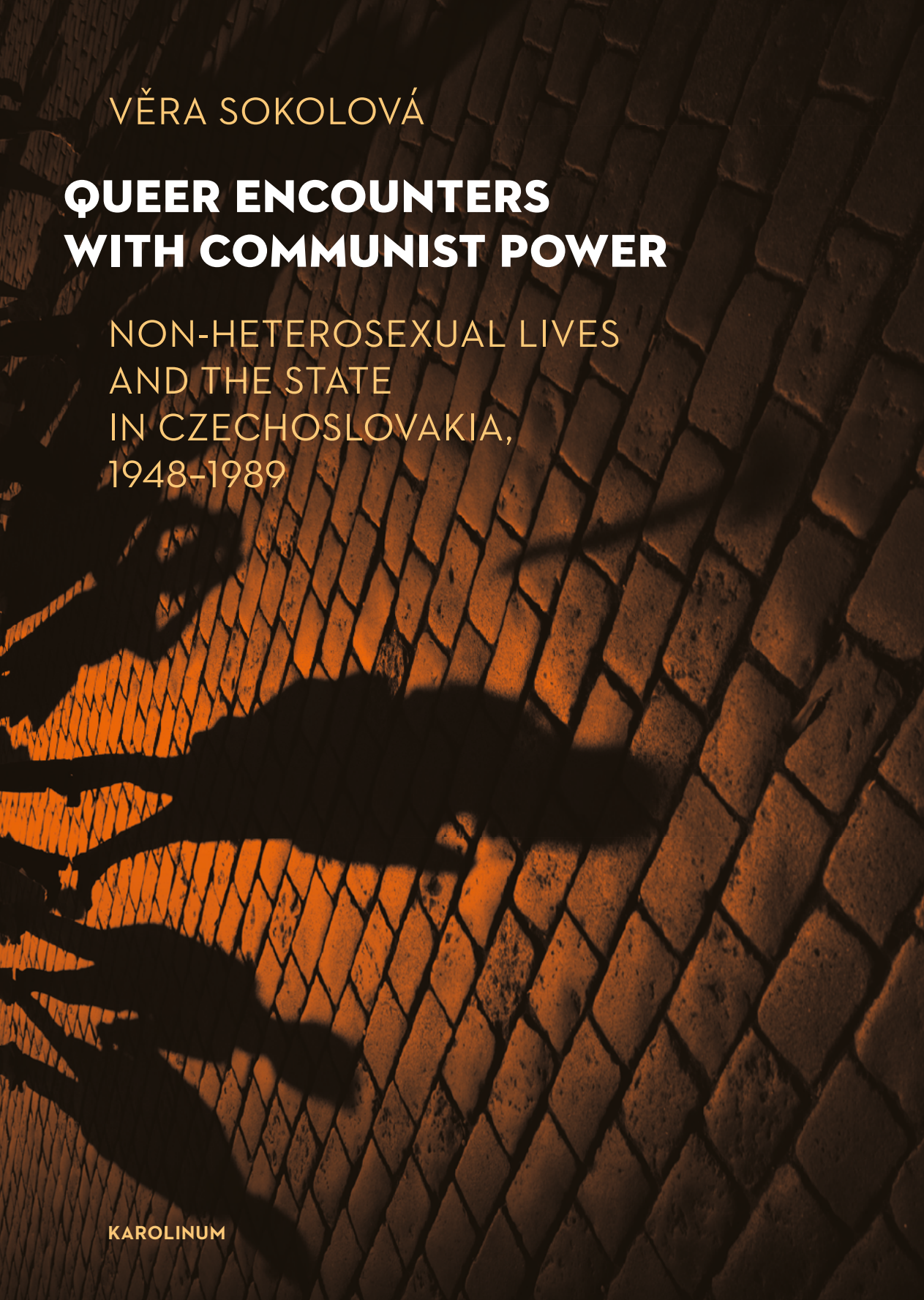

VĚRA SOKOLOVÁ

QUEER ENCOUNTERS WITH COMMUNIST POWER

NON-HETEROSEXUAL LIVES AND THE STATE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1948–1989

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ebooks@karolinum.cz

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To Sebastian, Toby, and Kaisa —
Have the courage to live the life you desire.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

PROLOGUE

Eva was born in 1952, during the dark years of Stalinism. Her family owned a modest house in the Motol neighbourhood of Prague, the capital city of then Communist Czechoslovakia, where she lived with her mother, father and an older brother. Despite the fact that she grew up in the height of the Cold War, she recalls her childhood as "happy and uneventful."[1] Since her early years, Eva "felt more like a boy" and was also "very strongly attracted to women." In 1963, when she was eleven, she went through, what she recalled, "a decisive moment of my life because I was visited by Jesus." Very young, and completely on her own, living in the most atheist country in Europe, enhanced by the recent destruction of all religious institutional life by order of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Eva became, in her own words, "deeply religious." Neither her parents nor her brother believed in God, she could not join the church or attend any religious services. She practiced her faith alone in her own private way, believing that "God and Jesus are guiding all my steps — from that moment on, for the rest of my life."

