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## Editorial

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This is the fourth volume of *Aspasia*, an international peer-reviewed yearbook, the aim of which is to provide a forum for the best scholarship in the field of interdisciplinary women's and gender history of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. The articles published in *Aspasia* contribute to the expansion and enrichment of the field of women's and gender history by making it more inclusive and by constructing bridges between the scholarship produced in and beyond the region. In addition they make it possible to challenge and deconstruct widespread notions about the 'otherness' and/or 'backwardness' of the region by allowing us to expand our knowledge of a part of Europe that has a complex, though little known, gender and women's history, and to situate these histories within broader contexts. A number of items included in this volume, not only articles but also book reviews and contributions to the Forum and News and Miscellanea, take up the challenges of deconstructing superficial notions about the region and of offering comparative perspectives.

This volume has two thematic foci. The first is 'Gender, the Body, and Sexuality', represented by three articles. With this topic we hope to explore issues that have been of fundamental importance to women's and gender studies since the 1970s. The questions in which we were interested included: In different contexts and periods, how was sexuality socially and politically constructed and normalised? How did power relations between the sexes, including those in the domain of sexuality, change or not, especially during state socialism? What did it mean to be a mainstream versus a sexually deviant person, and what role did the body play in constructing the ideal communist subject? What information about sexuality was available and how did it compare with similar information in Western countries?

In her article about the gender regime in Hungary during state socialism, Susan Zimmermann tackles the fundamental and much debated question of the nature of changes in gender relations and identities during that period. Her detailed overview enables her to conclude that 'women's and men's differential participation' in the spheres of production and reproduction remained unchanged, as did the hierarchical relations between those spheres – a characteristic of all industrial societies. Consequently, she writes, 'key elements of the gender hierarchy in [Hungarian] culture and society remained intact'.<sup>1</sup> Zimmermann is able to fine tune this conclusion in important ways, first of all by demonstrating that not all women were affected in the same

way by state socialist politics and gender struggles, and secondly by showing that male privileges, including men's sexual privileges, were defended actively and largely successfully.

In her article about normative sexuality in post-1966 Romania, Erin Biebuyck examines several sex manuals from Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania for the ideologically infused sex norms they contained. Her main conclusion is that Romanian 'sexperts' of the early Ceaușescu era constructed a new sexual ideal, which combined pre-1945 Romanian values with communist ideology, and which differed from contemporary American ideals. Biebuyck also emphasises that, even though the Romanian communist 'sexperts' used biological rather than religious justifications, homosexuality was still stigmatised and denied legitimacy. Thus, 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Adrienne Rich's influential concept) was perpetuated, in spite of the 'supposed communist commitment to dismantling traditional patriarchal structures'.<sup>2</sup> Differences in their specific focus and approach notwithstanding, both Zimmermann and Biebuyck in the end underline how little state socialism in Hungary and Romania did to dismantle the structures of patriarchy in spite of the regimes' theoretical and to some extent practical commitment to gender equality.

The third article in this part, by Karla Huebner, explores attitudes toward sex and sexuality in First Republic Czechoslovakia (1918–1938), focusing on the urban Czech population. Her analysis of a great many publications available to interbellum Czechoslovaks demonstrates that they were enthusiastic participants in closely linked discourses about hygiene, physical culture, sex education, birth control and sex reform. Her work also shows that Czech attitudes toward gender, the body, and sexuality during the early twentieth century were 'in complex dialogue with "German" attitudes, whether "German" meant Austrian, German or Czechoslovak German'.<sup>3</sup>

As we were gathering materials for the theme on 'Gender, the Body, and Sexuality', we learned that Yana Hashamova (Ohio State University) and Helena Goscilo (then at the University of Pittsburgh) were organising two conferences on women and war at their respective home universities – the first with a focus on the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and the second on the Second World War on the Eastern front. As the organisers were selecting some of these papers for publication projects, we asked if they would be able to submit a cluster of historical analyses of various aspects of women's lives at war. The result was the group of three articles included here by Susan Corbesero, Elena Baraban and Beth Holmgren, and introduced by Helena Goscilo and Yana Hashamova, who served as guest editors for these three pieces. At the same time we were in the process of reviewing another submission sent to us independently of the above-mentioned conferences. That article, 'Legacies of the Second World War in Croatian Cultural Memory: Women as Seen through the Media' by Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Reana Senjković, effortlessly coheres with those by Corbesero, Baraban and Holmgren, complementing them in terms of focus on media representation of women during times of war, and on the Second World War. The resulting subsection on 'Women and War' will be of interest to historians of war, gender, cultural representations, film, mass media, and memory.

The Forum in this issue brings together specialists in women's and gender studies (not women's and gender *history*) from Romania, Poland, Ukraine, Serbia/former

Yugoslavia and Hungary, who discuss their experience of the establishment of academic research on women and gender as well as the current situation. In often lively and impressive ways, Mihaela Miroiu, Agnieszka Graff, Tatiana Zhurzhenko, Marina Blagojević and Judit Acsády discuss such issues as the origins of women's/gender studies programmes in their respective contexts, the relation between the activist and academic agendas and the present status, strengths, and weaknesses of gender studies programmes. We will continue and expand this Forum in volume 5 of *Aspasia* (2011).

Lastly, this issue of *Aspasia* offers twelve book reviews, reports on the Women's Library and Archives in Turkey and the conference held there in April 2009 to celebrate its twentieth anniversary, as well as various announcements including one about the research project, 'Women Writers in History: Toward a New Understanding of European Literary Culture'.

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From the early stages of envisioning and shaping *Aspasia*, Maria Bucur has played an absolutely crucial role in developing and making the Yearbook. This is her last issue as editor, and the other two editors wish to express their most profound thanks for her intellectual and practical contributions, the importance of which cannot be over-emphasised. We are currently in the process of increasing the number of editors and reorganising the work. We would also like to extend our gratitude to members of the Editorial Board and outside readers, all of whom play an important role in the preservation of high-quality scholarship.

We welcome reactions and invite submissions on a continuous basis on any theme pertaining to women's and gender history in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. Although the first four volumes of *Aspasia* have dealt mainly with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we would like to include contributions about all historical periods. We also welcome reports about women's libraries and archives in, or relevant to, the region. 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](http://www.berghahnbooks.com/asp).

Francisca de Haan, Maria Bucur, and Krassimira Daskalova  
Volume 4 Editors

## ◆ Notes

1. Susan Zimmermann, 'Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism,' *Aspasia* vol. 4 (2010): 17.

2. Adrienne Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983. Originally published as 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631–660; Erin K. Biebuyck, 'The Collectivisation of Pleasure: Normative Sexuality in Post-1966 Romania', *Aspasia* vol. 4 (2010): 64.

3. Karla Huebner, 'The Whole World Revolves Around It: Sex Education and Sex Reform in First Republic Czech Print Media', *Ibid.*: 40.