Introduction
Men and Masculinities under Socialism

Toward a Social and Cultural History

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Abstract
This introduction to Aspasia’s Special Forum on the history of men and masculinities under socialism demonstrates the interest and originality of applying critical men’s studies and the history of masculinities to state-socialist Eastern Europe. It reviews existing scholarship within this field, stresses the persisting difficulties in analyzing everyday performances of gender and masculinities in socialist societies, and argues for adopting new approaches in order to get closer to a social and cultural history of masculinities. It puts the contributions to this Special Forum in their broader historiographical context—in particular, concerning studies on work, family, violence, war, disability, and generational change and youth—and shows how they will contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics and everyday performances of gender in state-socialist societies.

Keywords: disability, family, fatherhood, gender history, masculinities, socialism, war, work

For several decades now, scholars have taken an interest in analyzing the socialist attempts to transform traditional gender arrangements and revolutionize the family. They have studied the different efforts to “emancipate” women under socialism, such as their integration in the labor market, their education and training, their legal equality and access to divorce, the “socialization” of—traditionally female—domestic work through the establishment of public canteens, collective laundries, and childcare institutions. In contrasting the ideal of women’s emancipation with everyday experience under socialism, studies have also demonstrated the limits of the socialist “solution” to “the woman question” and its subordination to state interests, such as mass mobilization and extension of power, promotion of modernization and industrialization.
However, recent debates about the legacies of the state-socialist “emancipation” of women and the very notion, meaning, and existence of feminism(s) under socialist rule show the ongoing relevance of the topic. Central and Eastern European gender history is a dynamic field and current efforts include overcoming the continuing Cold War stereotypes and paradigms and writing a nonlinear history of socialist feminism. This means to acknowledge also its multiple contradictions and complexities due to the simultaneity of both revolutionary efforts and conservative backlashes.

Another current challenge is to consider critical men’s studies and the history of masculinities, and make these approaches fruitful for Eastern European gender studies and the gender history of socialism. The understanding of masculinities—like femininities—as a social and cultural construct that necessarily underlies historical change, and the performative and multifaceted view on male domination (over women and over other men), provide important avenues to write a truly relational, interactive, and dynamic gender history. Applying critical men’s studies and the history of masculinities to the history of state-socialist Eastern Europe opens new possibilities for further research. What impact did the making of “new” socialist women—better educated, economically independent, and enjoying more legal rights—have on the constructions of masculinity and fatherhood in state-socialist societies? How did men react to socialist gender agendas? What did socialism mean for men, and what did masculinity mean for socialists?

So far, most studies dealing with gender in socialist societies have concentrated on women. For a long time, they have not questioned the role of men and of masculinities. To some extent, this may be explained by the communists’ failure to see men as gendered beings and by their lack of interest in modifying masculinities. Indeed, Marxist feminism aimed primarily at changing femininities and at “promoting” women to a new role as “essentially, honorary or surrogate men.” Thus, the “woman question” was often regarded as of no concern for men, or, as legal scholar Barbara Havelková put it, “men were completely left out of the picture.” Scholars have acknowledged that socialist constructions of masculinity changed “out of necessity” (as a reaction to the changing situation of women), but they have insisted that “official” representations of masculinity remained unchanged under socialist rule. However, this is also a result of the historian’s perspective. For instance, Lewis Siegelbaum, well known for his works on the social and labor history of the Soviet Union, retrospectively acknowledged the importance of gender and masculinity, which he simply overlooked at that time: “The ‘maleness’ of the Soviet workers I studied similarly appeared secondary to other characteristics—urban versus rural, skilled versus unskilled, for example.”