Already as a small child, Eva exhibited great talent for the visual arts and spent a lot of time outside painting nature and animals. Later on, she enriched these themes with religious motifs and her painting became an interesting mixture of landscape art, Christianity, anatomy, and humanism. Despite this rather surrealist portfolio, she was accepted to the prestigious and highly competitive Hollar Art School in Prague. Or maybe, she was accepted because of that mix since she submitted her application during the rebellious and hopeful days of the Prague Spring of 1968. Eva loved her years at "Hollarka" where she "could get lost in my own world and no one cared how weird I was because all artists are fucked up." The careless and happy school days, however, had their somber side. After coming home from school, Eva would walk up to the attic of their house and lock herself up. "I stripped

1 The list of biographical interviews and the dates when they were carried out is included in the bibliography section of this book. Names of all narrators were changed to retain their anonymity. The queer oral history project, which forms the foundation of this book is explained in detail in chapter two.

myself half naked and whipped myself bloody for being a lesbian." Under the watchful eye of the atheist, heteronormative and collectivist Communist state, during the early years of the tough Normalization era, in the privacy of her home and soul, young Eva fought her own highly individualized and secret battles of reconciling her belief in God with her homosexuality. Unlike most of my other narrators, who shared with me their lives from Communist Czechoslovakia, Eva had no problem identifying as a lesbian. On the other hand, most of her life she struggled with harmonizing her openly embraced lesbian identity with her secretly chosen religious identity. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 was a liberating moment for her not because of her homosexuality but because "for the first time in my life, I could openly admit I'm a believer."

In 1974, Eva was admitted to the prestigious Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, where she began to study painting. Young and vivacious, she lived openly and her sex life was quite wild. In college and in the social circles she moved around in the mid 1970s, "everyone knew that I was into women." At the same time, no one knew about her religiousness. She carefully separated her religious and sexual lives and guarded the secrecy of her religious beliefs because "faith was too fragile to talk about." Her inability to reconcile both aspects of her identity gradually led to a "strange schizophrenia"; on the one hand she became an alcoholic and enjoyed "wild anonymous sex in public toilets with other women" and, on the other hand, she "prayed to God for mercy." In 1980, when she graduated from the Art Academy, she had "such problems with drinking and mental stuff" that instead of becoming a respected painter she received a disability pension, which remained her only source of regular income through the rest of the Communist period. As will be clear later in the book, it is significant that the doctors who helped Eva receive the disability support were sexologists from the Sexological Institute in Prague, to whom she "came for help with my drinking" and that the reason why Eva went to this institute to solve her alcoholism was because "my queer friends told me that those guys will certainly help me."

At nights, Eva spent a lot of time in the (unofficial) gay bars monitored by the State Secret Police (StB), such as the *T-Club*, *U Petra Voka* or *Špejchar*. In the *T-Club* on Jungmann Square she even had her own table close to the band, where she would "sit and paint all night, walking home at 4am all the way to Motol. Those were magical nights and such great years." Eva remembers the last two decades of Czechoslovak communism during the 1970s and 1980s as "the best time of my life." During these years, she had numerous relationships with women, often "only for sex," but never engaged in a single relationship with a man. "Men repulsed me because I always felt like a guy myself. I always loved women." This, Eva recalled, was also the main reason why she never had any children. Even though she "now regrets a bit" this

decision, she "never wanted to have children in [her] life" and "as a principle went out only with women who were childless." Eva found many of the women she dated through personal ads, which she regularly read, answered and placed in the officially sanctioned state newspapers.

Eva met her "most significant lover before 1989," a chemical engineer Helen, through a personal ad in the newspaper *Lidová demokracie*. Eva reminisced that Helen was her "femme fatale" and they had a wonderful, loving, beautiful relationship "full of love and sex." They lived together, "Helen looked all day long into a microscope and I painted." In their free time, they visited exhibitions, art shows and walked their two German shepherd dogs. The only problem in what seemed to be an idyllic relationship was that Helen was not religious. In 1984, Eva joined the Jehovah's Witnesses, who secretly met in home apartments and studied the Bible together. Longing "to find the Truth," Eva was soon "completely engulfed" in the Jehovah's Witnesses teachings. Since "the Witnesses preached that homosexuality was in direct contradiction with the teaching of Christ," Eva decided to leave Helen in order to "become closer to God." Retrospectively, she evaluated this decision as "the biggest mistake of my life." Her relationship with Jehovah's Witnesses did not last either. In 1987, she decided to leave their community because she could no longer stand Jehovah's Witnesses strict dress-code, requiring all women to wear only long skirts.

Miriam was born in June 1945, "christened by the Vltava river and joy from the war's end." Miriam's family lived harmoniously in a small apartment in Prague, which her father obtained with help from his boss during the war. In 1952 the time came to return the favor. Miriam's father helped his boss escape from Czechoslovakia to the West, for which he was sentenced to six and a half years in jail. Her father's imprisonment deeply affected Miriam because "it destroyed our family happiness. This guy [the boss] created a huge conspiracy around his escape. My dad's role was to go to Slovakia, travel around the Tatra Mountains and buy postcards there. He brought them back, the boss wrote them all up and when he was emigrating, he sent another person back to Slovakia to keep sending these postcards back as though he was on vacation. Twenty-nine people were involved in this scheme, including my dad. One day, dad went for some training to Kaplice and never came back. Seven guys came to our apartment instead. They destroyed the whole place because they were looking for the list of those twenty-nine people and unfortunately, they found it among our books… Because of such stupidity, because of one rich guy, my dad was jailed." Fortunately, Miriam continued, "President Zápotocký pardoned him so he came back in three and half years" but his health was broken and he died relatively young from lung cancer.

From these miserable times, Miriam recalled "one great memory of a wonderful StB officer" working in the prison, Hugo, who helped her mother and the girls to see their father more often and for much longer than officially allowed. Miriam didn't know why Hugo helped them but concluded that perhaps it was because he also had two children. Miriam recalled that "Hugo was even giving us Christmas presents from dad — of course dad had to pay for them but Hugo would make sure we got them." According to Miriam, her father and Hugo became life-long friends in the prison, visiting and writing to each other, and "Hugo even came to dad's funeral in 1981." It was because of all these "good deeds" from Hugo and Antonín Zápotocký (the second Communist president of Czechoslovakia), as well as due to assigning the blame for her father's imprisonment not to the Communist regime itself but to "the rich guy who emigrated," that Miriam had a paradoxically positive view of the Communist Party. She joined it in 1966, at the age of 22, and remained a loyal Communist Party member until 1989.

