.

The highest order of concern in *Red Hangover* is the question of what the Left can recover from the past, and how. “Reuniting the Divided” is the book’s richest section, as well as its most academic, and it is the place where Ghodsee most clearly stages the problem she hopes her text can address. “#Mauerfall” stages the political climate Ghodsee hopes to intervene in. She tells the story of her time in Berlin during the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Berlin Wall’s destruction, juxtaposing the events of 1989 with the rise of unfettered capitalism in 2014 and after. Ghodsee asks the questions: What fell in 1989, and, given the current environment in Berlin, should the fall be celebrated? US-led democratization and liberation, which *Mauerfall* proved successful, erected in the Berlin Wall’s place a new era of Euro-Atlantic white nationalist terrorism, isolationist extremism, and physical walls along borders.<sup>21</sup> Ghodsee’s objective in this section is not, however, to rehash the horrors of current authoritarian governments for a reader presumed to be sympathetic to the Left. If the Left is to produce any viable resistance, this section argues, leftists must agree on their common values. Just like the Slavists who conflate Stalinism with the Soviet century and require any recognition of the positive features of state socialism to come with “but Stalin...,” Ghodsee is fed up with the tendency on the Left to discredit any social movement that seems too reminiscent of the Soviet experiment.<sup>22</sup> The boogeyman of Stalin unites the Right and much of the liberal-Left in their disdain for socialism. “Goddamn Stalin follows me everywhere,” Ghodsee decries.<sup>23</sup> While providing comic relief within the dense description of Euro-Atlantic neofascism, Ghodsee’s analysis correctly argues that the Left’s rehashing of the unhealed wound of Stalin paralyzes leftist movements. The progressive base in the U.S. in 2020, for example, has been virulently split between Democratic-Socialist Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, even after the lesson of the 2016 run-off between Sanders and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Ghodsee next takes the reader to Ukraine to witness its anti- or de-communizing national program. In “Venerating Nazis to Vilify Commies,” Ghodsee demonstrates the historical and political violence done when

post-Soviet nations equate Nazism with communism (this is called the “two totalitarianisms” thesis). Why, two decades after the Berlin Wall, is Europe resurrecting the question of the Holocaust’s equivalence to communism?<sup>24</sup> Anticommunism of this nature, she explains, legitimates resurgent nationalisms by historically exculpating the Right from the historic singularity of its crimes.<sup>25</sup> By this logic, as long as new right-wing governments are not sending millions of Jews to death camps, they cannot be equated with the more distant past of Nazism. Not even the Trump government’s construction of concentration camps along the US-Mexico border—or Hungarian president Viktor Orbán’s 2015 border barrier against marching migrants—is enough to challenge the two-totalitarianisms paradigm. The case of Ukraine acts as an extreme dramatization of what is wrong about ignoring the advantages of state socialism out of fear of being called a Stalinist.

The section “Post-Zvyarism: A Fable about Animals on a Farm (Fiction)” is the bravest experiment of the book. As its title suggests, the story is a sequel to George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), a novel that testified to the Western European intelligentsia’s withdrawal of sympathy for the Soviet Union after Stalin’s Great Terror (1936-8). In Ghodsee’s version, the farm animals, led by a Bukharin-type old donkey, Chervenio, decide to oust the Stalinist pigs running the farm.<sup>26</sup> An election is held between a dog, Muttro, who believes in decollectivizing property and taking loans from capitalist human farmers, and a reformist pig, Sivo, who believes in weekly community meetings and collective decision-making.<sup>27</sup> Muttro wins, partitions the centralized government into property vouchers, distributes them evenly among the animals, then slowly acquires them back as payment for utilities.<sup>28</sup> When Muttro owns all of the farm and its utilities, he sells them all to a human developer who razes the farm to build a parking lot. Ultimately, the other animals have to sell themselves off to human farmers. Is this story an apologia of Stalinism? Is Ghodsee, like Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm in *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, defending the potential of Stalinism as an experiment for a “radiant tomorrow”?<sup>29</sup> Would such a defense be all that bad (coupled with an appropriately complementary condemnation of Stalin’s horrors)? More importantly, why does leftist imagination have to be limited to either the pigs/Stalinism or the dog/free-market capitalism? In Ghodsee’s story, there is the option of a reformist socialist democracy in Sivo, but he goes unseen because he lacks sensationalism. As a thought experiment, “Post-Zvyarism”

