

do interakce s celosvětovou situací politickou, ekonomickou i ideologickou. Nekola dává tomuto širšímu mezinárodnímu pojetí poválečné uprchlické problematiky na evropském kontinentě kratší prostor na závěr.

Jak je vidět ze členění kapitol, kniha poskytuje stručný, nicméně komplexní základní rozhled k problému. Autor zvolil populární styl textu, ten díky tomu plyne rychle a je čtivý, někdy se však tím pádem nevyhýbá zjednodušeným nebo zabarvenějším formulacím, které jej zplošťují, zároveň ale zpřístupňují běžnému čtenáři. Kniha nicméně zůstává popisná, rovněž fotografie slouží pouze k pasivní ilustraci zmíněných faktů, ačkoli se nabízí je s textem více propojit v dialogu. Zájem o každodennost je nahlížen z mnoha úhlů, autor se však po celou dobu drží perspektivy československých emigrantů, národnostní rámec opouští jen ojediněle. Častější interakce či srovnání s působením dalších národností by problému dodalo další rozměr. Autor obecnější uprchlickou situaci zařadil do několika kratších kapitol (kde slouží spíše jako rámcový podklad), aniž by ji problematizoval či hledal hlubší kořeny problému.

V dané problematice a jejím výzkumu má Martin Nekola široký rozhled, osobní kontakty a přístup k mnoha dosud nevyužitým fondům a osobním archivům. Jeho další aktivity v mnohém překonávají v úvodu zmíněné překážky výzkumu emigrace (prameny uložené v zahraničí, jejich fragmentárnost). Pohled na každodennost poúnorové emigrace je jednou z oblastí, v níž mnoho otázek čeká na své zpracování. Přesto, že si je dnešní historik vědom složitosti takové práce (nejen s ohledem na časovou či finanční stránku výzkumu), doufejme, že své dlouhodobě získávané znalosti a zkušenosti autor recenzované knihy dále zhodnotí a že se po výše zmíněných popularizačních počínech v budoucnu dočkáme také odborně koncipované publikace, sloužící (nejen) historikům jako kvalitní zdroj a podklad pro další bádání.

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**Kristen GHODSEE – Mitchell A. ORENSTEIN, *Taking Stock of Shock. Social Consequences of the 1989 Revolutions*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2021, 300 pages, ISBN 978-0-19-754924-7**

The post-socialist transformation is one of the most politically charged historical themes. It is also the topic of the book *Taking Stock of Shock* by the anthropologist Kristen Ghodsee and the political scientist Mitchell A. Orenstein, in which they embark on a quest to better understand the impact and context of a transformation whose enormous influence is still being felt today, as it continues to be a factor in shaping the political landscape of the post-socialist region. The book thus offers not only an analysis of the underlying processes relevant for historians, but also guidance relevant for politicians at a time when radical forces are on the rise and support for democracy is dwindling.

The central question Ghodsee and Orenstein ask is: “What were the social impacts of the transition that started in 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe and in

1991 in the Soviet Union?”<sup>1</sup> Using robust economic, demographic, public opinion and ethnographic data, their goal is to come up with “a more nuanced view of the transition process”.<sup>2</sup> They reject the duality of disaster capitalism, on the one hand, and the J-curve (an understanding of transformation as a short decline followed by a steep growth of the economy), on the other, and strive to overcome it with their own perspective centred on inequality, as in their view different types of data to some extent support each of these different perspectives, and the transformation brought about improvement for some and “increased poverty and misery for others”.<sup>3</sup>

For the Czech Republic, the lasting sensitivity and importance of the post-socialist transformation as a theme is demonstrated by Václav Klaus, who led the country through this period as prime minister, fiercely defending the process in response to a review of *Taking Stock of Shock* by Kateřina Smejkalová — without having read the actual book.<sup>4</sup> The transformation, however, is a political theme, and tool in the entire post-socialist region.

One of the most important aspects of the economic evidence is the disconnect between GDP growth and household income. As Ghodsee and Orenstein show, “average household income grew at only half the pace of GDP per capita between 1992 and 2010”<sup>5</sup> and almost half of the population of the post-socialist region remained below the poverty line<sup>6</sup> during the first decade of the transformation, which was marked by the removal and weakening of many social programmes and subsidies. Moreover, they also show that the performance during one of the best-remembered economic crises, the Great Depression, was comparable to that of the best-performing post-socialist countries during the transformation — while the mid-ranking and bottom countries fared far worse.

The relevant demographic evidence points to rising mortality, massive emigration, falling life expectancy and declining fertility. While many of the migrants found new opportunities and means to support their families back home, life in the West was not always free of harsh working conditions and prejudice. The “average postsocialist country saw a population decline of 8.22 percent from 1989 to 2017”.<sup>7</sup> This downward demographic trend has remained a source of anxiety in many

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1 Kristen GHODSEE — Mitchell A. ORENSTEIN, *Taking Stock of Shock. Social Consequences of the 1989 Revolutions*, New York 2021, p. 3.

2 Ibid., p. 4.

3 Ibid., p. 190.

4 See Václav KLAUS, *Václav Klaus pro Právo: Nad článkem Kateřiny Smejkalové “Méně šoku, více terapie”*, 27. 1. 2022, online: <https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/4855> [retrieved 5. 12. 2022]; Kateřina SMEJKALOVÁ, *Méně šoku, více terapie. Kateřina Smejkalová nad knihou o transformaci bývalého východního bloku*, Právo, 27. 1. 2022, online: <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/kultura-salon-mene-soku-vice-terapie-katerina-smejkalova-nad-knihou-o-transformaci-byvaleho-vychodniho-bloku-40384573> [retrieved 5. 12. 2022].