Already as a little girl, Miriam "dressed up like a tomboy and enjoyed boy's games." Her father's name was Pavel, but the whole family, including Miriam and her older sister, called him the female version of that name, "Pavla." Miriam insists that it had "absolutely no connection to being feminine even though it was a bit strange." Since she was "very little," Miriam "knew she was into girls" but she never discussed these feelings with anyone. Her platonic lovers were always girls, never boys, but she "had absolutely no idea that anything like 'that' [homosexuality] existed." During the interviews, Miriam resisted assigning any named identity to herself, claiming that she is "not into categories, then or now." Her aunt, her father's sister, however, "was a lesbian." Interestingly, Miriam explicitly talked about her aunt as being a 'lesbian' (*lesbička*), even though her aunt apparently never openly identified herself this way. Miriam said that she simply "connected the dots." Her aunt had been married a long time ago but then got divorced and "lived together with her girlfriend ever since." Miriam's family visited them occasionally in their apartment at Kampa but Miriam's mother "avoided inviting them over to our place as much as possible."

Because of her father's imprisonment, Miriam was prohibited from entering a regular high school and had to go to a two-year technical training school (*technické učiliště*). She was surrounded by boys, being one of only two girls in the entire school. Since Miriam felt like a boy herself, she concluded that "naturally, I was good at technical subjects." She excelled and after ending her first year with straight As, she was allowed to transfer to a better school. There Miriam joined a drama club and at one poetry competition she met her first husband, a waiter from the town of Písek. He was 15 years her senior, was "completely obviously gay" and according to Miriam they "immediately fell for each other because, you know, 'we' [homosexuals] recognize

each other among other people." She married him four years later, in 1967, because he needed a visa to emigrate to West Germany and she, in turn, desperately wanted his apartment in Prague because she "was terribly in love with one beautiful woman, unfortunately a married one with a little child," and needed a place to meet with her. Because Miriam was already a member of the Communist Party, and because it was during the reformist late-1960s, her husband obtained a West German visa without a problem. His emigration came as a shock to her parents but Miriam explained to them that "it's totally fine because I got the apartment." She filed for divorce and started to secretly date her beloved married girlfriend with a child. None of Miriam's relationships with women, in fact, were ever openly admitted, neither before 1989 nor after. According to Miriam, it was "something that I think should stay hidden and private."

In 1972, Miriam married again. Her second husband and his large family were all active in water sports in the Prague neighborhood of Podolí. Miriam joined the group, had "a great time, really enjoyed the whole thing," became a coach for little kids and also worked as a referee for water slalom. She "especially liked his mom, my future mother-in-law." When Miriam was alone with her husband, "when we were together at holidays, he was great. I really loved him." But back at home, in a huge villa house in Podolí, where the whole extended family lived, "everything was decided by the mother in a big family meeting around a big round table." Gradually, Miriam started to resent not having any power over her personal life. She even became pregnant in her second marriage, but her husband and his mother "were not particularly crazy about a child" so she had an abortion. She shared that it's the only decision in her life that she regrets. In 1978, she got divorced for the second time and started to work in the Complaints Department of the State Gas company. She loved that job "because finally I could help somebody." Soon after, she met Vendulka with whom she spent "eleven wonderful years." They never lived together but it was "a great, exciting relationship." All her life, Miriam lived only in monogamous relationships, with both men and women. Before 1989 she never visited any 'gay' or 'homosexual' club or bar, nor looked for any community or "homosexual socializing," because as she said, it was not "her scene." Miriam never told her parents about Vendulka but she was "convinced that they both must have known. I was with Vendulka all those years. Vendulka was a nurse and so she also helped me with both of my parents in their old age."

Heda, the oldest narrator in this book, was born in 1929 in Brno. Her mother was a nurse and in 1935 got a decently-paid position and an apartment in the former "Masaryk Homes," today's Thomayer Hospital in Prague, where Heda moved with her mother and grandmother. Heda's father was a doctor but

he did not move with the family, nor ever expressed any further interest in Heda. Heda went to an elite French high school, admired "Masaryk's democratic ideals," was well read in "Western philosophers," spoke fluently several foreign languages, and devoted her life to academic work at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. Heda never joined the Communist party and was open about being a practicing Evangelical Christian.

Heda considered herself to be "transsexual from year zero" and felt that she was forced into the category of a woman "by social conventions." Her grandmother pressured her towards conventional women's behavior and dress, but fortunately her "mother was reasonable and let me be." In 1952, she was briefly married to her colleague, a mathematician, "to please her mom" but she did not consider the marriage a significant chapter of her life. She divorced rather quickly and for the rest of her life had short-term and long-term relationships only with women, adding that she was "always the man in the relationship." With quite a few of her girlfriends, however, she was not sure whether she was in a relationship or not because she "was not able to arrive at a stable definition of what constitutes a relationship." She experienced this difficulty, for example, while on a post-doc in Budapest in 1954. With her "girlfriend," she would often meet, talk, go for coffee; they would walk along the Danube hand in hand, study in the library together, "look each other in the eye for a long time. I think we both knew something was there but neither of us said it out loud. I really loved her. She was a beautiful, sharp, smart, redhead from Yugoslavia. We were on the same fellowship and spent two years together. Every day together, holding each other, kissing, cuddling. But we never had sex together… Hmm, too bad that it didn't work out. So I don't know, you tell me, does this count as a relationship or not?"

