



Editorial



The year 2010 marked the centennial of International Women's Day (IWD); the year 2011 marked the centennial of its first celebrations, which took place in Austria, Denmark, Germany, partitioned Poland, Switzerland, and no doubt other places. Inspired by these events, the theme section of this volume deals with "A Hundred Years of International Women's Day in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe," with articles focusing on Russia, the Polish lands, and Greece. In addition, we review the book *Frauentag! (Women's Day!)*, a collection of essays that accompanied an exhibition in Vienna on the occasion of IWD's first centennial;¹ and the News and Miscellanea section features a report on recent IWD-related events in Ukraine, including two exhibitions.

The theme section opens with Rochelle Ruthchild's article "From West to East: International Women's Day, the First Decade." Ruthchild revisits the origins of International Women's Day—which she and others believe to have been in the United States—the various narratives about the holiday's beginnings, IWD's role in empowering Russian women to spark a revolution, and its re-branding as a Soviet communist celebration. The next article, co-authored by Iwona Dadej and Angelique Leszczawski-Schwerk, explores how Polish feminists celebrated and organized IWD in Galicia and Congress Poland in 1911 and beyond. They emphasize the cooperation between liberal and socialist feminists around early IWD events. Angelika Psarra then carefully examines the history of International Women's Day in Greece. After the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) introduced IWD in Greece in 1924, it remained a communist ritual for fifty years, and its status reflected the vicissitudes of communism in that country. In recent decades, following the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974, and in particular after the United Nations' General Assembly adopted IWD in 1977, feminist groups and organizations, trade unions and parties from the entire political spectrum gradually embraced the holiday. Psarra's article ends with a discussion of IWD's impressive ability to survive in diverse socio-political contexts—a conclusion that applies to more than Greece alone.

These three articles discuss the different meanings of and narratives about IWD, its changing agendas, the different forms of cooperation and contestation that surrounded its celebrations, and the various ways in which it has been remembered, which are all related to the changing historical context. Ruthchild, Dadej and Leszczawski-Schwerk, as well as the Vienna book project emphasize that liberal and socialist feminists/women's activists organized and celebrated IWD together in the early years.² A moving example of how the historical context shaped the meaning of International Women's Day is the role it played during the years of fascism in Europe, when, for

example, it inspired a meeting of socialist women from Allied and Axis countries in London in 1941 and encouraged communist women in their struggle for survival in the Ravensbrück concentration camp.³ It is further important to note that the meaning of International Women's Day as a symbol for the anti-fascist struggle is not just textbook history but the personal, living history of women in contemporary Europe, as exemplified by Koviljka Koka Marjanović (1921), a partisan during World War II in Yugoslavia. The two pictures here show her in uniform during the war and at age ninety, with the flowers received from comrades on the occasion of 8 March 2011.



Figure 1. Koviljka Koka Marjanovic (1921) in her partisan uniform, wearing the medals she had been awarded for courage. Photo taken in 1946 in Sremska Mitrovica, to where she was transferred to the reserve forces of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia after the end of World War II.



Figure 2. Koviljka Koka Marjanovic in her home in Arandjelovac, Serbia. Photo taken in March 2011. Both photos shared with the permission of Koviljka Koka Marjanovic.

Although the three contributions clearly demonstrate the international dimension of International Women's Day, at the same time, many questions about the day's inter/trans-national character remain unanswered. Through which channels, for example, did IWD celebrations start in countries or regions not represented at the 1910 Copenhagen meeting of socialist women where Clara Zetkin's resolution about an international day for women was adopted? How important, or not, was the international dimension for the women who participated in manifestations? How did the communist appropriation of IWD in 1921 shape its celebration and interpretation in different contexts

before 1933, in the period of Nazism and World War II, during the Cold War, and since the fall of state socialism in Europe? But even if we are left with more questions than answers and in that sense can see the contributions here as only a beginning, at least three things stand out based on the authors' findings. First, the changing agendas, narratives about, and meanings of IWD are an integral part of its history and ongoing significance. Second, despite or because of this characteristic, IWD has had a huge and multilayered importance in the history of progressive, socialist, feminist, anti-fascist, communist, and autonomous women's activism (and not just in Europe, which is our focus here). That since the 1990s the day has been kidnapped and co-opted by mainstream and commercial interests should not blind us to that important fact. Third, whatever its current status, the story of International Women's Day is not over: the events in Ukraine—as discussed by Oksana Kis in this volume—illustrate that women activists in some cases “take back” this day and reinvest it with feminist political content.