is a galling, inflammatory, and alluring flirtation with Stalinism that one must read together with “Postsocialist Freedoms,” and consider alongside Ghodsee’s incitement to look seriously at both state socialism and liberal democracy “to promote a system that gives us the best of both.”<sup>30</sup>

Ghodsee follows up her *Animal Farm*-esque story with another in the genre of what she calls “speculative science fiction.” Her goal is to “pla[y] on the German history of de-Nazification and postcommunist lustration to ask whether we can hold individuals responsible for inaction in the face of tyranny.”<sup>31</sup> In “Interview with a Former Member of the Democratic Party of the United States,” Ghodsee imagines herself being interrogated by a German immigration official in 2029 after the election of someone like Donald Trump in the U.S. Her interviewer probes into her affiliation with the Democratic Party, taking seriously (to the point of satire) that the party’s elected representatives directly represent the citizen’s beliefs. How, for example, could Ghodsee have voted for John Kerry in 2004 knowing he had voted for the Iraq War?<sup>32</sup> That she “voted against Bush more than [she] voted for Kerry”—an option Ghodsee’s assumed reader is all too familiar with—is not an adequate excuse for the immigration official concerned with protecting German democracy “against those who support state violence by their inaction.”<sup>33</sup> Eventually, Ghodsee admits that “things never felt that bad. No matter what was happening in Washington, the grind of [her] ordinary life just went on.”<sup>34</sup> Again, the sentiment is likely familiar to Ghodsee’s reader: at a time when the popular vote has been publicly delegitimized, how can individuals “be held accountable for the things the government did while [they] were busy living [their] lives?”<sup>35</sup> Although this is the book’s most self-reflective section, Ghodsee manages to protect herself from the immigration officer, in turn protecting herself from her own condemnation. It is true, a cishet woman with a tenured faculty position likely did not feel that what was happening in Washington in the early 2000s impacted her daily life. But at what point does a person begin to feel the violence of the state? Is passive non-participation, particularly in the blindness of relative privilege, as bad as active collaboration? The consequence of leaving this last question unanswered is all too high a price to pay for both scholar and citizen.

Yet this question remains unanswered by *Red Hangover* because Ghodsee’s ethnographical-literary experiment commits an even more glaring oversight: the book does not specify what kind of postsocialist subject *matters*. Throughout the text, Ghodsee relies on the phrases “ordinary



men and women,” “ordinary people,” and “everyday life” to describe her ethnographical subject. For whom is the life she describes ordinary or everyday? This question is unanswered in Ghodsee’s other texts, as well.<sup>36</sup> Ben Highmore begins *The Everyday Life Reader* with the statement: “Everyday life is a vague and problematic phrase. Any assumption that it is simply ‘out there,’ as a palpable reality to be gathered up and described, should face an immediate question: whose everyday life? [...] To invoke the everyday can often be a sleight of hand that normalises and universalises particular values, specific world-views.”<sup>37</sup> “Everyday life” is a phrase that permits politicians to interpellate “constituents into a common culture”—a function of the very populism Ghodsee calls on leftists to rise up against. In a project that points to the urgency of reflecting on 20<sup>th</sup> century state socialism, Ghodsee’s reliance on unexamined notions of everyday life rules out the class-based critique at the core of left politics.