Heda came back to Prague in 1956, "just before the Hungarian uprising so that I could not even entertain the sinful thought of emigrating because I was no longer there." At a mandatory public meeting at the Academy of Sciences she refused to denounce the Hungarian Revolution. On the contrary, she stood up and openly supported it by saying that the "Hungarian working class was doing the right thing." She expected to get fired and imprisoned for that statement but she was "only taken out of the spotlight and moved to the archive of the Academy." But she was no longer allowed to travel, "not even to Poland. I could only visit Bulgaria so I concentrated [academically] on that [topic and context]." This event, in her own words, destroyed her professional and private life as she was "blacklisted forever." Heda evaluated the Communist past overall as "bad" but never felt "discriminated against for [her] sexuality." She did feel immensely persecuted before 1989 but "only for her political beliefs." Even when she was repeatedly harassed by StB agents for sitting on a park bench with a woman, she interpreted these confrontations as a consequence of her political blacklisting, "using alleged 'homosexuality' only as a pretense."

Heda's common explanation for a variety of situations in both biographical interviews I conducted with her was, "it was that Hungary again."

The two most important things in Heda's life were "work and faith." She led a quiet, modest and pious life, in her own words, "a boring life not worth mentioning." She never wanted to have children and did not attend bars or clubs. She loved technology and repair work and her only "extravagant pleasure" was ownership of a motorcycle, which she bought in 1963 and "rode for many years." She would usually meet her girlfriends in libraries or through same-sex ads placed in newspapers, which she "read with pleasure since the 1960s." Heda, however, never placed any ads herself. She only answered them because it felt "more natural that way." In our interviews she avoided any identification with the categories of 'lesbian' and 'homosexual.' But not because she would not have same-sex desires; in fact, she openly said several times that she "loves women" but she "was never sure whether I was a man or a woman." While Heda never officially challenged her sex-assignment as "female" nor felt any desires to surgically change her biological body, in the interview she firmly said that "I believe I am a transsexual. I have a female body but I feel like a man. I can't really explain this to anyone around me, but I think they wonder too." Heda died shortly after completing our second biographical interview at the age of 83. Close to three hundred people, both from the Czech Academy of Sciences and the Czech gay and lesbian community, attended her funeral held at an Evangelical Church in Prague.

ARGUMENT

Eva, Miriam, and Heda's biographical sketches serve as a fitting prologue to this book. Their complex self-understanding and unexpected trajectories reflect well the diversity of queer lives during the four decades of state socialism in Czechoslovakia and demonstrate why oral history is a valuable method for amending the dominant historiography of sexuality and state socialism. The recollections of queer people of their experiences and encounters with the Czechoslovak Socialist state, its employees and institutions at various contexts and levels of power, full of seeming contradictions, unanticipated empathy, and surprising decision making, provide remarkable opportunities for exploring and reconsidering the functionings of the Communist state and its approaches to homosexuality and non-heterosexual identities in the four decades of its existence.[2]

2 In this book, I use several different terms, such as 'queer,' 'non-heterosexual,' 'homosexual,' 'lesbian,' 'gay,' 'gay and lesbian.' The terminology is strictly historically contextual and is discussed at length in the end of the introduction.

This book, building on a wealth of archival sources and oral history, offers a new look at the history of sexuality in Communist Czechoslovakia. The life stories and experiences collected and analyzed in the following pages both supplement and challenge mainstream historical narratives about 'gays' and 'lesbians' during the Communist era. The book argues, in the first place, that queer people were themselves fundamentally diverse — in their discovery of their sexual identities, in their personal relationships, and in their relation to the state. During the Communist period, queer people did not use the terms 'lesbian,' 'gay,' 'transgender' or even 'homosexual' to describe themselves; they adopted these identity categories (or were attached to them) only after 1989. Rather than analyze a 'gay and lesbian history' that is readily identifiable from the categories of the present, this book aims to understand how Czechoslovak people, especially women, during the Communist period discovered that they were not heterosexual, how they described their experiences and passions in the terms they used in the past, and how the context of the Communist regime shaped their identities, choices and life strategies. Second, the book also argues that queer people were not necessarily 'victims' of the Communist regime. It is relatively commonplace to find historical narratives that treat queer people as victims of a regime that targeted them as sick and abberant. But narratives that divide historical agency into perpetration and victimhood often simplify how the exercise of power worked in practice and, above all, underestimate the agency of queer people to find their own ways to lead full and enriching lives. For example, the book challenges the predominant interpretation of Socialist sexological discourse as a heteronormative arm of the state, which worked to discriminate against homosexuals by defining them as 'deviant.' As will become apparent, the relationship between 'sexology' and the 'state' was never that of complete authoritarian power or ideological control, because sexologists exercised a great deal of agency in their descriptions and treatments of queer people that often served to empower and inspire them, not suppress them. By uncovering the dynamics between sexologists and queer people at the micro-level of everyday life, this book seeks to challenge both the myth that there was such a thing as a homogenous homosexual subjectivity and that queer people were victims of the authoritarian regime.

It may seem surprising that the Czechoslovak Communist regime, despite its brutality in many areas of life, never enacted a hateful or seditious campaign against homosexuality and queer people. Quite to the contrary, when we look at its laws on sexuality from a historical perspective, Communist legislation was not only more lenient in comparison to previous imperial, interwar, and Nazi legal codes, but the institutional discourse of sexuality in some ways provided an even more complex and emancipated context for non-heretosexual sexuality than what was legally possible in the democratic

West.[3] That certainly does not mean that homosexuality in Socialist Czechoslovakia was accepted with open arms as a sexual orientation equal with heterosexuality. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia of course did not support diversity and feared identities that questioned the ideological foundations of state socialism. In this sense, however, the repressive elements of the regime did not persecute homosexuals and transsexuals any more than, for example, hippies, rockers, or the religious. There is no inevitable logic in this reluctant behavior of the regime towards homosexual people and it is not entirely clear why the regime did not actively persecute gays and lesbians in similar ways it did some other groups. The regulation of sexuality in Socialist Czechoslovakia also has to be placed in the context of the effort of the Communist Party to maintain the monopoly on power it gained in 1948 and which was manifested in the repression of private ownership and various civic and individual rights.[4] Historically rooted homophobic sentiments of mainstream society thus blended together with the systematic destruction of freedoms and individuality, affecting all people regardless of their sexual orientation.