Recent scholarship has complicated this picture. Scholars have shown an increasing interest in questions of masculinities in Eastern Europe. Historians have, first, revealed that even though they were not priorities, masculinity, manhood, and fatherhood have been discussed by communists and even the highest bodies of the communist parties. Second, they have stressed that socialist attempts at remodeling the family and at creating the “new woman” necessarily had an influence on the construction of social as well as individual identities of men under socialism. Thus, historians increasingly have understood also the “first sex” as a cultural and historical construct and
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Yet, a particular challenge in studying masculinities under socialism is to question the oft-cited ideal of the new socialist, or Soviet, man; that is, an image of virility and hyper-masculinity referring to industrial work, soldierly attributes, and bodily perfection. The communist subject, as Éva Fodor has convincingly shown, was exclusively situated in the public sphere and had, therefore, “distinctly masculine features,” even if it was, at first glance, genderless. Indeed, due to their unchallenged domestic and reproductive duties, women could never fully correspond to the ideal image of the communist subject—loyal, reliable, engaged in work, and devoted to the communist cause. Literary and film scholars, who have been among the first to turn toward the study of masculinities under socialism, have discussed largely the virile imagery behind the ideal of the “new” socialist man, its continuities and its contradictions. However, this ideal image—a product of propaganda stressing male self-sacrifice for the sake of constructing communism—has sometimes been mistaken for what Raewyn Connell has coined “hegemonic masculinity” in the socialist states. However, this notion cannot be reduced to an ideal image, sanctioned by the state. Connell understands hegemonic masculinity as the configuration of gender practice, which reproduces men’s domination over women and over other men. So, hegemonic masculinity implies the existence of, and the relations between, multiple conceptions of men and masculinities. While being dominant at a certain point in time, hegemonic masculinity is being constantly contested and is, thus, subject to change. Contrary to this understanding, the image of the new socialist man has long been considered as a homogenous picture and a consistent idea, “as if this ideal were utterly impervious to political upheavals and social change.” Sylka Scholz, among others, has criticized this view, for the figures of the worker-hero or the soldier-hero were (and remained) normative models only (or mainly) thanks to their promotion by the communist state. Still, Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt clearly stated that even if hegemonic masculinity may, indeed, be supported by the state, it cannot be reduced to “a pattern of simple domination based on force.” Hegemonic masculinity refers, thus, to social diversity, interaction, and dynamics; to contestation, compliance and consent; that is, attributes that scholars still struggle to fully acknowledge regarding socialist societies. So, the main reason this propagandistic model of the “new” socialist man is believed to have shaped individual behavior and subjectivities is the continued perception of state-socialist societies as homogenous and compliant with the communist state.

**Toward a Social and Cultural History of Masculinities?**

Contrary to this, however, research in the last few decades has stressed both the diversity of socialist societies and the changes that these societies underwent throughout socialist rule. Recent studies on masculinities have contributed to this interpretation of socialism, in highlighting diverse subjectivities, alternative identities, and contradictory practices of men and fathers in state-socialist Eastern Europe. This Special Forum of *Aspasia* contributes to this growing research field. Whereas earlier scholarship on...
masculinities under socialism has focused in particular, or exclusively, on represen-
tations—especially in cinema, poster art, literature, or the media19—this Special Fo-
rum inscribes itself in a renewed historiography, interested in a social and cultural
history. It aims to stimulate new paths for writing the history of masculinities under
socialism, focusing especially on examining the meanings of masculinities in every-
day life.20 Case studies in this Forum address topics such as work, family, fatherhood,
domestic violence, the army, disability, youth, and love. In using new sources and
in applying original approaches, the contributions to this Special Forum address the
methodological challenges of writing a history of masculinities under socialism and
demonstrate the richness of this research field. They do, of course, draw on previous
research, which I will briefly review here.

Work

Work, workers, and working classes are extremely significant for Marxism and com-
munism. Marxist and communist thinkers have idealized work as a means of emanci-
pation, and they have glorified the working classes as the driving force to implement
socialism and prepare the communist future. This led to an actual cult of work and,
in particular, of industrial work, which was associated not only with progress and
modernity, but also with masculinity.21 Agriculture, in contrast, was considered “fem-
inine” and backward. Indeed, several studies have revealed how much the represen-
tations of workers under socialism drew on images of virility and strong and healthy
male bodies. Be it in the early Soviet Union or in Central and Eastern Europe after
World War II, the worker hero, the hero of socialist labor, was male, even if the so-
cialist states integrated women massively into wage labor.22 This was true concerning
industrial work as during the forced industrialization of socialist states, as well as,
for instance, in the fields of science and technology.23 Scholars have stressed the fact
that these propagandistic representations of workers did not necessarily refl eect the
meanings of work for individuals living under socialist rule.24 Nevertheless, the issue
of everyday masculinities at work and the meaning of work for men during socialism
have remained less studied, so far. Work certainly represented an important aspect of
men’s biographies, even if men did not adhere to the official, communist ideals, such
as Stakhanovism.25 Work even continued to be seen often as a male homosocial site,
and women as “intruders into the male club.”26 This is also why—despite the socialist
idea of gender equality and the frequency of dual-earner families during socialism—
the idea, and ideal, of men as the family’s breadwinners has not been fully erad-
cated.27 Historians have stressed the obstacles in women’s professional achievements,
especially the persisting wage differences and the lack of women in executive posi-
tions.28 Research has also shown the different kinds of men’s hostilities to female wage
labor, for instance in overt harassment of women at the workplace or men’s efforts
to prevent women from further training and acquiring advanced skills.29 However,
female wage labor met men’s resistance also in the private sphere. This idea is devel-
oped by Natalia Jarska in this Special Forum, who draws on a particularly rich collection
of unpublished memoirs written for different “memoir contests” in post-Stalinist
Poland, allowing Jarska to study male practices in everyday life. She focuses on men’s resistance not only to women’s work, but, more precisely, men’s resistance to having a working woman at home, and this shows perfectly the relational nature of femininity and masculinity, and the fluid borders between “public” and “private” (or “political” and “social”) spheres. Jarska stresses not only the long continuities of this resistance to female work, but also its dependence on class and education.