Yet Ghodsee’s postsocialist subject is not, ultimately, the most important concern of *Red Hangover*. More pressing in the text is leftist infighting which Ghodsee understands to be the consequence of state collapse in 1991. Ghodsee stakes her text’s urgency in the period after the 2016 US election—a period when the Euro-Atlantic public watches the cannibalization of the Left from within.<sup>38</sup> Overall, the text is motivated by the author’s desire to understand today’s transatlantic political crisis as the consequence of the failure to properly address the regime collapse of the 1990s. Hers is not an attempt to apologize for 20<sup>th</sup> century state socialism—which her uncited contemporary Slavic Studies scholars might accuse her of—but rather a plea “for historical nuance” in how scholarship and leftist movements relate the past to the present, particularly as they concern “the continued demonization of everything about the state socialist past [that] has real impacts on the political landscape today.”<sup>39</sup> The problem of what is ordinary or everyday does not defeat the overall purpose of this text: to convince the Left to pause its infighting long enough “to stand together to fight a common enemy.”<sup>40</sup> Ghodsee quotes Audre Lorde to emphasize her point: “The Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house.”<sup>41</sup> By this, Ghodsee means that it is time to consider alternatives to democracy, which has been so wounded by capitalism that perhaps nothing of the “democratic ideal” can be recovered.<sup>42</sup> The bravery of Ghodsee’s experiment puts in one’s mind the bravery required by the Left (in both the public and the academic spheres) to recover the parts of 20<sup>th</sup> century state socialism that can unite us in fighting the enemy of the present.<sup>43</sup>

## NOTES

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- 1 Kristen Ghodsee, *Red Hangover: Legacies of Twentieth-Century Communism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 149.
- 2 Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, 180.
- 3 Ibid., xi.
- 4 Ibid., 200.
- 5 Kristen Ghodsee, *Lost in Translation: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 6 Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, xx.
- 7 Ibid., 4.
- 8 Ibid., 8.
- 9 Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 161. Ghodsee's book is a significant elaboration on recent theorizations of 21<sup>st</sup> century authoritarianism in general. Wendy Brown, Peter E. Gordon, and Max Pensky do not mention Russia once in their study of contemporary authoritarianism, focusing exclusively on Western Europe and the US. *Red Hangover* extends the scope of "Euro-Atlantic" to include Russia in the historicization of current authoritarianism. Brown, Wendy, Peter E. Gordon, and Max Pensky, eds., *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).
- 10 Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, 10.
- 11 If attempting to appeal to the reader born after 1989, Ghodsee may want to address the other public scholar giant on the topic of postsocialist subjectivity, Masha Gessen, who in *The Future Is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (2017), questions the very assumption that the Soviet Union "collapsed," as most of the state was cordoned off and sold to the highest bidding members of the dissolved centralized government. This is implied in the title of Gessen's book, where the past tense of "reclaimed" reveals that the collapse of "future" and "history" has already occurred. Gessen helpfully demarcates the difference between the collapse of the state (for Ghodsee, figured in the fall of the Berlin Wall) and the psychic distress felt by citizens in losing their entire worldview in one day. It is in the latter that I understand Ghodsee to be most interested. Masha Gessen, *The Future Is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 2. For more on the economic sale of the centralized government, see Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Jack F. Matlock Jr., *Superpower Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray—And How to Return to Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
- 12 Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, 11.
- 13 Ibid., 17.
- 14 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *A Spy in the Archives: A Memoir of Cold War Russia* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013); Katherine Verdery, *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
- 15 David Price, *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology* (Durham,

NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2013); Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootian, eds. *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2002).

16 Ghodsee does not acknowledge that this relationship went both ways. In the spirit of her casual form and emphasis on narrative, a personal story of my own challenges the one-sided victimization of the Eastern European subject. My father received permission to emigrate to the US from Soviet Ukraine in 1989 as a refugee of religious persecution because his interviewer believed that, as a Jew who had served in the Red Army just years prior, my father was both willing and able to divulge military secrets. Little did the interviewer know that because my father was a Jew serving his conscripted years during the Afghanistan War, he spent his time in a nameless place in the Siberian tundra, surviving off of little else than poisonous moonshine and whatever few rations he was offered. The only thing he was able to spy on was the effects of malnutrition, rank abuse, and skin rot that afflicted him and the other Jews in his unit. None of this, however, stopped my father and his friends from playing into the interviewer's desires in order to acquire those visas.

