

Women's and Gender History¹

Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann

Since the 1980s, historians working on East Central Europe, as on other parts of the world, have shown that historical experience has been deeply gendered. This chapter focuses on the modern history of women, and on gender as a category of analysis which helps to make visible and critically interrogate “the social organization of sexual difference”². The new history of women and gender has established, as we hope to demonstrate in this contribution, a number of key insights. First, gender relations are intimately related to power relations. Gender, alongside dominant and non-dominant sexualities, has been invoked persistently to produce or justify asymmetrical and hierarchical arrangements in society and culture as a whole, to restrict the access of women and people identifying with non-normative sexualities to material and cultural goods, and to devalue and marginalize their ways of life. Second, throughout history both equality and difference between women and men have typically resulted in disadvantage for women. Men and women have generally engaged in different socio-cultural, political and economic activities, and this gender-based division of labor, which has itself been subject to historical change, has tended to put women in an inferior position. Even when women and men appeared as equals in one sphere of life, this perceived equality often resulted in drawbacks or an increased burden for women in another area and women's contribution was still devalued as compared to men's.

Third, women – and sometimes men – have resisted and challenged these arrangements in myriad ways, with more or less success. As gender history has developed these insights, it has generated scholarly interest in themes and fields of inquiry that were previously considered marginal or secondary, or as anthropological constants not subject to historical change. In this way, this relatively new field has contributed enormously to the broadening of our understanding of East Central European history as such. This chapter examines the history of women's lives, status, and experience. Wherever possible we do this in comparison to men's lives, status and experience, so as to highlight historically changing gender norms and social practices. The chapter also discusses differences among women and those with marginalized gendered identities.

The insights of women's and gender history have not always been incorporated into the mainstream of East European historiography. However, while women's and gender history in Eastern Europe still lacks the institutional support of other historical subfields, the field as a whole has blossomed in the past few decades.³ This chapter relies on this new body of research.

To show key themes of gendered historical change and follow the primary concerns of scholars in this field, and because we wish to call attention to the unavoidable selectivity of the thematic choices of

any historical overview, we focus on six major themes in women's and gender history in East Central Europe: education; work and social politics; law and citizenship; empire, nation, ethnicity; gendered scripts of sexualities and intimate relationships; women's activism and movements. Historically, women's activism and movements have been instrumental in making hierarchical and asymmetrical gender arrangements visible and in bringing about change in each of the five other domains. The thematic structure of the chapter also provides a way for those who have not considered the impact of gender on these large thematic areas to easily see how a focus on gender changes established narratives. Thinking about East Central European women's and gender history allows us to interrogate critically and alter inherited paradigms in both gender history and East Central European history as a whole.

Education

Education in East Central Europe since 1700 has been highly gendered in terms of both access and curricula. Looking at policies, practices and debates over the gendering of education allows us to investigate how gender norms developed and were contested in society more generally. But gender was never a factor in isolation. Social and class status, ethnic and religious competition, as well as nation-building (both before and after the establishment of the nation-states) and economic developmental efforts have all affected the access women and girls had to education and how that education was gendered. Access to the higher echelons of education in particular was much more restricted for girls compared to boys and for girls from more humble social backgrounds compared to the daughters of more privileged parents. Elementary education was more accessible to girls, but compared to boys they remained distinctly underrepresented even at the primary level until well into the twentieth century.

In East Central Europe as a whole, the process of nation-building had a substantial impact on the education of women and men. Within limits, patriotic modernizing and development efforts had positive effects on the state of women's education. Examples of this date from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when some East Central European intellectuals supported the idea that schools for both boys and girls should be established in each village and town. During the nineteenth century both female and male authors from the Balkans published pamphlets and articles on women's right to education. They drew readers' attention to women's superficial and inadequate education and presented this as the reason behind the lower status of women and gender inequalities. Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian literary men and intellectuals supported women's education, believing that overcoming women's ignorance and 'barbarism' was an important step in their people's national development. Similarly, while within the Greek society a specific Western Enlightenment-inspired discourse on women's education emerged only after the establishment of the modern Greek state in 1832, among the Bulgarians and Albanians in Southeastern Europe, discourses on women's education paralleled nation-building processes and appeared already during the era of Ottoman rule.⁴ In the Habsburg Empire various male Hungarian authors in the last two decades of the eighteenth and the very beginning of the nineteenth century—at times parading under a female pseudonym or as a women's 'advocate'—were keen to demand women's

educational improvement as a contribution to building the (noble) Hungarian nation. When reform endeavors came to an end soon thereafter, interest in educating Hungarian (noble) women visibly decreased.⁵