Family and Fatherhood

Socialist policies affected private life, marriage, and family, even if they were not directed explicitly at remodeling them. Much research, nevertheless, has concentrated explicitly on the creation of a socialist family and partnership. When it comes to the position of family men and fathers, the impact of socialism has often been described in negative terms only. In the early Soviet Union, the family had been regarded as potentially counter-revolutionary, since it had been considered the “depository of tradition,” which, thus, “embodied the very society which had to be transformed.” Therefore, the state showed profound distrust in the education of children by their parents, likely to transmit “bourgeois,” pre-revolutionary values. Men’s central tasks were seen as workers and soldiers in constructing socialism. Therefore, several historians have stressed that the socialist state “alienated” and “marginalized” men within the family, for it took over paternal functions, in particular the role of the provider, and formed an “alliance” with women and mothers, giving them financial independence both as workers and as mothers, and facilitating access to divorce. For Katherine Verdery, this “usurpation of allocative decisions” by the socialist state strengthened what she has called “socialist paternalism.” Sheila Fitzpatrick, as well, described Soviet family policies and propaganda in the 1930s clearly as “anti-men.” Several historians consider the 1944 family law, a clear result of pronatalist policies, as the apex of Stalinist family policies, oriented exclusively at women as mothers; that is to say, oriented at women, but profoundly male-centered, ignoring female perspectives and needs, and benefitting men who were incited to have extramarital affairs. Indeed, this law freed fathers from any (legal and financial) responsibility toward their offspring and led to a massive increase of single mothers.

The alienation of men from family life was, however, not only a product of socialist family policies; it was reinforced by large-scale (and mainly male) work migration, but also political repression and deportation, which both led to a distance between many fathers and their families. Modernization and new technologies, such as running water, electricity, or gas heat, also contributed to the fact that men’s traditional household duties disappeared. The outcomes of these policies have been described as the “emasculcation” and “infantilization” of men by the state. Cultural representations of the Stalinist period strengthened this image by favoring communist surrogate fathers over biological fathers. Especially under Stalin, the Soviet state “assume[d] symbolically the role of father,” and Stalin himself incarnated the “universal father.”

Several recent works on masculinities nuance earlier evaluations, such as the “marginalization” of men within the family, and they reveal contradictions and dy-
namics that were at work even in the Stalinist period. Political change, nevertheless, had an impact on these dynamics. De-Stalinization played, without any doubt, an important role, or as Marko Dumančić put it: “With the death of the man to whom no other man could compare, it finally became possible to build alternative masculine forms.”43 The Khrushchev era in the Soviet Union, for instance, with its more liberal political and cultural context, but also with its focus on communist “morality” and the moral renewal of the society,44 brought about a “veritable discursive explosion” about men’s family roles and prepared the “conditions that allowed for a reconceptualization of Soviet fatherhood.”45 In this issue, Amy Randall further investigates this idea of the family man as a “new form of legitimate socialist masculinity.” Within debates about communist “morality,” the moral-ideological education of the youth played a particular role. Brendan McElmeel analyzes that, drawing on a regional Komsomol newspaper, and demonstrates that preparing men to become husbands and fathers resulted in a surprising mix of romantic love and communist morality.

