

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

GHODSEE, KRISTEN, *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism, and Postsocialism on the Black Sea*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2005, xii + 226 p. Index.

The Red Riviera is an excellent ethnography on Bulgarian women working in the tourism sector and a welcome addition to the growing literature on postsocialism. The author discusses tourism under communism, the transformations in this sector in the postcommunist era, and how women have negotiated these changes. She further examines tourism within larger (post)communist political and economic contexts and addresses the impacts of privatization and local women's NGOs.

Ghodsee challenges the notion, proposed by many scholars and NGOs, that all Bulgarian women have been negatively affected by the transformations in the postcommunist era after 1989. Drawing on Bourdieu, she proposes that women working in the tourism sector acquired 'cultural capital' (high education, foreign-language training, and work experience with foreigners) under communism which was crucial for their relative success within this flourishing sector in the postcommunist era. Despite a high unemployment rate, women were, interestingly, not pushed out of the tourism sector by men due to this cultural capital and the popular perception, developed under communism, that women are 'naturally' better suited for the work in this sector. The author, consequently, argues that generalizations presenting Bulgarian women as a homogeneous group, who are claimed to be worse off than men, ignore class differences.

By using qualitative and quantitative methods – for example, participant observation, formal and informal interviews on the one hand and two large-scale surveys on the other – Ghodsee provides an in-depth view of the everyday lives of individual women, connecting their experiences with larger political, economic and social processes. Her research on local women enables her to challenge studies or reports that focus exclusively on the macro level. She is particularly critical of reports by women's NGOs that claim that Bulgarian women have been negatively affected by the transition and ignore the success of some women like her informants. The projects of these NGOs focus on issues like violence, discriminatory employment practices, or sexist advertisement, matters of little concern to the women the author interviewed. Meanwhile, unemployment, one of the biggest problems (for women *and* men), is not addressed in their projects. Thus, the author discovered a discrepancy between the NGO reports and experiences and views of local women working in the tourism sector.

Moreover, based on her interviews with women working in NGOs, she concluded that the local NGOs were strongly influenced in their project designs and reports by the agendas of international, mostly Western, organizations and agencies that funded them.

While Ghodsee focuses on women, she touches on the issue of gender relations in the everyday context when presenting the case of Petar, a man whose wife works in the tourism sector. While appreciating that his wife has a job, he suffers under unemployment and his inability to take care of his family. It would have been interesting, if the author had discussed such gender relations in greater depth, not only those between women working in the tourism sector and their husbands/partners, but also those between the women and their male relatives, and/or male colleagues and how the women's success shapes these relationships. Moreover, she argues, drawing on Bourdieu's notions of cultural, economic, and social/political capital, that cultural (i.e. individual's skills and experiences) became more important than the other two in the tourism sector after the collapse of communism. However, many of her examples give the impression that cultural capital can be closely related to one or both of these other forms of capital. Her informant Prolet, for example, had the necessary cultural capital but without her social capital (i.e. international connections) she could not have established and maintained her own business. Svetla, a young student who wants to work in the tourism sector, lacks the economic capital (i.e. money to pay tuition for university or to afford a private tutor to increase her chances of getting a scholarship) in order to gain cultural capital (i.e. university education). Thus, while not pointed out by the author in this way, economic capital (money or material goods) and social capital (social networks) – in combination with cultural capital – seems to be crucial for success in the tourism sector as well.

This well-written, vivid account of women in postsocialist Bulgaria will be compelling for anthropologists and scholars from related disciplines interested in women/gender, tourism, and/or postsocialism as well as feminism, development and NGOs. It will further be suitable for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses addressing the aforementioned topics.

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