Girls' primary education was usually part and parcel of the introduction of compulsory elementary schooling. The Greek government was a forerunner in 1834. Compulsory education for both genders was mandated by the Romanian Constitution of 1866, in the first Bulgarian Turnovo Constitution of 1879, and Serbian educational law in 1882. These legal measures, however, were rather ineffective. As late as the beginning of the twentieth century in some poor regions of the Balkans there was less than 50 percent school attendance for both boys and girls. In addition, the predominantly patriarchal culture in the region meant that no matter what was prescribed by law a much lower proportion of girls compared to boys attended schools.⁶ In the Habsburg Monarchy compulsory primary education for both sexes came early in the Dualist period and was closely related to the short-lived dominance of liberalism in the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy (1869) and of liberal nation-building in Hungary (1868). While there was no gender difference in terms of curricula and the number of years to be spent in elementary schooling in the Hungarian half of the monarchy, gender was a factor at higher educational levels throughout the Habsburg Monarchy. Girls' education everywhere in Central and South Eastern Europe was tailored to be shorter than boys' and focused on preparation for the life in the home and family, while boys were prepared for working life.⁷

If primary education for both sexes, with all the limitations described above, was an accepted standard in principle, higher education for the female sex was a bone of contention. In Russian Poland girls' education formed a battlefield between Russifiers and Polish nationalists.⁸ In southern East Central Europe conservatives saw women's education as a principal agent of the evil caused by the Westernization of morals and manners. They thought women's higher education and immorality were synonymous. Some Balkan modernists supported Westernization or Europeanization in principle but tended to reject Westernizing girls' secondary education. While wide differences existed between various regions, the most visible were those between the culturally conservative, traditional, agricultural continental part of East Central Europe and the more developed and urbanized administrative centers and ports. As elsewhere, the majority of the rural population considered girls' education absurd, while town populations were more receptive to the model of separate girls' education. At the same time, the idea of a woman's mission or vocation as a mother-educator spreading national ideology reinforced views in support of a specifically gendered kind of women's education.⁹

In the Austrian lands in the later decades of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, Czech and Slovene nationalists supported expanding women's secondary education, albeit with explicitly gendered nationalist goals in mind. In the 1860s, Czech-language secondary schools for girls were instituted in Prague to reinforce the idea of motherhood and the family as central to Czech women's calling and to include educated women as mothers of the nation into the patriotic Czech community.¹⁰ Different nationalist factions competed to establish secondary schools for women in their preferred

language. Thus the first women's gymnasium (i.e. a university preparatory school rooted in Classical languages and literature) in Austria was established in Prague in 1890, with Czech as a teaching language, followed by competing German-language institutions. A Polish-language Jewish gymnasium was founded in Lwów (Lemberg, L'viv) in 1899 and a Ukrainian-language gymnasium followed in 1906.¹¹ In Estonia under Russian rule the dominant German elites successfully pursued the expansion of socially conservative gendered German-language secondary education for girls.¹²

The first women's high school in the Balkans was established in the Serbian capital of Belgrade in 1863. During the 1860s and particularly from the 1870s onwards Balkan educational initiatives were subordinated to the national cause. They aimed at indoctrinating Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians and Romanians, girls in particular, with national ideals. In Greece between the 1860s and 1890s a number of women's 'superior' private schools were established. Those run by the Society of Friends of the Education, known as *Arsakeions* after the generous donor Apostolos Arsakis, were especially popular. Apart from providing formal secondary education to girls, the *Arsakeions* were important institutions for the preparation of future women teachers and as places for women's socialization and identity building. In the 1870s several new schools for Greek-speaking women were established thanks to the activity of the Association in Favor of Women's Education (founded in Constantinople in 1871), the Association of the Ladies in Favor of Feminine Education (established in Athens in 1872), and various other educational associations; financial support came from rich Greeks from the diaspora. The first Greek public secondary schools for girls, equivalent to those for boys, opened in 1917, but it was only in 1929 with the educational reform of Eleutherios Venizelos that girls' secondary education became comparable to that for boys.¹³

In Bulgaria after the establishment of the nation-state in 1878 there were various kinds of secondary schools with different numbers of grades or 'classes' called *klasni* (class) schools. There were also incomplete and complete types of *class* schools—i.e. schools offering some or all of the possible grade levels—called *gymnasii*, modelled after the German *Gymnasien*. These schools were both single-sex and coeducational. Most were called *narodni* (people's) schools and were supported by the Bulgarian state. Private schools for ethnic minorities and religious groups were not supported by the state. In 1885–1886 there were seven complete *gymnasii* for boys and two complete *gymnasii* for girls. But women's *gymnasii* had six grades while men's had seven grades and different curricula.¹⁴