Not only political change in general, but concrete political measures too played an important role in this reconceptualization of post-Stalinist fatherhood, for instance the re-legalization of abortion, which, in the Soviet Union happened in 1955. As Amy Randall, Yulia Hilevych, and Chizu Sato have shown, this re-legalization was accompanied by a wide-ranging anti-abortion campaign, which gave partners and husbands a new role as responsible fathers-to-be who would protect their wife’s and their future newborn’s health, thus backing the state in its effort to fight abortion and regulate gender, reproduction, and women’s bodies.46 Similar trends can be observed in other state-socialist countries, for instance in Poland, where access to abortion was equally facilitated in 1956 and husbands were assigned increasing responsibility in family planning.47 This example demonstrates that this new model of caring husbands and fathers was not free from political instrumentalization, for instance, for the sake of pro-natalism. However, it is undeniable that the postwar period in state-socialist Central and Eastern Europe saw a proliferation of representations of caring fathers, involved in childcare and family life and expressing emotions, which contributed to a new understanding of men as fathers.48

Especially from the 1960s on, men began to be explicitly targeted in order to realize gender equality, that is as equal husbands in a companionate (and heterosexual) marriage and as fathers, responsible for childcare and education.49 Admittedly, this “struggle” for a socialist fatherhood was not fully successful, as suggested by statistics from the late-socialist period about the share of household duties and childcare. Also, this attempt to create companionate partnerships and egalitarian marriages was, to a certain extent, part of socialist propaganda and of Cold War rhetoric, when authors claimed that only under socialism is partnership and marriage based on “real,” that is, sincere and mutual, love, whereas marriage in capitalist societies continued to be motivated by financial, material, and social considerations. However, as Brendan McElmeel suggests in this issue, this does not mean that ordinary people were not invested in debating the meaning and practices of love and partnership. Quite the contrary, state-socialist societies engaged in “serious discussions about the need for a more sincere and democratic form of intimacy” that we know well from Western Europe and the United States.50 Part of this were, for instance, also discussions about the
involvement of men in early childcare, the affective benefits of men’s presence during childbirth, or their greater inclusion in issues of pregnancy.51

**Deviations and Domestic Violence**

We have at our disposal a considerable number of prescriptive texts concerning the ideal husband or father. However, it is much more difficult for historians to assess everyday masculinities. Statistics and sociological surveys provide a partial insight into everyday gender performances.52 In this issue, two contributions adopt original approaches that allow us to analyze those everyday gender performances that clearly deviate from the socialist norm.

Erica Fraser and Kateryna Tonkykh do so in re-reading Nikolai P. Kamanin’s diaries. The well-known diaries of this aviator and high official within the Soviet space program have already been used to study Soviet space policies, space science, and technology. However, Fraser and Tonkykh demonstrate how these diaries and the numerous anecdotes about marital tensions and infidelity, alcohol abuse, or domestic abuse they contain can also be used to analyze everyday gender performances. The diaries are meaningful for discussing the contradictions to publicly displayed communist morality, since gossip’s function—as Fraser and Tonkykh remind us—is also to touch on taboo topics. Thus, this original reading of Kamanin’s diaries offers a fresh perspective on debates about the private lives and the “proper” behavior of Soviet citizens in the post-Stalin era.

Cristina Diac focuses in her article on domestic violence—a widespread phenomenon, but one that has attracted relatively little attention in the study of state-socialist societies.53 This certainly has to do with the fact that intimate and sexual violence was socially taboo and banalized on the pretext of men’s “uncontrollable” sexuality and alcohol consumption.54 However, the few historical studies about domestic violence are also a result of the lack of available sources, since everyday domestic violence is often not reported and, thus, recorded. Apart from official institutions and courts, women had nowhere to turn in the case of domestic violence; they had to wait until the 1990s to see the emergence of women’s shelters and NGOs combating domestic violence in Eastern Europe, often with institutional and financial aid from the West.55 Although socialist courts considered wife beating to be incompatible with socialist norms of gender equality,56 socialist states—similar to Western liberal democracies—did not criminalize rape within marriage, with the sole exception of Poland. Though, the communist parties did become more intrusive, in the post-Stalin era.57 Nevertheless, while officially propagating gender equality, they only hesitantly intervened in cases of domestic violence among party members, and did so mostly when additional charges were put forward against the violent men. Cristina Diac shows this in studying files from the party control commission, which was one of the mechanisms and institutions in charge of disciplining party members and of implementing ideals about social and family life into reality. This commission, as with other social and legal institutions dealing with domestic violence, clearly had a pedagogical mission, contributing to the project to create the “new” socialist person. Thus, as Jane Freeland put it
in studying the courts’ responses to domestic violence in East Berlin: “the court was frequently more preoccupied with improving men’s commitment to socialism than it was with protecting women from violence.” That means that East German courts considered not only the crime perpetrated by the husband, but also his attitude at the workplace, his work ethic, and his public activity, especially within the party. This led to the perception that domestic violence was not a problem in itself, but rather part of the overall failure to adhere and to live according to socialist values.58