This volume's general section opens with an article that is not directly about IWD but is nonetheless related to it. It focuses on Clara Zetkin's monthly journal *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* (The communist women's international) (1921–1925), which Zetkin used to convince women of the virtues of joining Soviet Russia/the Soviet Union in worldwide revolution rather than succumbing to what she argued were the empty promises of feminist movements in capitalist nations. Author Liberty Sproat emphasizes that this journal, by and large neglected by historians and Zetkin biographers, allows us to see important strands of Zetkin's thinking, in particular her unwavering support for the Soviet model of communism.

Evguenia Davidova then takes us to the second half of the nineteenth century. She analyzes the travelogue written by the Russian Maria Karlova, who, in the company of her brother, the prominent Slavist scholar and diplomat Alexander F. Gil'ferding, traveled in Ottoman Macedonia and Albania in 1868. Davidova argues that Karlova emphasized her “European” identity to foreground her main concern of female emancipation. Karlova seemed to assume, or in any case wished to convey the idea, that in a core cultural entity called “Europe,” women “enjoy[ed] respect and pre-eminence in society.”⁴ The final article is Laurie Stoff's contribution about Russian wartime nursing during World War I. In Russia, upon the outbreak of the hostilities, thousands of women rushed to volunteer as medical personnel. Although their contribution to the war effort was crucial, their experiences have received considerably less attention from historians than the actions of men on the battlefields. Stoff argues that an examination of Russia's “sisters of mercy” in World War I reveals the significance of women's medical service to our understanding of the war and exposes the fallacy of the notion of war as a distinctly male experience.

In this volume we start a new rubric called The Source, in which we present translations of relevant but not very accessible primary sources. We begin with Olga Zakuta's 1917 *Kak v revoliutsionnoe vremia Vserossiiskaia Liga Ravnopravnaia Zhenshchin dobilas' izbiratel'nykh prav dlia russkikh zhenshchin* (How in the revolutionary time the All-Russian League for Women's Equal Rights won suffrage for Russian women), translated and introduced by Rochelle Ruthchild. Zakuta vividly describes the demonstration of 19 March 1917 in revolutionary Petrograd that won Russian women suffrage earlier than in any major Western democracy.

The previous two volumes of *Aspasia* included a Forum about women's and gender studies in the region. Here we start a two-part Forum on the state of women's and gender history in countries in the region, called "Clio on the Margins: Women's and Gender History in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe." After an Introduction by Krassimira Daskalova, the Forum includes contributions about Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, and Ukraine. We end with thirteen book reviews and News and Miscellanea, for which the Russian historian Natalia Pushkareva has written an In Memoriam of Igor Kon, pioneering scholar of many academic fields in Russia, including gender history.

It is a pleasure to thank those who have made this volume possible. In addition to the authors and translators, we thank Grażyna Szelałowska and Susan Zimmermann for their crucial suggestions and the colleagues worldwide who have done the blind peer-reviewing of manuscripts submitted to *Aspasia*. We would also like to express our gratitude to the members of the Editorial Board for their ongoing support.

The editors continue to welcome contributions in the field of interdisciplinary women's and gender history of the region. These contributions can deal with all periods, as long as there is a clear historical question or approach. Notes for contributors can be found on the inside back cover of this volume. For more and updated information about *Aspasia*, please visit <http://journals.berghahnbooks.com/asp/>.

Francisca de Haan

◆ Notes

1. Heidi Niederkofler, Maria Mesner, and Johanna Zechner, eds., *Frauentag! Erfindung und Karriere einer Tradition* (Women's Day! Invention and career of a tradition), Kataloge des Österreichischen Museums für Volkskunde, vol. 93 (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 2011).
2. See the book review by Susan Zimmermann in this volume, pp. 208–212.
3. Irene Bandauer-Schöffmann, "Absenz, Resistenz und Erinnerung. Frauentage zwischen 1933 und 1945 und die Thematisierung von Faschismus und Krieg" (Absence, resistance and memory. Women's Day between 1933 and 1945 and the thematization of fascism and war), in Niederkofler et al., eds., *Frauentag!*, 106–139.
4. Evguenia Davidova, "Gender and Culture in the Turkish Province," p. 79 in this volume. Perhaps we can call this ironic if we think of the surprise expressed by some women migrants from Europe at the "respect" shown to women in their new country, the United States, which, as Maxime Schwartz-Seller points out, in turn for many became a bitter irony ("Ladies' were first to be underpaid, unemployed, and abused"). Maxime Schwartz-Seller, ed., *Immigrant Women* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 4.