As in other parts of the world, government officials in East Central European societies devoted many more resources to the education of boys than to co-educational or girls' schools. Women's education in the region thus remained much less developed and the number of educated women was far smaller than that of men. State-sanctioned differences in the curricula of girls' and boys' high schools served as a pretext to block women's admission to the universities throughout the region well into the twentieth century. Anywhere the admission of women to university education had been or seemed likely to be introduced, it met with fierce resistance from professors, politicians, and journalists, and other members of the male intelligentsia. Opponents argued that women were physically unfit for higher

education; some said, for example, that women's more labile sense of justice made them unfit for the study of law. Some claimed that politics and economics were male spheres where women should not compete; one Hungarian supporter of women's higher education, summarizing this perspective, explained that the study of law was especially 'a question of empire and jurisdiction, and as long as the state remains a man's state, as has been the case for so many thousands of years, these two will not be laid into women's hands easily.'¹⁵

As a result, access to universities did not come easily to women anywhere in the region. Hungary and Austria were latecomers in particular. Before 1895 and 1897 respectively at some universities women could attend lectures as guests, but other universities did not even allow them guest status, with a few exceptions dating back to earlier decades. In Hungary, universities admitted women to study the humanities, medicine and pharmacy beginning in 1895, but only on a case-by-case basis. New branches of study were opened to women in 1918, but with the simultaneous introduction of a *numerus clausus* for both female and Jewish students (even though the legal basis for each was different).¹⁶ In the Austrian Half of the Dual Monarchy, women holding Austrian citizenship could enroll in humanities curricula beginning in 1897; three years later they were allowed to study medicine and pharmacy. For Serbian women it was theoretically possible to study at the University of Belgrade from the time the university opened its doors in 1864. Only a handful, however, did so. Female students, still few compared to men, were only fully integrated into the Serbian university system in 1905. Both the University of Zagreb (established in 1874) and Sofia University (in existence from 1888) admitted women first as auditors in 1895 and as full-time students in 1901. The two Romanian national universities—in Iași and in Bucharest, both established in the 1860s—admitted women as auditors in 1894. Ottoman women entered Istanbul University (established in 1846) in 1911, while Albanian women were admitted to the University of Tirana immediately after its establishment in 1957.¹⁷

State socialism quickly accomplished at least formal women's equality in education at all levels. Sooner or later secondary education became compulsory for both women and men across the region; women especially benefited from this. The proportion of women among university students rose steadily over the course of the twentieth century, but especially during state socialism. In Bulgaria, one third of university students were female in 1956–1957. By 1970–1971, this proportion reached 50 percent, while in the last year of the socialist regime (1988–1989) 53.5 percent of university graduates were women. Since the end of the 1970s sociological research has repeatedly shown that in Bulgaria women are much more educated than men. In Hungary, the proportion of female university graduates nearly doubled between 1949 and 1970, when it reached 31 percent. In the early 1950s, quotas aimed at raising the proportion of female students in technical and agrarian courses of study were instituted. Data on the professional careers of Hungarian women in academic and high ranking cultural institutions suggests that, after hesitant beginnings in the interwar period, the state socialist system enabled a number of women to climb the career ladder. But despite these gains, educational discrimination, gendered patterns of

educational performance and the phenomenon of the glass ceiling continued throughout the state-socialist period.¹⁸

Work and social politics

Work has long formed one of the key preoccupations in gender historiography, including that with a focus on East Central Europe. Most gender historians would agree that there are at least four entangled fields of inquiry at the core of this research: women's involvement in the world of paid labor; the gendered relationship between paid labor and the unpaid domestic work largely done by women (and generally considered to be 'women's work'); the push to convert unpaid domestic or care work into paid work and the class dimensions of this shift; and, last but not least, the role of social and welfare policies in shaping the gender order in relation to paid and unpaid work. Three themes have been of crucial importance in gendering the division of labor in East Central European societies: women's role in farming and agriculture, the contested process of women's initial entry into the paid labor force in the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, and the politics of women's mass entry into non-agricultural sectors of the labor market under state socialism.