5 K. GHODSEE — M. A. ORENSTEIN, *Taking*, p. 38.

6 The World Bank’s threshold of USD 5.50 per day is used.

7 Ibid., p. 71.

former socialist countries, resulting in pro-natalist policies, including abortion bans of various severity, and anti-immigrant rhetoric, fuelled by fears that declining local populations might be replaced by immigrants and national identities lost in the process.

Both public opinion and ethnographic evidence paint a bleak picture of the developments in the post-socialist region. Although the number of people describing their own situation as positive has increased, the assessment of the general situation has worsened, with a correlation between rising economic inequality and declining support for democracy. “A postcommunist social contract based on markets and democracy had failed to win the confidence of a majority of the population.”<sup>8</sup> The ethnographic part of the book shows many cases of people falling into extreme poverty from a relatively stable standard of life, and examples of social deterioration resulting from the transformation, which might have been otherwise lost in the data.

I would like to commend the authors for publishing online and linking to some of the datasets and summaries, particularly the ethnographic studies, they used as a basis for their research.<sup>9</sup> This provides a useful overview for researchers who would wish to follow in their footsteps in one way or another.

On a more critical note, considering their own approach to the question of whether things could have been done differently, as well as the uncertain ends of the transformation to democracy, it might have been better to abandon the term “transition” in favour of the term “transformation”.<sup>10</sup>

To provide an answer to the above question, the cases of China and Vietnam are used to present a possible alternative to the development in Europe and Central Asia. However, such counterfactuals should be based on more extensive comparisons of the different obstacles and contexts, and deeper engagement with the works of other researchers focusing on these particular cases.<sup>11</sup> The situation of China was very different from that of, say, Russia, and it would deserve much more consideration before it is used to argue that things could have been different.<sup>12</sup>

Trying to paint a coherent picture of the post-socialist transformation is sometimes not easy when “different sub-regions experienced different transitions”<sup>13</sup> — with, for instance, Visegrad Countries being the paragons of success, and Russia and Moldova ranking among the worst. The levels of inequality and social deterioration vary across the region. Although Ghodsee and Orenstein also mention the positive

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.takingstockofshock.com/data> [retrieved 5. 12. 2022].

<sup>10</sup> For the difference between “transition” and “transformation” cf. e.g. <http://monumentto-transformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/t/transition-or-transformation/transition-or-transformation-marcel-tomasek.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Such as e.g. Barry Naughton or Tuong Vu.

<sup>12</sup> While simultaneously weakening this claim by admitting that following the Chinese example might not have been possible in Europe. Cf. K. GHODSEE — M. A. ORENSTEIN, *Taking*, p. 190 versus p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

effects of the transformation for some,<sup>14</sup> this is downplayed by the overwhelming evidence provided for social decline. As the authors themselves say, they wish to counter the narrative of disaster capitalism. Their perspective may help politicians and researchers to understand why there is so much dissatisfaction with the actual outcomes of the transformation, but it is unlikely to provide a success story for any political movement aiming to win over the “losers” of the transformation who currently support radical forces, as these discontents are unlikely to find much comfort in understanding and accepting that the transformation was actually beneficial for parts of the population. As a result, the authors just punctuate the perspective of disaster capitalism with occasional positives for some — adding colour, but not fundamentally altering the picture.

As regards the economic part of the post-socialist transformation, I think the role of domestic economists and economic thinking deserves more emphasis. The influence of international financial institutions on economic policy was mixed, as was that of foreign economic experts. Current research shows domestic economists were more than prepared to execute the transformation in a way even more radical than some of the proposals made by foreign advisors and institutions.<sup>15</sup>

Although the wider impacts of Western co-transformation are beyond the scope of the book, it would be worthwhile to analyse the (social) costs and benefits resulting for the West from the transformations of the East.

Nevertheless, the book presents many important pieces of evidence which, taken together, document the developments and the images of transformation that have led to the disillusionment of the majority of the population in the region today.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore not only a valuable contribution to the transformation discussion across different academic fields but also has an appeal for general audiences. It also makes the case for the state and markets to both have a role in societies: in the end, Ghodsee and Orenstein do not shy away from policy advice, stressing the “need to embrace policies for the future that balance personal liberties for the strong with social safety nets for the weak, enabling all citizens to develop their capacities to the fullest”.<sup>17</sup> It remains to be seen whether this advice based on their analysis of post-socialist transformations will be heeded in the world of polycrisis that we live in today.

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14 Jan BĚLÍČEK, *Postkomunistické transformace přinesly jednu z nejhorších recesí v dějinách, říká politolog Orenstein*, A2larm, 22. 3. 2022, online: <https://a2larm.cz/2022/03/postkomunisticke-transformace-přinesly-jednu-z-nejhorsich-recesi-v-dejinach-rika-politolog-orenstein> [retrieved 5. 12. 2022].

15 Cf. e.g. K. GHODSEE — M. A. ORENSTEIN, *Taking*, pp. 62–63.

16 Cf. what Orenstein says in J. BĚLÍČEK, *Postkomunistické transformace*.

17 K. GHODSEE — M. A. ORENSTEIN, *Taking*, p. 205.