

Kristen Ghodsee: *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity*. Duke University Press, 2019

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1 In her text *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War*, Kristen Ghodsee sets out to examine two key components of the UN International Decade of Women. The first component is how Bulgarian women's activists made connections with socialist women in Zambia and exchanged knowledge with them. The second component is how Bulgarian and Zambian women's activists and Second and Third World activists for women's rights more broadly, allied with one another in the context of the UN Decade for Women. For Ghodsee, the history of Second World women's rights activists has largely been lost, and this book works partly as a recovery project.

2 After the International Year of Women (1975) and the Decade for Women, many authors writing about feminist activism gloss over the differences in women's activism, opting to use First World, middle-class, feminist politics to stand in for all women's politics. *Second World, Second Sex* shows that First World feminist accomplishments benefitted from Second World women through the exchange of ideas and competition between the two during the 20th century, improving conditions for women more broadly. Ghodsee notes communist women from the Eastern Bloc and their socialist allies from the Global South would not have called themselves "feminist" as they did not see the goals of feminism aligning with theirs (Ghodsee 15). Socialist women in the Second and Third Worlds believed that women's rights were a key part of "achieving sexual equality with men," in contrast to Western conceptualizations of feminism, which prioritized self-actualization over community-oriented goals.

3 Ghodsee interviews several Bulgarian and Zambian women in order to gain a better appreciation of how socialist women from the Second and Third World understood their activism within the larger global landscape. Ghodsee found that both Bulgarian and Zambian activists positioned themselves as socialist activists invested in the politics of their home countries and their struggles against racist, heteropatriarchy.

4 The first and second chapters focus on the activist roots of the Bulgarian women Ghodsee interviewed. The Bulgarian women who were later active in the International Year of Women recounted how they educated themselves, as many of them came from poor or agrarian backgrounds and were not able to access education, not only because of their economic status, but

also because of their gender (Ghodsee 35). Ghodsee uses archives, memoirs and interviews to reveal how many of the Bulgarian women involved in women's activism discovered socialist literature that examined women's issues and patriarchy. This autodidacticism not only created these women's foundational beliefs, but also helped them create international networks of socialist women's activism.

5 The Zambian women who Ghodsee interviewed had similar experiences to the Bulgarian women with one key difference: overwhelming racism. Chibesa Kankasa discusses her anti-colonial, anti-racist activism as an adult in colonial era Zambia (then Rhodesia), where a catalyzing experience of racism in a butcher shop solidified her decision to join and organize Black women's support for the African National Congress in Rhodesia (Ghodsee 100). Another woman Ghodsee interviewed recounted how difficult it was for her to obtain an education and the lengths she had to go to to obtain one, similar to the Bulgarian women (Ghodsee 113).

6 In the last part of Part One, Ghodsee examines how the tensions between the First World and the Second World put Zambian women and the country at large in a position where they had to choose who they would accept as influencers in their political and economic system. Ghodsee asked Zambian women why they chose to ally with the Second World rather than the First, and most argued that the values of "Zambian Humanism" and traditional African cultures aligned more closely with socialism and its ideals of cooperation rather than capitalism's competitiveness (Ghodsee 137).

7 Part Two explores the interactions between the First, Second and Third World during the International Decade for Women. Ghodsee discusses how Second and Third World participants organized themselves for the International Women's Decade by working as allies with Second World women to pass resolutions specific to their countries' agendas throughout each conference. For instance, women from the Third World, with help from their allies in the Second World, were able to pass resolutions in the Declaration of Mexico that included explicit references to Zionism and apartheid (Ghodsee 157).

8 The United States delegates found themselves voting against parts of or entire declarations because of Second and Third World women's insistence on including anti-apartheid, anti-racist, anti-Zionist and anti-capitalist language. Compromise was found only through passing two separate declarations or removing references to Zionism within the final declaration at the Nairobi conference in 1985 (Ghodsee 213).

9 Perhaps one of the most fascinating parts of *Second World, Second Sex*, is its attention to how Bulgarian women's activists were able to use government resources to bring women's activists from the Third World to the Eastern Bloc for educational courses on socialism and activism. Ghodsee shows the messiness of the interactions between women from the Eastern Bloc and the Global South, particularly Bulgarian and Zambian women. However, these interactions and their stickiness are what produce the solidarity at the conferences during the International Decade for Women.

10 *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity* during the Cold War is a fascinating look at the alliances women activists built across the Second and Third World during the Cold War in order to challenge capitalist hegemony and patriarchy. Ghodsee's use of oral histories and archival research shows how prior research does not present the entire story about the International Decade for Women. Ghodsee does not romanticize the authoritarianism Bulgarian and Zambian women lived through. However, the stories she captures offer hope to future generations of activists through demonstrating how women from the Third World and Second World were able to build bridges transnationally to influence women's rights globally.