War and Military Masculinities

Among the factors that caused historical change in gender arrangements, scholars often cite political change (such as installing a socialist regime, de-Stalinization, or pronatalist policies) or generational change that can be observed in both Eastern and Western Europe.59 However, a decisive factor for change was also World War II. Its impact on gender and masculinities has, in particular, been studied in connection with Soviet society, where the experience of war and the loss of (mainly male) life had an “enormous impact on how men and women thought of themselves” and how they “redefined interpersonal relations between the sexes.”60 The war reinforced the pronatalist policies under Stalin, leading to the above-mentioned 1944 family law. At the same time, World War II was also the culminating point of female soldiers’ integration into the Red Army and thus led to questioning about the military as a purely male space. Furthermore, experiences of fear, cowardice, and desertion contributed to challenging the often-portrayed ideal male soldier.

Yet, military masculinities as a particular form of idealized masculinity played an important role in the history of socialism and the Soviet Union even before World War II. Indeed, the “new Soviet man” of the early Soviet era was very much linked with ideas of mythic hypermasculinity, the exaggeration and idealization of soldierly attributes, and the idea to “fight” for the construction of socialism together with a much-needed “defense” of the country facing permanent threat from capitalist enemies. This implied also a unity of (male) comrades devoted to their leader. So, socialism in the interwar period had “a pronounced militaristic tone,”61 as Eric Weitz wrote, and this is undoubtedly one of the reasons that considerable research has been conducted on heroic-military masculinity and the soldier-hero as a particular Soviet and socialist model.62

In addition, in recent years, historians have increasingly adopted sociohistorical perspectives to analyze the impact of this idealized military masculinity on the subjectivities of male soldiers and everyday gender performances within the army. Steven Jug, for instance, has shown the clear contradictions between officially propagated ideals of male heroism, courage, strength, discipline, and self-sacrifice, on the one hand, and very diverse individual experiences that included cowardice and fear, but also support and care for each other, that is, activities that were traditionally considered “female” tasks. However, on the basis of war letters, Jug has also shown that over the course of World War II and, in particular, with the experience of an existential threat of the Soviet Union, male soldiers turned to traditional gendered perceptions,
identifying the front with masculinity and the home as a female sphere that has to be protected. The Soviet experiment of including female soldiers in the Red Army is of particular interest for studying military masculinity, for this confuse the idea of the army as a space of male solidarity and the homosocial bonding of male soldiers. The presence of female soldiers challenged this image especially when they were appointed in combat units or in superior positions, where women were in charge, for instance, of the political instruction of male soldiers. Already during the Civil War, tens of thousands of women had served in the Red Army, but had encountered considerable resistance and harassment by male soldiers. The latter claimed that women “disrupted the male camaraderie on which unit cohesion was built” and that female soldiers in combat units represented an “affront to male sensibilities.” World War II saw a much more massive integration of female soldiers (around a million women served in the Soviet army) and historians assess differently the impact of women’s presence in the Red Army. Anna Krylova, for instance, considers the huge participation of women in the Red Army a result of the education and socialization of young women in a more gender egalitarian school system of the 1920s and 1930s. Krylova takes female participation in the Red Army as an example for the inner contradictions of socialist feminism and contributes thus to the critique of the idea that Soviet gender arrangements and policies underwent an overall gender “backlash” in the 1930s. While Krylova focuses on women in combat roles and reveals positive cases of the integration of women into these units, including men’s supportive stance toward female soldiers, Steven Jug and Kerstin Bischl stress the many cases where female soldiers met with resistance and rejection. In particular, they discuss male soldiers’ perceptions of female soldiers as sexualized objects rather than professional colleagues, and highlight the sexual harassment and violence to which women were subjected. Thus, according to Jug, the presence of female soldiers “did not lead to lasting change in gender ideologies or military service policies.”