In considering the degree to which queer people were repressed, it is important to ask, *who* or *what* actors and institutions are referred to by the terms 'state power' or 'Communist regime.' Despite only one ideological party-line and the existence of a single party-state, there was never only one supreme or omnipotent 'power' in Communist Czechoslovakia. The 'regime' was a conglomerate of diverse institutions, expert discourses and individual actors that exercised their power and ideas about social discipline, political loyalty, need for repression or benevolence in quite different ways. In the context of the state approach to (homo)sexuality and queer people, other conditions were equally significant, such as laws regulating the criminalization and medicalization of homosexuality and transsexuality; attitudes of the

3 Jan Seidl, *Od žaláře k oltáři: homosexualita v českých zemích 1878–2006* (Praha: Academia, 2012); Roman Kuhar and Judit Takács, eds., *Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe* (Ljubljana: Mirovni Inštitut, 2007); Jiří Fanel, *Gay historie* (Praha: Dauphin, 2000); Leila Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Richard Green and Donald James West, eds., *Sociolegal Control of Homosexuality: A Multi-nation Comparison* (New York: Plenum Press, 1997); John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); Josef Košela, *Homosexualita a její* trestnost (Diplomová práce. Brno: Univerzita Jana Evangelisty Purkyně, Právnická fakulta, 1981); Neil, Miller, *Out of the Past. Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (Boston: Alyson Books, 2006).

4 Libora Oates-Indruchová, "The Beauty and the Loser: Cultural Representations of Gender in Late State Socialism," *Signs* 37/2 (2012): 357–383; Karel Kaplan, *The Communist Party in Power: A Profile of Party Politics in Czechoslovakia* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987).

police (both public and secret), educational and health institutions; the role of publishing houses; and at the end of the imaginary chain of power, the attitudes of supervisors and other superiors in a variety of jobs and offices. In all these contexts there were concrete people who, in spite of the censorship and single-party rule, had enough discursive space to understand the official approach to homosexuality and queer people in their own way. They often possessed the courage to apply their understanding of state directives in ways which they personally considered right, appropriate, or pragmatic in the given context. It is probably not surprising that such individualized attitudes and behavior dramatically differed from each other and sometimes were in direct opposition to official positions on homosexuality. In other words, even though an emphasis on the institutional dimension of power is fundamental for understanding how the Communist regime functioned, an excessive adherence to the institutionalized conception of power can easily ignore other possible historical narratives and explanations of life at the time.[5]

For example, as some previous studies indicated, queer people in Socialist Czechoslovakia had a powerful, even if rather invisible ally: Czechoslovak sexology and sexologists who played an important, and mainly positive, role in the process of decriminalizing homosexuality in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[6] While acknowledging this positive influence, most studies by historians examining Czechoslovak sexology have placed emphasis on the represive aspects of the sexological discourse, which through its authority defined homosexuality as a perversion and disease. Historian Josef Řídký and sociologist Kateřina Lišková both analyzed the process in which the heteronormative definition of the 'homosexual' subject was constructed, even though they examined different time periods and different source materials. Řídký focused on the popular sexological self-help literature during the interwar period, while Lišková studied broadly the entire discourse on sexuality and the "science of desire" during the period of state socialism. Performing deconstructive discursive analyses of sexological definitions and arguments — and taking the texts at face value — they both concluded that Czechoslovak sexology played a pivotal role in creating the category of a 'deviant' and 'perverted' homosexual, who was inhibited from forming a positive sexual identity and leading a satisfied and happy life.[7]

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5 Vera Sokolova, *The cultural politics of ethnicity: discourses on Roma in Communist Czechoslovakia* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2008), 44–54.

6 Seidl 2012; Jiří Hromada, *Zakladatelé: Cesta za rovnoprávností českých gayů a lesbiček*. http://gay.iniciativa.cz/www/index.php?page=clanek&id=266 (2000); Ivo Procházka, "Czech and Slovak Republics." In *Sociolegal Control of Homosexuality: a multi-nation comparison*, edited by Donald James West and Richard Green (New York: Plenum Press, 1997), 243–254.

7 Kateřina Lišková, *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). In the book, Lišková formulates this argument in a more complex way, which is a significant departure from her earlier

This book argues, to the contrary, that Czech and Slovak sexologists in their scholarship espoused complex and diplomatic attitudes towards homosexuality and non-heterosexual behavior, from which it often was not easy to discern whether they were a prolonged arm of the officially sanctioned heteronormative system, or its critics. Both the archival sources and the oral history narratives collected in this book suggest that the science of sexology and sexologists themselves played an influential role in gradually improving not only the state's treatment and attitudes towards homosexuality and 'homosexuals,' but, perhaps more importantly, also the self-perceptions and self-worth of gay men and lesbian women in Communist Czechoslovakia. With a bit of exaggeration, one can argue that since the late 1970s some sexological offices became the first gay clubs in Czechoslovakia. Medical doctors — as trusted expert-messengers of the official normative doctrines — contributed through their scientific writings to the creation of an unexpectedly open and complex framework for understanding and living out one's queer subjectivity. Indeed, this book goes beyond the existing research on the everyday lives of 'homosexual' people during the Communist period — research that focused primarily on the conditions and lifestyles of gay men.[8] Instead, the following chapters bring forth mainly the points of view of broadly defined queer women (lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, intersexual, and transgender). In its broader scope, the queer oral history project uncovers testimonies and experiences, which challenge the male-female and hetero-homo dualisms and provide evidence that even though such categories were not explicitly articulated during the Communist period, they existed and were lived.

Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1989 had in many ways more tolerant laws about homosexuality than the democratic West.[9] While some Socialist countries had strong anti-homosexual legislation (especially Romania, USSR,

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articulations of this topic, as for example, in her article "Perverzní sex a normální gender. Normalizační sexuologie promlouvá o sexu a gender," *Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum* 13/2 (2012): 40–49; Josef Řídký, "'Neexistuje dobře přizpůsobený a šťastný homosexuál.' Pozice homosexuality v českých populárně sexuologických příručkách 30.–90. let 20. století." In "'*Miluji tvory svého pohlaví': Homosexualita v dějinách a společnosti českých zemí*, edited by Pavel Himl, Jan Seidl, and Franz Schindler (Praha: Argo, 2013).

8 Jürgen Lemke, *Gay voices from East Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1991); Fanel 2000; Radek Miřácký, *Proces coming-outu u homosexuálních mužů v Československu před rokem 1989*. Bakalářská práce. (Praha: Fakulta humanitních studií, 2009); Schindler 2013. A notable exception to this trend is the work of Francesca Stella on Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia (2015), discussed in the next chapter.

9 Margot Canaday, for example, in her pioneering study *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* reveals how systematically the United States penalized homosexuality and excluded many gays and lesbians (especially incoming immigrants) from full-fledged citizenship. Canaday argues that the opression of gays and lesbians in the United States in the 1950s was not a sudden abberation but rather the culmination of a long and persistent heteronormative state-building process.

and Cuba),[10] in most Socialist countries anti-homosexual laws became increasingly progressive over the decades.[11] In fact, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary gradually decriminalized consensual adult homosexuality in its entirety.[12] At the same time, the "absence of a commercial homosexual subculture" paralyzed any ability to create substantial alternative spaces that were common in the 'open' West.[13] In other words, for general ideological reasons, Socialist societies were unable to translate legislative advantages into the real-life advantages of more visibility or the development of subcultures and vibrant communal spaces for gays and lesbians. Gert Hekma, a Dutch historian and sociologist, provocatively argued that "Communist states were largely organized along homosocial lines, always an interesting playground for homosexual desires."[14] Along with other scholars, Hekma has pointed out that the specific patriarchal circumstances of Communist societies provided much larger spaces for subversion than is commonly believed. Slavoj Žižek similarly argues that, contrary to expectations, coercive socio-political contexts often offer more opportunities for transgressing normative borders than politically free environments because it is much harder for both the public and the state to "imagine beyond" such borders.[15] This thesis was applied and substantiated by historians studying queer lives in clearly defined and sexually restrictive historical contexts, as well as by the queer of color critique, which expands queer politics by situating transgressions within an intersectional framework.[16] Drawing on this literature and evidence from

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10 Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Laura Essig, *Queer in Russia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Marvin Leiner, *Sexual Politics in Cuba: Machismo, Homosexuality and AIDS* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Lucian Turcescu and Lavinia Stan, "Religion, Sexuality and Politics in Romania," in *Europe-Asia Studies* 57:2 (3005): 291–310; Erin K. Biebuyck, "The Collectivisation of Pleasure: Normative Sexuality in Post-1966 Romania," *Aspasia* 4 (2010): 49–70; Luis Salas, *Social Control and Deviance in Cuba* (Westport, Praeger Publishers, 1979).

11 Richard Green and Donald James West, eds., *Sociolegal Control of Homosexuality: A Multi-nation Comparison* (New York: Plenum Press, 1997); Antonín Brzek and Slavomil Hubálek, "Homosexuals in Eastern Europe: mental health and psychotherapy issues." *Journal of Homosexuality* 15/1–2 (1988): 153–162.

12 Seidl 2012; Samirah Kenawi, *Frauengruppen in der DDR der 80er Jahre. Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: GrauZone, 1995); Gudrun Hauer, Doris Hauberger, Helga Pankratz and Hans Vonk, *Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern. Zur Lage der Lesben und Schwulen in Osteuropa* (Vienna: HOSI Wien and Christiane Gemballa Verlag, 1986); Monika Pisankaneva, "The Forbidden Fruit: Sexuality in Communist Bulgaria." *E-magazine LiterNet* 68/7 (2005): 1–10; Fanel 2000.

13 Frédéric Jörgens, "East" Berlin: Lesbian and Gay Narratives on Everyday Life, Social Acceptance, and Past and Present. *Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe*, edited by Roman Kuhar and Judit Takács (Ljubljana: Mirovni Inštitut, 2007), 119.

14 Gert Hekma, "Foreword. In *Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe*, edited by Roman Kuhar and Judit Takács (Ljubljana: Mirovni Inštitut, 2007), 9.

15 Slavoj Žižek, *The sublime object of ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989).

16 Charlene Carruthers, *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018); Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality,

the oral history research, this book argues that queer people in Communist Czechoslovakia also had particular opportunities for subversion and transgression, which allowed them to maintain a greater degree of personal agency and autonomy than one would expect in an authoritarian regime.