Well into the twentieth century, the majority of the East Central European population belonged to the peasantry or to the ranks of landless agricultural laborers. Therefore, the dominant occupation of most women in East Central Europe, aside from domestic and care-work, was farming and agricultural work, whether paid or unpaid. In peasant households, work was performed according to a complementary gendered and generational division of labor. In some regions and among certain ethnic groups, male and female tasks were rigidly differentiated, while in others tasks were divided somewhat more flexibly. Many chores were considered categorically either 'female' or 'male.' Others were done jointly, but the woman's part was often defined as 'auxiliary' even when it required greater strength or stamina. Changing circumstances, such as availability or non-availability of paid labor opportunities for either sex, or changes in the composition of the household after members died or left, could bring changes in the gendered division of labor. As a rule, women had to shoulder a heavy burden of work in and around the house, in addition to field work. Until well into the late twentieth century, many peasants considered it improper to buy something they could produce themselves, such as soap or bread; such purchases signaled that a woman was a bad housekeeper. Visual sources as well as memories indicate that while rural men had some free time, for instance when they sat down to eat after work, women rarely had even a moment to themselves. Even at meals women stood while the rest of the family sat to eat: they served the food and then cleaned up afterwards.¹⁹

A large percentage of the population in the countryside did not fall under the classical definition of the peasantry as a class of independent freeholders. Large numbers of farmhands belonged to the medium or vast estates of others and millions of landless rural dwellers, or those living on the tiniest plots pursued both unpaid and gainful work in agriculture and in various small scale trades, many of them caught in dire poverty.²⁰ Girls and women belonging to these landless strata performed a whole variety of

mostly gender-specific work, as did boys and men. In the Great Hungarian Plain in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, many girls under the age of ten worked for long months between April and September as goose watchers in remote hamlets. By the late nineteenth century their peasant mistresses, who themselves might own a house in the village and only lived in these primitive facilities part of the time, hired these girls on the local market where they were offered by their mothers. While some girls had positive experiences as servants and laborers, others suffered greatly from solitude or experienced great fear when encountering strangers in the sequestered cottages where they typically did their summer work. When such girls become older they were often hired out as nursemaids; from the age of fifteen or sixteen they might become servants, combining work in the house and in the garden and fields. Until the late nineteenth century these girls' wages were largely paid in kind. In addition to their keep, they might get a pair of boots or slippers and only very rarely money.

Whether adult women from among the landless agrarian population who lived with their husbands or partners took on paid work in addition to their domestic labor seems to have depended less on the financial situation of the family (which always needed additional income) than the availability of work—which in many places waxed and waned—and the age of their children. Women's paid labor continually adjusted to their changing opportunities. Married women in Hungarian hamlets and villages did all kinds of casual labor. They might be hired by peasant or affluent Jewish households for part-time work such as force-feeding or plucking geese (goose was a particularly important part of the Hungarian Jewish diet). The force-feeding of the geese (to enlarge the liver and create *foie gras*, considered a delicacy in Hungary as in France) was done twice a day, in the morning and the afternoon. After three or four weeks of force-feeding, the geese were sold and the women received a portion of the proceeds from each goose. The plucking was done for a day-wage. In larger settlements, widows and married women both worked as day-laborers doing all manner of tasks, including hoeing, bundling sheaves of grain, shucking corn, mending sacks, or making jam or soap; they took in washing or ironing, baked bread, and helped out during the grape harvest or when a pig was slaughtered. Women who could establish themselves within the various branches of the (itinerant) retail trade, as healers or midwives (women who had formally qualified for this trade became more frequent only by the 1880s), or whose circumstances were such that they could take in foster children, or professionally cook for others, tended to make a better living.²¹

State socialism brought a dramatic decrease in the agrarian population and equally far-reaching changes in rural property relations and the structure and organization of agricultural production. Yet there was also significant continuity in the gendered division of labor within households and in the agrarian workforce. Women tended to remain in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations. For instance, for decades in Hungarian agricultural cooperatives, women made up approximately 40 percent of semi-skilled and unskilled agricultural workers, but only ten percent of the skilled manual workforce. Women's labor was also largely concentrated in traditionally female occupations, such as planting; in 1980 two thirds of the workforce in this sector was female.²² Gendered hierarchies in rural life were aided by the symbiosis

between private plots and collective production and the formal division of collective farm residents into full members and 'supporting family members.' Between 1970 and 1980 only 30 percent of the total number of cooperative members or cooperative employees were women, and many of them were engaged in low level work in administration. But 94 percent of economically active 'supporting family members' in 1970 were women, which rose to 98 percent in 1980. According to one study, in 1962 these women spent only a very small part of their average work time in paid labor, while nearly a third of their typical working day was devoted to work on the so-called private plot, where rural families grew produce for their own consumption and to sell privately. Thus, the internal structure of the cooperatives continued to contradict the dominant trend towards the formally equal treatment of women and men under socialism. In their daily lives, women found themselves, once again, in a highly asymmetrical position within the household and the cooperative and were kept in a particularly burdensome position combining paid and unpaid work.²³