This was confirmed at the end of the war, which meant also a step toward what was perceived by many as “normality,” that is, the rapid demobilization of female soldiers. This must be seen as part of the attempt to “remasculinize” the Soviet military, to recreate it as an all-male space, and to reestablish a military masculinity, which again was seen necessary for the reconstruction of the Soviet postwar society.

**Postwar Masculinities and Generational Changes: Toward a “Crisis” of Masculinity?**

The army and military specialists, but also the media aimed at re-creating a martial masculinity, adapted to the postwar situation in the Soviet Union, as Erica Fraser has shown. Considerable effort was put into promoting military ideals among the younger generation, and in glorifying World War II. In the state-socialist regimes of East-Central and South-Eastern Europe, antifascist war heroes were promoted and their war efforts against Nazi Germany and, more generally, against fascism and capitalism were glorified.
Recreating military masculinity as a shared norm in the state-socialist societies after 1945, however, encountered serious problems. The obvious negative impact of the war on men became more than clear as they faced considerable difficulties re-integrating into civil life after the end of the war. Historians have observed post-traumatic reactions and various “disruptive masculine behaviours” that were provoked by the war, in particular violent behavior and alcohol abuse. Many men also encountered challenges in trying to rebuild a “normal” family life after the experience of alienation between family members during the war. Therefore, the postwar emphasis on domesticity, with its new ideal of family life, also included the challenge for men to (re-)integrate into it. Indeed, historians have observed a clear transition from military masculinity to familial masculinity and representations of masculinity in the postwar period “were increasingly linked to paternity.” Even public heroes became more and more depicted as family-oriented persons, loyal husbands, and loving fathers. Thus, domesticity was considered a space to restore shattered masculinities, and the family should help men to adapt to postwar realities.

These difficulties were particularly serious for war-disabled veterans. Injured soldiers encountered particular problems re-integrating into postwar society, civil life, and families. The difficulties in making a living and retraining for new jobs, and the discriminations faced at the workplace, were manifold. Women were expected to nurse former soldiers and war-disabled veterans back to full health in their families. At the same time, veterans’ efforts in the Soviet victory were glorified and war injuries were even considered a prestigious symbol of military masculinity. This, however, was not translated into any kind of protection after the war, and there was a “growing gap between propaganda and social performance.” The war-disabled were confronted with the paradox between war injuries as a prestigious symbol of military masculinity and their increasingly common perception as signs of fragilized masculinity, imperfection, and emasculation.

In this Special Forum, Wojciech Śmieja further investigates this contradiction between veteran’s glorification as antifascist and national heroes and the difficulties or even hostility the war-disabled encountered in postwar societies. In analyzing personal memoirs, collected as one of several “memoir contests,” quite popular in post-Stalinist Poland, Śmieja reveals that these memoirs could be perfectly integrated into the socialist vision of masculinity in stressing the individual capacity to overcome their handicap. This idea reproduces typical characteristics of the ideal socialist man, in emphasizing the importance of discipline, mental strength, and self-will. It also combines two major aspects of socialist masculinities: work and military. Indeed, for war veterans, and in particular, for the injured among them, postwar civilian labor was considered in its continuity to war service, that is, “as if it was an extension of battle.” Śmieja calls this “fight-as-work” and suggests that social recognition was not based solely on merits during the war, but especially on the adaptation to the postwar situation, ability to work, and devotion to the construction of communism.

As has been shown for the Soviet Union, realistic depictions of the difficult re-integration of war-disabled in postwar Polish society are very rare, and Śmieja therefore suggests reading between the lines of these published memoirs, which allows
him to analyze the diversity of individual experiences and subjectivities, but also to make critical statements concerning the postwar status and the difficult integration of war-disabled veterans.

