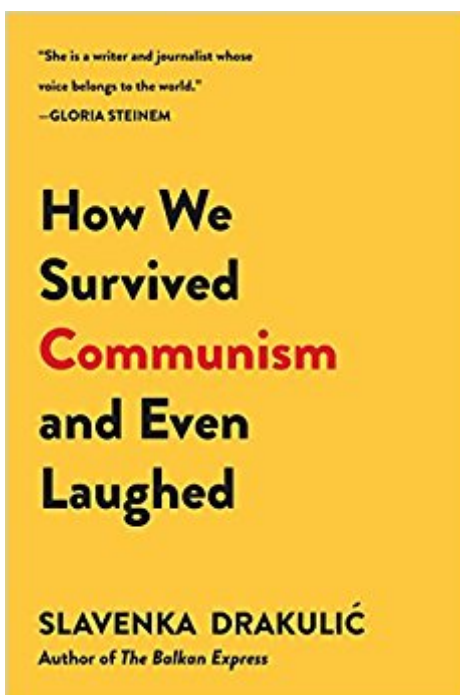


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# How We Survived Communism & Even Laughed



## Synopsis

This essay collection from renowned journalist and novelist Slavenka Drakulic, which quickly became a modern (and feminist) classic, draws back the Iron Curtain for a glimpse at the lives of Eastern European women under Communist regimes. Provocative, often witty, and always intensely personal, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* cracks open a paradoxical world that through its rejection of capitalism and commoditization ends up fetishizing both. Examining the relationship between material goods and expressions of happiness and individuality in a society where even bananas were an alien luxury, Drakulic homes in on the eradication of female identity, drawing on her own experiences as well as broader cultural observations. Enforced communal housing that allowed for little privacy, the banishment of many time-saving devices, and a focus on manual labor left no room for such bourgeois affectations as cosmetics or clothes, but Drakulic's remarkable exploration of the reality behind the rhetoric reveals that women still went to desperate lengths to feel "feminine." *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* also chronicles the lingering consequences of such regimes. The Berlin Wall may have fallen, but Drakulic's powerful pieces testify that ideology cannot be dismantled so quickly; a lifetime lived in fear cannot be so easily forgotten.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Drakulic's fine collection of essays draws strength from her keen powers of observation and sensitivity to her readers' interests. Her achievement is to depict the starkly common identity of

everyday life in socialist Eastern Europe before its unlamented loss becomes irretrievable. It is a world in which party authority can create the "sudden invisibility" for an offending journalist, where public buildings share a "shabbiness and color of sepia," and one that makes the post office an impenetrable "institution of power." The essays are also about people, about the obsessive "communist eye" (*italics original*) disturbed by the injustice of New York's homeless yet neurotically envious of those wearing fur coats at home. The tragic irony lies in the book's title. Hoarding material objects enabled people "to survive communism," but hoarding wartime memories and the inability to "let the dead be dead" may destroy the author's native Yugoslavia. Recommended for all public and academic libraries.- Zachary T. Irwin, Pennsylvania State Univ.-Erie Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A poignant and truthful look at what living under Communism was really like, by Croatian journalist and novelist Drakuli. The author, daughter of a former partisan who was a high-ranking Communist army officer, was never a member of the Party herself. Here, she conveys the reality of life under Communism through ordinary but telling detail: the wonder of a man who, for the first time in his life, was able to eat a banana--and ate it skin and all, marveling at its texture; Drakuli's own bewilderment at finding fresh strawberries in N.Y.C. in December; the feel of the quality of the paper in an issue of Vogue; the desperate lengths to which women under the Communist regime would go to find cosmetics or clothes or something that would make them feel feminine in a society where such a feeling was regarded as a bourgeois affectation. Drakuli dismisses the argument that Western manufacturers have manipulated these needs: "To tell us that they are making a profit by exploiting our needs is like warning a Bangladeshi about cholesterol." Though herself a feminist, she willingly turns amusing in describing the uncomprehending questions sent to her by a New York editor who asked about the role of feminism in political discourse in Eastern Europe, when there was no political discourse and when feminists were--and apparently still are--regarded as enemies of the people. "We may have survived Communism," Drakuli writes, "but we have not yet outlived it." To the author, Communism is more than an ideology or a method of government--it is a state of mind that is yet to be erased from the collective consciousness of those who have lived under it. A sometimes sad, sometimes witty book that conveys more about politics in Eastern Europe than any number of theoretical political analyses. -- Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Easy, accessible account of living under communism during the 80s. This book mostly struck me

with details like toilet paper being difficult to procure, things like that. It's something that you don't necessarily need a lot of context to read, so as a casual history book I'd recommend this.

A great window into every day life under communism. A fantastic historical narrative that focuses on things not normally covered in history class, like communist toilet paper, sharing apartments, talking with the man who listens to all your phone calls, etc.

Nice copy. Wish there had not been stickers right in the middle of the cover. Pls put in a less conspicuous place.

Written by an intelligent and very funny woman, she gives surprising views of life under Communism. She addresses various topics, and things I have wondered about. Many times you will catch yourself laughing out loud.

A great combination of first hand experiences and interviews by a woman, mother and journalist. Copyright date of 1991 I found is a real plus since experiences were very recent.

Kind of interesting book touching a lot of subjects that persons who lived under communism will certainly understand. It is a great reading.

Everything I expected it would be and fast shipping.

This book is a reality check and an eye-opener to a lot of people, I've asked several of my friends to read it. My mom and I both cried when we read it. My mom's family is from eastern Europe and I had only heard little bits and pieces of stories from my grandma. This book helped me see things a lot better. If you have any interest in eastern European culture, history or the modern history of feminism and human rights, and you like reading about more personal accounts, then this would be a good book to read. Because of the cold war and American/Western attitudes towards this area of the world (whether those are right or not is another story for another book), there is a lot that happened that we don't know about during this time period. It's interesting to see things from a different POV and Slavenka does a great job showing us what it was like to be there.

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