Women's growing integration into the paid labor force in the non-agrarian sector in the nineteenth and early twentieth century forms the second important theme in the gendered history of women's work in East Central Europe. Women's entry into paid work was one root cause of important challenges to the dominant gender order. It was, therefore, a constant source of social anxiety for both men and women. While wage labor changed the lives of many women and their families, this process was not simply emancipatory.

Domestic service was and remained an important feature of women's paid work. The large majority of domestic servants were women in many places in the late eighteenth century.²⁴ Their social distance from the group of the agricultural servants increased throughout the nineteenth century. In 1910 in the Hungarian Kingdom domestic servants comprised 40 percent of the non-agricultural female workforce, and the figure was the same even in the capital city, a fast growing industrial hub with close to one million inhabitants. Budapest in the immediate postwar years also provides the setting for the famous novel *Anna Édes* by Dezső Kosztolányi, first published in 1926. Since translated into many languages, this novel masterfully memorializes the work and life of this group of women. It illustrates how these women coped with the incessant hard household work they performed for others, the danger of sexual assault many servants faced in the households of their employers, and how their mistresses were obsessed with controlling and intervening in all aspects of their lives. Kosztolányi also highlights the cynical superciliousness of employer families that refused to acknowledge their reliance on the hard labor of their servants. Anna's employer, Mrs. Víz, spoke as if Anna rather than she was the privileged one: 'Talking in monologue Mrs. Víz lamented: "It is true, she works enough. But tell me, please, what else should she do", she irritably asked. "Here she gets her board and lodging. She will also get clothing. She can put her wage aside. What else does she want in these difficult times? What's her problem? She does not need to maintain this big flat, to rack her brains everyday about what to cook ... she just lives, lives untroubled, freely. I used to say often times, nowadays it's only the servants who thrive.'" The ladies sighed.'²⁵

Statistical data about the growing presence of women in the paid labor force and the changing gender composition of the workforce are available from the later decades of the nineteenth century. In general, we see an increase in women's contribution to the paid labor force. For example, by 1923, the proportion of women within the Slovene working class had grown to 27 percent. Between 1909 and 1944 the share of Bulgarian women among industrial workers in the country increased from 22 to 36 percent, while even in 1939 both female and male workers in all economic spheres represented only 6.7 percent of the economically active population in the country.²⁶ Yet such statistics can give us only a very partial picture of women's economic contribution and of the asymmetrically gendered pattern of women's inclusion into the various branches of paid labor. There was great variation, particularly in the case of married women. Even as women's participation in paid labor expanded, women continued to be almost exclusively responsible for domestic duties (which would remain the case throughout the twentieth century).²⁷ Married women felt many pressures to stay at home. This is borne out by statistics. In Hungary the percentage of married women involved in paid work decreased from 22 to 10 percent between 1900 and 1930. But during this same time period the share of single, divorced and widowed women within the female workforce increased. The proportion of the female labor force working in the agricultural sector decreased by one fourth during these years (but was still 44 percent in 1930).²⁸

Women's experience in the world of paid labor was colored by, and contributed to, their marginalized status in society more generally. Gendered patterns of exploitation within the world of paid work included women's systematically lower wages and the threat of sexual harassment or assault. Women's growing involvement with commodified labor met fierce resistance on a variety of levels, although the nature of this resistance varied substantially by class. In Austria the exercise of a trade was supposed to be gender-neutral after 1859, but in practice women's position was made even more difficult by the introduction of the separate category of qualified trades in 1883.²⁹ Women who struggled to establish some form of independent living by entering middle-class professions were confronted with a persistent hostility that manifested itself in legal and cultural challenges; this can be seen as an extension of the resistance against secondary and higher education discussed above. Teaching, the first and most widespread intellectual occupation accessible to the 'second sex' since the beginning of the nineteenth century (and in some areas even earlier), can serve as one example. As long as women had no access to regular university training, they were reduced to the lower, least respected and worst paid ranks of the teaching profession. As in other parts of Europe, laws in some East Central European countries forbade female teachers from continuing to work after they married or introduced other discriminatory regulations that specifically targeted women.³⁰

