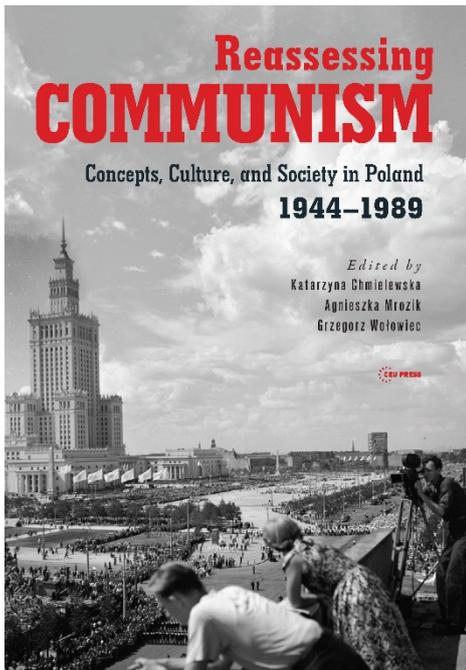


REASSESSING COMMUNISM

Concepts, Culture, and Society in Poland, 1944–1989



The thirteen authors of this collective work undertook to articulate matter-of-fact critiques of the dominant narrative about communism in Poland while offering new analyses of the concept, and also examining the manifestations of anticommunism. Approaching communist ideas and practices, programs and their implementations, as an inseparable whole, they examine the issues of emancipation, upward social mobility, and changes in the cultural canon.

The authors refuse to treat communism in Poland in simplistic categories of totalitarianism, absolute evil and Soviet colonization, and similarly refuse to equate communism and fascism. Nor do they adopt the neoliberal view of communism as a project doomed to failure. While wholly exempt from nostalgia, these essays show that beyond oppression and bad governance, communism was also a regime in which people pursued a variety of goals and sincerely attempted to build a better world for themselves.

The book is interdisciplinary and applies the tools of social history, intellectual history, political philosophy, anthropology, literature, cultural studies, and gender studies to provide a nuanced view of the communist regimes in east-central Europe.

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“Reassessing Communism: Concepts, Culture and Society in Poland, 1944–1989 brings new and important reflections and interpretations of communism in Poland. The book is intended as a polemic with the dominant historical and popular narratives in which communism appears in terms of strangeness: as an aberration or a ‘black hole’ in Polish history. The authors consistently and convincingly deconstruct this type of narrative. Instead, they propose a picture of communism that cannot be easily subordinated to established patterns, national-centric stereotypes, or totalitarian theories. The authors’ approach to communism as a multidimensional ‘revolutionary project’ is a new and needed perspective in the current state of research on the history of postwar Poland.”

Małgorzata Fidelis, University of Illinois at Chicago

“I have been waiting for years for someone to write this book. Reassessing Communism represents a long-overdue corrective to the one-dimensional approach that has characterized so much historical scholarship on the communist period in Polish history. Breaking away from the image, seen mainly through the lens of political power, as a land only of ‘totalitarian’ oppression and misgovernance, contributions to this volume show that the Polish People’s Republic was also a place in which people pursued diverse goals and sincerely attempted to build a better world for themselves. After all, the communist vision of a better social order necessitated more than mere submission: it also required public compliance, even assent. Reassessing the communist era from this perspective also allows us to critically examine the anticommunist opposition and break away from the unproblematized mythologies that have dominated public memory for too long.”

Brian Porter-Szűcs, Thurnau Professor of History, University of Michigan

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