To be clear, queer encounters with Communist power and the Socialist state were not harmonious. Queer people living in Communist Czechoslovakia were not able to form a legal community,[17] did face many obstacles, were discriminated in many areas of their private and public lives, and at times were subjected to random acts of violence, surveillance, and political harassment.[18] However, the queer oral history project also revealed a large degree of autonomy and agency by individual queer people in the face of these hardships. People, who at the time had no means (either terminological or political) to officially identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, nonetheless provided clear evidence of living such identities. This is a story of people who, despite various and often dire obstacles, lived their lives not only with fear and stress but also with invention, dignity, and passion. The book contributes to both the recent history of Czechoslovakia and the history of sexuality in several important ways. First, it fills the gap in oral history of our recent past by integrating queer people, whose voices have been so far largely silent and invisible. Second, it further complicates the picture of a singular, monolithic "Communist regime" by discussing the importance played by a variety of expert discourses in the functioning of the Socialist state. And third, the book contributes to the study of state socialism by utilizing the category of gender as its main analytical tool. Using this particular lens exposes not only the ways in which queer people formed their subjectivity or how they negotiated their identities *vis-à-vis* the heteronormative and ideological pressures of the state and society, it also reveals unexpected historical markers queer people considered important in their lives and thus offers an alternative periodization of the Socialist era.

Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, 43/6, 1991; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza: 25th anniversary* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Revised tenth anniversary edition. (London: Routledge, 2000); Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Fourth edition. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015); Pisankaneva 2005; Rupp 1999.

17 Kateřina Nedbálková, "The Changing Space of the Gay and Lesbian Community in the Czech Republic." In *Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe*, edited by Roman Kuhar and Judit Takács (Ljubljana: Mirovni Inštitut, 2007), 67–80.

18 Franz Schindler, "Život gayů za socialismu." In *"'Miluji tvory svého pohlaví': Homosexualita v dějinách a společnosti českých zemí*, edited by Pavel Himl, Jan Seidl, and Franz Schindler (Praha: Argo, 2013); Seidl 2012; Procházka, Ivo, David Janík and Jiří Hromada, *Společenská diskriminace lesbických žen, gay mužů a bisexuálů v ČR* (Praha: Gay iniciativa, 2003).

TERMINOLOGY

As can be discerned from the discussion so far, finding suitable terminology for this book was not an easy task. On a personal level, all the narrators had very different relationships to their own sexual and gender identities, to their biological bodies, as well as to questions of marriage, parenthood, and sexuality. At a more general level, they also had quite distinct relationships to Communist power and the membership in the Communist party, as well as questions of resistance or obedience and outward loyalty to the Communist political regime. When thinking about what characteristics and experiences define the narrators together, it was neither their 'homosexual,' 'lesbian' or 'gay' identity (because some of them do not identify with, or even hate, those terms) nor their 'same-sex' desires and sexual relations (because some of them did not see themselves as 'women sleeping with other women' or 'men sleeping with other men'). Some narrators complicated the temptation for a homogenizing terminology by questioning their biological body as 'female,' while others identified as 'transsexual,' with a note that this realization came much later in their lives, while growing up under socialism they had no idea that such an identity (by then well covered by sexological literature) even existed. The only thing that connected all of the narrators together was their rejection of heterosexual subjectivity, whether in terms of sexual orientation or gender identification. For that reason, in the earlier versions of this text I used the term "non-heterosexual" as the most fitting expression of the diversity of the narrators.

But defining queer people as 'non-heterosexual' is not satistying either. Such definition does address the nonconforming and subversive aspects of their identity and behavior through which they defied the heteronormative pressures and expectations projected at them by the Socialist state and society. The term does capture flexibility and the important dimension of transgressing the heterosexual norms in a variety of ways, but ultimately it does not solve the problem of naming. Defining queer people by a supposed standard, as the absence of the heterosexual norm, perpetuates their categorization as deficient or lacking. Lots of people, maybe most, would have non-binary gender identities and non-heterosexual affinities, if not for legal prohibitions and social pressures. Queer people worked their way out of being defined as deficient by appropriating that negative appraisal and owning it as an identity to embrace. Thus, when referring to non-heteronormative sexual identities and behavior, as well as when referring to the narrators and discussing their lives during the Socialist era, I use the term 'queer' which I believe best captures the complex and emancipatory nature of this proces.[19]

19 I would like to thank Kate Brown for inspirational discussions on this topic.

Most Czech scholars who recently wrote on the subject of queer identities and discourses from a variety of disciplinary perspectives most often opted for the term 'homosexual,' mainly because they analyzed written documents that explicitly operated with these terms: Seidl researched the topic of decriminalization of homosexuality, Řídký studied the constructions of a "homosexual subject" in popular sexological handbooks and Lišková examined how homosexuality was linked with deviance in sexological discourse on perversion.[20] Jiří Fanel did not theorize or explain his terminological choices at all and simply used the term 'gay' for all same-sex desire and identities from the period of antiquity to the 1990s.[21] In a similar way, in order to capture a collective and transcendent essence of same-sex desire while simultaneously reflecting the historical consensus in writing about a recognizable identity, various anthologies examining homosexuality in the history of Czech culture and society also decided to use the term 'homosexual.'[22] Other colleagues, who conducted structured interviews or biographical narratives about the Socialist period used the category 'homosexual' as well, explaining that they did so because "it best captures who their respondents are," and "the narrators themselves identified that way."[23] Miřácký and Schindler went so far as to argue that they researched the life and topography of meeting places of a "homosexual community" during the Communist regime. Needless to say that all of these projects using 'homosexuality' as the umbrella term for same-sex desire and subjectivity were concerned with the study of male sexuality and men.