17 Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, 92.

18 *Ibid.*, 98.

19 *Ibid.*, 85.

20 *Ibid.*, 98.

21 *Ibid.*, 57-58.

22 *Ibid.*, 71.

23 *Ibid.*, 73.

24 The question was first raised in the 1980s in the Historikerstreit (the Historian's Battle).

25 Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, 134.

26 *Ibid.*, 153.

27 *Ibid.*, 158, 160.

28 Portioning out the centralized government into vouchers was the same process undertaken in Russia in the 1990s. Stephen Kotkin explains that Russian officials used their bureaucratic positions to profit by setting up themselves the private industries that would inherit most parts of the state (Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 126). There were two large waves of privatization: between 1992-1993, citizens were given vouchers that could be traded and used in property auctions and public sales. All large state firms were forced to become incorporated as joint-stock companies. Much of the old centralized government was literally sold off in pieces during this rush (*Ibid.*, 132). Then the second wave of privatization of industries previously excluded occurred between 1995-1998. By this time, the central government had racked up huge budget deficits from its failure to properly collect taxes and manage finances: "[N]ewly established banks" provided the solution of covering the deficit with "loans" if, as collateral, the government would put up the shares it retained in oil, nickel manufacturing, and other coveted sectors" (*Ibid.*, 133). When the government failed to pay back the loans, the shares would be sold at auction. Foreign investors were

often forbidden from participating in the auctions as a concession “to nationalists who decried the sale of Russia’s ‘patrimony’” (Ibid., 131). This meant that Russia could not raise the value of the parts of government it sold through participation in a larger market, and that the auctions were controlled by and went to many of the same insider-investors (Ibid., 131; 134). Kotkin argues that it was “the millions of officials who had betrayed the Soviet state and enriched themselves in the bargain” that resulted in the failure of shock therapy (Ibid., 116).

29 Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, 138.

30 Ibid., 200.

31 Ibid., xvii-xviii.

32 Ibid., 171.

33 Ibid., 174.

34 Ghodsee explains in her prelude that she wrote the first draft of the story before Donald Trump had won the Republican nomination. Hilariously, her “early readers thought the story unrealistic.” Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, 177; xvii.

35 Ibid., 177.

36 In *Lost in Translation*, for example, Ghodsee explains that the “book is about sharing the experiences of those everyday men and women as they eat, sleep, learn, work, love, and dream of a better world.” The measurements of who qualifies as “everyday,” and how such language can be misused, is left unaccounted for. Ghodsee, *Lost in Translation*, xv.

37 Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

38 I use “Euro-Atlantic” to describe the area of Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the U.S., all of which appear in *Red Hangover*. Ghodsee seems to deliberately avoid mentioning or looking at the Russian Federation. Where she imagines Russia to fall in the recovery of state socialism is unclear.

39 In a sustained effort that is as difficult as it is commendable, Ghodsee does not succumb to Soviet nostalgia (what she calls “Ostalgie”—nostalgia for the East). The chapter “Belgrade, 2015” is a particularly evocative example of her labor in subverting nostalgia with a focus on the impossibility of living in the 1990s without any hope. Her intention is not to convey how much better life was under state socialism; it is, instead, to stop focusing exclusively on the crimes of communism, and to take seriously what can be learned or inherited from twentieth century state socialism (including more orgasms for women). Ghodsee confronts Ostalgie in the leftist Western European movement in section six, “The Enemy of My Enemy.” She recalls her participation in the Liebknecht-Luxemburg Demonstration in 2016, where she found herself marching in front of the Turkish Communist Party’s banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. “Goddamn Stalin follows me everywhere,” she hilariously exclaims (Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, 71). She quickly distances herself physically so as not to be accidentally captured in a photograph with the banner. As much as Ghodsee wants to recuperate what can be learned from state socialism, she wants to foreclose any Stalinophilia as well.

40 Ghodsee, *Red Hangover*, 191; 197.

41 Ibid., 192.

42 Ibid., 191.

43 Ibid., 197.