



Editorial



This is the third volume of *Aspasia*, with a focus on the gender history of everyday life. The questions in which we were interested included: How have broad institutional frameworks – religious, social, economic, political, and cultural – related to the ways in which average women and men negotiated their gender identities, and, vice versa, how have (changes in) gender identities and relations influenced broader institutional frameworks? Our call for papers also asked more specific questions: How have assumptions of religious institutions about gender norms shaped the everyday religious practices and spirituality of laywomen and men? How have sexual norms impacted how women and men perform and negotiate their sexual identity in their daily lives? What changes did state socialism bring to women’s and men’s gender identities and daily lives, and how did that change over time?

The seven articles included here deal with these and other questions that engage with the lived, everyday aspects of femaleness and maleness, femininities and masculinities in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe from a multidisciplinary historical perspective. To start with, Aleksandra Djajić Horváth revisits the well-known figure of the Balkan *man-woman*. Her specific focus is on representations of the Balkan *man-woman* in missionary and travel accounts from the turn of the twentieth century, which she reads as ‘points of intersection between observers and the observed’. Tsvetana Boncheva and Galia Valtchinova examine little-known and surprising aspects of Bulgarian religious and sociocultural history. Boncheva explores the institution of ‘village nuns’ during the first half of the twentieth century, a form of religious celibacy among the Bulgarian Catholics in the Plovdiv region. Using Michel de Certeau’s concepts of strategies and tactics, her primary concern is to show that the nuns’ institution enabled women to bring about power shifts in gender relations, from informal means of exerting authority in public matters to laying claim to family inheritance that would normally be bequeathed to male heirs. Valtchinova’s contribution focuses on the Bulgarian seer, prophetess and healer *baba* Vanga, who was active between the 1940s and the mid-1990s. Using visitor response cards collected by the Institute of Suggestology, a would-be scientific institution that monitored Vanga’s healing practices between 1966 and 1986, Valtchinova explores the seer’s amazing and successful transformation from a peasant soothsayer into a state-sponsored prophetess and sheds new light onto



the processes of secularisation and modernisation of Bulgarian society after the Second World War.

Vesna Drapac reviews the meaning of resistance during the Second World War through the lens of everyday life, focussing comparatively on Yugoslavia and better-known cases in Europe, France and Germany. Her main argument is that 'a woman-centred focus on the social, everyday aspects of resistance' allows us to rethink the definitions of and preconditions necessary for successful resistance as well as the issues of collaboration and conformism in the Second World War. The theme of resistance continues in Anna Muller's contribution, which analyses a collection of 340 poems created by political prisoners accused of and imprisoned for anti-state activities in late-1940s and 1950s Stalinist Poland. In addition to evaluating prison poetry as a historical source, Muller's essay also explores gender differences and similarities in the 340 poems and in the social function of the prison poems.

Simona Fojtová, in turn, analyses how the Czech author Iva Pekárková, in her novel *Truck Stop Rainbows* (1992), envisions the role of the body in constructing counter-hegemonic knowledge. The novel's female protagonist, Fialka, becomes actively engaged in anti-state resistance by creating knowledge that exposes the communist regime's devastation by involving her body in the process. Lastly, Jill Massino has a rather different approach to everyday life under state socialism. Taking up the question of how state socialism changed women's and men's gender identities and daily lives, she argues that, by creating the conditions for women's full-time engagement in the workforce, state socialism in Romania decisively shaped the course of women's lives, self-identities, and conceptions of gender, often in a positive way. Emphasising that the story of women's lives under state socialism is more complicated and messier than it was once believed to be, Massino makes the important point that understanding women's complex relationship to the past requires a more nuanced, bottom-up approach to state socialism as it was made meaningful by individuals' life experiences. Taken together, these carefully crafted pieces illustrate the importance of further research into the history of everyday life in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe: that research will further unearth the historical significance of everyday life in a more remote as well recent past; it will make gender visible; and it will offer new avenues for understanding the intricate relationship between the gendered aspects of everyday life and 'big topics' such as religion, politics, war and varieties of resistance.

The *Aspasia* Forum presents an opportunity to approach the volume's central theme from a different perspective. The Forum in this issue presents a discussion about *Alltagsgeschichte* and its relevance for or specificities in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe – a conversation pursued through e-mail by historians Maria Bucur, Rayna Gavrilova, Wendy Goldman, Maureen Healy, Kate Lebow, and Mark Pittaway over a period of several months. In addition to highlighting the strengths and possibilities of this field of research, the Forum participants discuss a range of broader political, institutional and epistemological reasons that explain the relative weakness of *Alltagsgeschichte* as a field of historical research in the post-communist era.

Lastly, this issue of *Aspasia* offers five thoughtful review essays that relate to the theme of gender and everyday life history, twelve book reviews, as well as presentation of *Frauen in Bewegung* (Women in motion), an Internet project of Ariadne, the

Women's and Gender Documentation Centre at the Austrian National Library and the Department of Contemporary History at Vienna University to create an online documentation and a digital collection on the history of Austrian women's movements between 1918 and 1938.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Anna Loutfi for her valuable contributions in the earlier stage of creating *Aspasia* 3, the members of the Editorial Board for their continued support, and the outside readers for their absolutely essential contribution to creating high-quality scholarship. We also want to acknowledge the presence on the Editorial Board of two new members, Malgorzata Fidelis, of University of Illinois, Chicago, a historian of twentieth-century Poland, and Irina Livezeanu, of University of Pittsburgh, a historian of interwar Romania. We continue to welcome reactions and invite submissions. Though the first three volumes of *Aspasia* have mainly dealt with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we do welcome contributions focusing on any historical periods. In addition to a focus on special themes, starting with volume four we will also continuously accept submissions on any theme pertaining to women's and gender history in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. Notes for contributors can be found on the inside back cover of this volume. For more and updated information about *Aspasia*, please visit the website at www.berghahnbooks.com/asp.

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