The mentioned studies are correct in that the sexological discourse of state Socialist period worked explicitly with the hetero-homo division and conceptualized men and women with same-sex desires as 'homosexual.' The same is true about other expert and popular discourses produced by the Socialist state and its institutions in Communist Czechoslovakia. When analyzing these discourses, I use the terms that appear in them. However, I purposefully do not use these terms for identifying personal subject positions of queer people living during the Communist period unless they explicitly attach such terms to themselves. I am equally reluctant to write about the lives of my narrators in a homogenous way because they were so vastly different. They did not form a community or collective body during the Communist period that would entitle me to treat them that way. The fact that after 1989 most of the narrators identified as gay or lesbian does not legitimize a retroactive

20 Seidl 2012; Řídký 2013; Lišková 2018.

21 Fanel 1999.

22 Martin Putna and Milena Bartlová, eds. *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury* (Praha, Academia: 2011); Seidl 2012; Pavel Himl, Jan Seidl and Franz, Schindler, eds., *'Miluji tvory svého pohlaví': Homosexualita v dějinách a společnosti českých zemí* (Praha: Academia, 2013).

23 Miřácký 2009; Schindler 2013.

appropriation of such categories and subjectivities for past historical periods, especially since those terms did not readily exist in the discursive contexts of the Socialist state.[24]

Throughout the book I use several different terms relating to the topic of sexual identities and experiences during the Communist period, such as 'queer,' 'non-heterosexual,' 'homosexual,' 'lesbian,' 'gay,' and 'gay and lesbian.' When it comes to historical documents and archival sources, the terminology is used in strictly historically contextual ways. Medical discourse during the Communist period used only the term "homosexual," either by itself or in conjunction with the terms "inclinations" (*sklony*), "dispositions" (*dispozice*) or "origins" (*původ*). Also the Communist legal discourse worked only with the term homosexual or found ways to avoid this term altogether. The wordings of the 1950 and 1961 laws, the only two laws directly dealing with homosexuality during the Communist era, both referred to "sexual acts with a person of the same sex" (*pohlavní styk s osobou téhož pohlaví*) and nowhere used the term homosexuality or homosexual. In materials related to these laws, such as reports from committee meetings, correspondence and recommendations between ministries, Central Committee of the Communist Party and diverse state institutions, only the term homosexual appears. For this reason, when working with these documents or context, I also use only the term 'homosexual.'

The queer oral history project, which forms the most important research foundation of this book, was carried out mainly with older women (born between 1929–1952). Very few of them explicitly identified as being 'lesbian' and none referred to herself as being 'homosexual.' Occasionally, the narrators applied the term 'lesbian' to their identities retroactively, and when they did so, the citations used in this book kept their terminological choice. Most narrators resorted to a variety of alternative terms used in the Socialist past, such as "being into girls/boys" (*být na holky/na kluky*), "our kind" (*našinec, náš člověk*), or simply avoided any naming altogether. When discussing efforts to create queer communal spaces in the face of surveillance and censorship, narrators often used the term "*teplý*" or "*teplá komunita*," fittingly translated as "queer." The term 'homosexual,' in fact, rarely appeared in their recollections and when it did, it refered to 'other homosexuals' or to the perceptions of the narrators about how other people viewed homosexuality or homosexuals in the past. Some narrators, for example, mentioned that "homosexuality was a social taboo," "homosexuals had a difficult life" or that "homosexuality was never spoken about." The unwillingness to embrace the term 'homosexual' by the female narrators for their personal identity suggests there was a clear discursive abyss between the understanding of the Socialist medical science

24 Rupp 1999.

about who the homosexuals were and the self-perceptions of queer people themselves. The medicalization of their sexual identities in terms of sickness, disease, deviance, misfortune, and pity resulted in queer people's reluctance to associate with this term. Additionally, it also exposed the male-dominated and male-centered character of the state Socialist discourse on homosexuality in general.[25]

STRUCTURE

The book is organized into six main chapters. Following this introduction, chapter two elaborates on the relevance and importance of sexuality as, to paraphrase Joan W. Scott, a useful category of historical analysis.[26] Sexuality is situated into both historical and gender studies scholarship, suggesting what can be gained by inclusion of sexuality into contemporary Czechoslovak history of the Socialist period. In general, this chapter addresses conceptual questions and discusses the main methodological tools used in this project. Since the book is based on the combination of methods of discursive analysis of the sexological discourse of Socialist Czechoslovakia and oral history, the second part of the chapter explains the purpose of this methodological approaches and the productivity of the combination of analysis of medical documents with biographical narratives. The chapter is concluded by a discussion of power and agency in authoritarian societies.

Chapter three provides a detailed analysis of the Czechoslovak sexological discourse. Based on an original comprehensive research of more than 120 articles and books from the medical database of Czech National Medical Library from 1947 to 1989, this chapter offers an in-depth look into the attitudes and arguments of Czech and Slovak sexologists, and other medical professionals concerned with sexuality, towards the questions of homosexuality, intersexuality and transsexuality. Inevitably, the chapter dissects the

25 Male narrators were more willing to use the term "homosexual," both as a noun and adjective (in the Czech and Slovak languages, there is no customarily used female form of the noun "homosexual," most often it is used only as an adjective with the added designation "woman"). In this context, it is significant that some of the most visible male activists in the early 1990s refered to themselves as "homosexuals," for example Jiří Hromada, Šimon Formánek, and others, and that the very first civic organization after 1989, led and dominated by men, bore the name *The Movement for Equality of Homosexual Citizens* (HRHO — Hnutí za rovnoprávnost homosexuálních občanů) and later *Union of Organizations of Homosexual Citizens* (SOHO — Sdružení organizací homosexuálních občanů). While the LGBT movements and scholarship in the "West" thematized and articulated the problems with the term 'homosexual' since the 1970s, in the Czech context it was used until the late 1990s. Only since the turn of the millennium have civic activists used for their self-designation, activities and projects the terms "gay," "lesbian," or "queer."

26 Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis, *The American Historical Review* 91/5 (1986): 1053–1075.