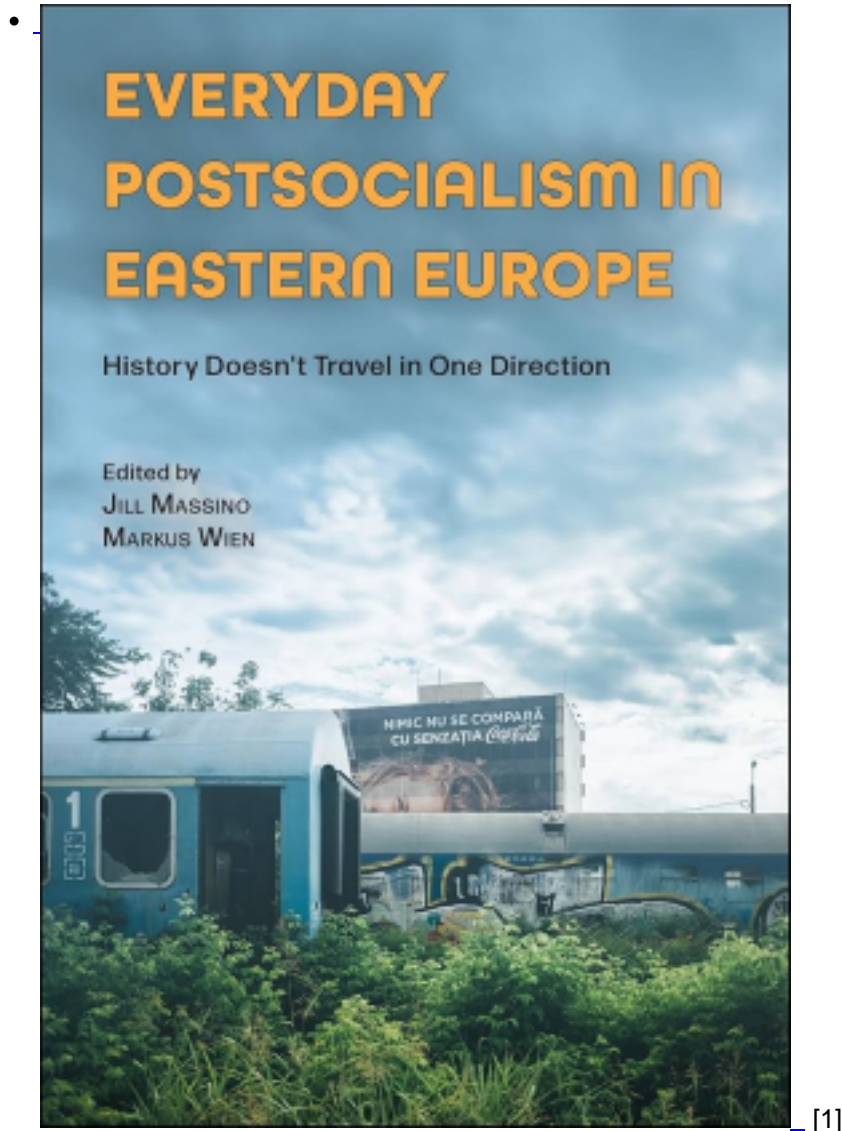


Being Gay

“There’s a Lot of Talk About Tolerance, but That’s Just Words”: Being Gay in Postsocialist Poland

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Abstract:

In the early 1990s, the editors of youth magazines received thousands of letters from young people confused not only about their adolescence, but also about new opportunities and new restrictions brought on by a new political system. In this chapter, I draw on the collection of letters sent to a scout magazine, *Na Przełaj* (*Cross-Country*), and focus on letters sent by gay boys and lesbian girls. Some of them were thrilled by the new opportunities available: they were eager to learn about newly established gay and lesbian associations and cafes. They believed that the new democratic Poland will be a country of tolerance and sexual diversity. Others were terrified of their homosexuality, as they learned in church that they were sinful and had deviated.

Drawing on experiences and anxieties expressed by young gay people in the early 1990s in letters sent to *Cross-Country*, I discuss their ideas and practices in the context of continuity and change before and after 1989. I am particularly interested in ideas and practices concerning on the one hand, gay and lesbian rights, and, on the other hand, Catholic engagements with sexuality. I ask: what were the new factors shaping their experiences and feelings? Which ideas were rooted in the socialist past? What was developed locally, and what came as a result of transnational exchange? Finally, I trace further developments in ideas and practices that served to organize gay lives in the early 1990s: are there any continuities between then and now? Can a link be drawn between current attacks on “LGBT ideology”, so common in today’s Polish politics, and the sexual politics of the early 1990s?

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