Another aspect—which Eastern and Western European societies shared, at least to a certain extent—is the challenge to military masculinity and the masculine ideal as a soldier by the younger generation, especially from the 1960s on.\(^79\) Be it in the Soviet Union or in East-Central Europe, one can clearly observe a “gradual erosion of traditional military-based models of masculinity celebrated and supported by the regime,”\(^80\) and historians have shown that the generational conflict over male role models was first and foremost directed against norms associated with veteran masculinity. Neither Stalinist ideals of masculinity nor military masculinity provided adequate models for the younger generation of the 1960s, which, combined with limited opportunities for public engagement and the decline of male authority within the family, led to a period of “searching”\(^81\) and a perceived “lack” of male role models in late socialism.\(^82\) Increasing concerns about men’s health, their risk behavior, alcoholism, and higher mortality rates enticed several observers and scholars to declare a “crisis” of masculinity under late socialism.\(^83\) This idea of a “crisis”—though open to criticism when used as an analytical tool—certainly reflected individual anxieties and subjective perceptions of change, which were often seen as being provoked by socialism and women.\(^84\) Historians have shown how this “crisis,” that is, the perceived “emasculating” or “de-masculinization,” contributed to male engagement in alternative and dissident public spaces.\(^85\) Less often, however, historians have linked the male re-appropriation of a (dissident) public space with the beginning of masculinist tendencies in late-socialist Eastern Europe, aiming at a “re-naturalization” of the societies and, thus, of the gender order. “The claim of demasculinization stereotyped traditional gender roles” and led to what Anna Rotkirch called an “anxious masculinization.”\(^86\) And Peggy Watson added that liberty at the turn from late socialism to postsocialism was not only perceived in political terms, but also as liberty to live “traditional” or “natural” gender arrangements.\(^87\) This trend toward a re-naturalization of the gender order and an “aggressive re-masculinization” of postsocialist societies has been confirmed by scholars studying the impact of the transition from planned economy to market economy in the early 1990s.\(^88\)

Magali Delaloye contributes to this research about masculinities in late socialism in an original way. The Soviet-Afghan War, as Delaloye shows, was an opportunity for at least some men—in her case study, in particular, male military doctors—to reaffirm their authority, paternal position as protectors of the weaker, and thus their masculinity. They contributed to challenging the stereotype of that period that Soviet men were weak, emasculated, and lacking responsibilities. On the contrary, they reproduced typical traits of military masculinity, considering combat, courage, and self-discipline as essentially “male” features.\(^89\) This reproduction of traditional gender stereotypes, however, did not contribute to renewing the ideal of a military masculinity more generally. Quite the contrary, the Soviet-Afghan War was accompanied by a considerable decrease in the army’s prestige and in its perception “as a pillar of society and educator of Soviet citizens.”\(^90\)
Conclusion

Masculinity studies represent a very dynamic and interdisciplinary field of research. This Special Forum builds upon this research and at the same time aims to go beyond it. It resulted from the assessment that there is growing interest in the history of masculinities under socialism, but that this research is often dispersed. Therefore, two international workshops, organized at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, in Paris, in 2017, and at the University of Bern, in 2020, preceded this publication.

The written outcome is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of all the existing work done in this field; it can deal with a few topics only. Others remain unaddressed, or not sufficiently addressed, for instance, sports, bodies, sexualities and homosexuality, religion, and alternative cultures or subcultures. The Forum’s main goal is to demonstrate the fruitfulness of analyzing masculinities for a gender, social, and cultural history of state-socialist societies. The case studies presented here strengthen sociohistorical approaches toward men and masculinities under socialism by raising new questions, adopting new perspectives, and using new sources. Convinced that they will deepen our knowledge about the everyday performances of gender and masculinities in state-socialist societies, the Special Forum hopes, thus, to stimulate new research that applies critical studies on men and masculinities to Eastern Europe.

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◊ About the Author

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Notes


11. Schrand, “Socialism in One Gender.”


40. Mazierska, Masculinities in Polish, Czech and Slovak Cinema, 90–110; McCallum, The Fate of the New Man, 8.


44. Deborah A. Field, Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev’s Russia (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).


52. See, for instance, Martine Mespoulet, “Travail domestique et construction du socialisme en URSS d’après les enquêtes de budget-temps” [Domestic work and the construction of socialism in the USSR according to time-budget surveys], *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 41 (2015), 21–40.


70. See, for instance, Gries and Satjukow, Sozialistische Helden.


73. Fraser, “Yuri Gagarin and Celebrity Masculinity.”


77. Dale, “‘Being a Real Man,’” 124. For the importance of work on the perception of disability before the war, see Frances Bernstein, “The History of Disability during Stalinism,” in Life in Stalin’s Soviet Union, ed. Kees Boterbloem (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 115–137.


79. Fraser, Military Masculinity; Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation, 275.

80. Wojciech Śmieja in this issue.

81. See Marko Dumančić’s analysis of the “cinema of searching”: Dumančić, Men Out of Focus, 217.


85. One has to add, however, that the way the history of dissent in late socialism has been written is almost exclusively male-focused, casting, thus, mainly male dissidents as agents and


