Coming Out of Communism: The Emergence of LGBT Activism in Eastern Europe. By Conor O'Dwyer. New York: New York University Press, 2018. xii, 352 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. $35.00, paper; $99.00, hardbound.
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The politics of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) citizenship in post-communist central and eastern Europe have gained traction as clashes over "European" and "traditional" values have intensified. Indeed, concepts of European-ness partly define themselves around LGBT visibility. European Union (EU) conditionality required societies that had virtually no awareness of diverse sexualities and genders in the communist era to adopt sexual orientation and gender rights protections as part of the accession process. In this valuable study, the relationship between LGBT activism, transnational forces, and the countervailing "backlash" from the "hard right" is investigated using Poland and the Czech Republic as case studies.

Building on insights from civil-society and transnational norm-diffusion literatures, with close attention to social-movement theory as a bridge, political scientist Conor O'Dwyer begins with a historical account of EU enlargement and the simultaneous rise of EU "sexual citizenship"—the adoption of LGBT rights (33) that came as incidental baggage in the entry conditions imposed on post-communist states. European-level LGBT advocacy organizations also arose during the 1990s, and some established EU states adopted civil partnership laws. Where EU "leverage" over accession was strongest, the norm-diffusion effect was also strong, as Philip Ayoub and others have demonstrated. O'Dwyer confirms this effect, and contributes closer analysis of the consequences. The next chapter examines the dynamics of the hard right political backlash in Poland, compared to its absence in Czech Republic. Party and media sources reveal that homosexuality generated a Polish "framing contest" that gave the topic "unprecedented salience" in public debate (82) after the 2004 accession. The contest pitted EU-led sexual citizenship against nationalist family-and-faith rhetoric with increasing traction. Meanwhile in the Czech Republic the absence of a hard-right backlash in a relatively "open" (secular, individualistic) society meant no framing contest over homosexuality occurred.

O'Dwyer then traces the interaction of variables, including political backlash in determining the emergence of LGBT activism in his two cases. In three chapters he discusses LGBT politics in both countries before, during, and after accession to the EU. A follow-up chapter tests the findings for the cases of Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania as alternatives. Before accession from 1989 to 1997, communist legacies in Poland and the Czech Republic differed significantly. The Polish state had a morality-based, Catholic-charity influenced hostility to non-heteronormative sex and gender, and this yielded an "invisible and inchoate" (104) LGBT movement focused on self-help. Czechoslovak communism took a sexological and psychological view of homosexuality, yielding a confident, elaborate, and successful movement based on visibility and tolerance-promotion in the 1990s. During the accession phase (1998–2004), Poland's LGBT activists served as "brokers" for a government anxious to meet human rights standards; they gained in confidence, organization, and visibility. A 2003 "Let Them See Us" campaign (119–20) capped the drive to greater salience. Meanwhile Polish anti-gay forces consolidated as a national movement during the period, foreshadowing post-accession backlash. At the same time the Czech movement was so state-oriented that no "broker" role was necessary. Instead, activists pursued civil partnership legislation, a goal that fractured the movement along gender, identity, regional, and grassroots versus professional lines. "Deinstitutionalization and demobilization" (143) followed in the Czech LGBT movement.

After accession, the Polish hard-right (in power 2005–07) politicized LGBT visibility; Pride marches became political "framing contests," subject to official hostility, and activists responded to defend their "immediate protective surround" with vigorous organizing, networking with political allies, and imaginative protest (144–62). By 2008 the leading Polish LGBT organization, KPH (Campaign Against Homophobia), had paid employees and an office (rare among LGBT groups anywhere), 200 registered members, and a sophisticated internal structure (151–2). Warsaw hosted Europride in 2010. Meanwhile in the Czech Republic lobbying by insider-activists produced a largely "symbolic" civil partnership law in 2006 with cross-party support. There was no hard-right backlash (then). Generational and priority shifts subsequently led to a decline in national activism and a turn toward grassroots issues (162–8). In the final chapter, brief case-studies of Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania elaborate O'Dwyer's arguments about the power of hard-right backlash against EU-led norms to energize local activism. These studies rely on country-specific scholarship, interviews, and participant observation.

Reading this book as a historian, I found the stories compelling and illuminating, especially where O'Dwyer's local informants, observation, and research blends with synthesis from area-specific scholarship. His political-science modelling and structure make demanding reading for the non-specialist, with a succession of cases and variables sacrificing narrative flow for thematic analysis. Students might start with works by Ayoub or Lukasz Szulc before attempting this. Yet O'Dwyer's main argument, that homophobic backlash has produced vigorous LGBT activism given certain contexts, is welcome and useful for activists and scholars within and beyond our region.

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Property, Power, and Authority in Rus and Latin Europe, ca. 1000–1236. By Yulia Mikhailova. Leeds, Eng.: ARC Humanities Press, 2018. xvi, 231 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Figures. Maps. $115.00, hard bound.
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The history of medieval Rusʹ has always been on the edge of the study of medieval Europe, linguistically inaccessible to western medievalists and hard to fit into the patterns of development that seem to be characteristic of the west in those centuries. Yulia Mikhailova seeks to remedy this situation with an analysis of the political structure of the Rusʹ principalities in rigorous comparison with those of the France, England, and Germany in the Middle Ages.

Mikhailova starts with the changes in the understanding of fiefdoms, vassalage, kingship and relations with and among the elites that have reordered the understanding of the Middle Ages in the west. Relying on the work of Susan Reynolds, Timothy Reuter, Gerd Althoff, and others, she operates with a conception of medieval power relationships that is much more flexible and varied than the older literature, dominated by rather abstract conceptions of fiefdom and homage originating in legal and constitutional history. She is also sensitive to the issue of language. In the west there are differences in the description of the relations of rulers and elite subjects depending on the language of the text, Latin or the vernacular languages. In Rusʹ, Mikhailova contends, this distinction did not exist because most narrative and other sources are in the Old Rusʹ language, which she takes to be vernacular, as opposed to Old (Church) Slavic. One of her more interesting observations is that the terminology