In addition, advances achieved by female employees and professionals were repeatedly challenged. There were constant attempts to exclude women from better-paying jobs, particularly in education and the civil service. Bulgarian teachers, for instance, after the interruptions caused by World War One, returned to the classroom only to be dismissed again during economic crises in the 1920s and 1930s. In the newborn Czechoslovak Republic, the *celibát* (which mandated that female teachers be fired

after marriage) was abolished in 1918, but gendered discrimination remained pervasive in the civil service throughout the interwar period. Officials pondered reintroducing the *celibát* only years after abolishing it; in 1926 gendered restrictions were applied to lower-level office staff, and during the economic crisis of 1933, pay cuts were introduced in both the state and the private sector for married employees whose spouses also worked. In Hungary as well, an increase in the number of women working in white-collar jobs provoked an intense debate, with oppositional voices becoming predominant in the 1930s.³¹ Female professionals such as lawyers, doctors, artists, writers, and architects faced numerous restrictions in many countries. The situation of women with law degrees was especially egregious; in Bulgaria, Albania and Hungary women-lawyers were not allowed to practice their profession until after 1945. In Hungary, additional restrictions on women in the legal profession were introduced as late as 1937.³²

In East Central Europe, these developments were accompanied by an ambiguous discourse on “modernization.” The modernizing elites in the Balkans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries certainly understood that ‘modernization’ would inevitably transform gender relations, yet at the same time they were afraid of shattering traditional life and the gendered status-quo. Liberal reformers who aimed at modernizing their ‘imagined communities’, were also seemingly of two minds. They campaigned for women’s economic activity while still defending traditional women’s roles as mothers and housewives. Many argued that the family was the major institution of social stability and opposed the idea of women’s paid work outside the household; they believed that traditional gendered patriarchal virtues and values could preserve the Balkan nations from the subversive influence of Western ideas and practices.³³

At the same time, women who had managed to enter the professions in the later nineteenth century developed their own professional cultures while initiating political actions that often consciously aimed to counter the restrictive discourses of male “modernizers.” Feminist journalists such as Callirhoe Parren in Greece and Teodora Noeva, Ana Karima and Vela Blagoeva in Bulgaria, for instance, made use of their new means of self-expression, financial independence and cultural visibility to contest male ideas about women and to contrast male fantasies about women with women’s lived reality. In the interwar period, professional women organized, nationally and internationally, to represent and promote their interests. In 1924, educated Bulgarian women established the Association of Bulgarian Women Graduates (later renamed the Bulgarian Association of University Women) which joined the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) in 1925. Yugoslav women-graduates established a branch of the same international organization in 1927 and joined the IFUW in 1928.³⁴

Women were also integrated into the sphere of paid labor through welfare and social policy where the vexed relationship between equality and difference played a pronounced role. On the one hand, social policy provisions contributed to increasing the gender gap in the world of work even if strictly based on legal equality between the sexes. Social insurance is a case in point. While women represented 24 percent of the workforce in the Kingdom of Hungary in 1910 (35 percent in the capital city of Budapest), their share among those covered by health insurance was only 13 percent in the capital and on the national

level. This largely mirrored the fact that women workers were concentrated in sectors such as domestic service, the informal economy and other areas considered marginal and ‘backward.’ As a result, a supposedly gender-neutral social policy deepened the cleavage between the male and the female labor force by prioritizing predominantly male occupations and leaving out of the safety net predominantly female ones.³⁵ Local social welfare policies similarly built on supposedly gender-neutral norms when regulating access to (even minimal) benefits; in practice these worked against supporting women in need. In Budapest during the pre-1914 period single mothers and widows who asked for regular support from the municipal poor relief authorities by arguing that they were ‘incapable of work’ because they were the sole caregiver for numerous children were systematically rejected. In the eyes of the Budapest authorities, only applicants suffering from chronic illnesses were entitled to social aid; domestic responsibilities that prevented women from taking jobs entitled them to nothing. In this way a vision of social reality that ignored the gendered division of care responsibilities in society translated into sharply exclusionary gendered social welfare policies.³⁶

On the other hand, poor relief and social policy measures also included strongly gendered components, entertaining particular visions of what a proper gender order looked or should look like. Labor protection on the national level is a key example. From the beginning of the industrial era, and increasingly by the late nineteenth century, labor law contained important gender-specific prohibitions and stipulations. In the early twentieth century Hungary and Bulgaria were the first East Central European countries, followed by Romania, Greece and later Serbia, to introduce restrictions on night work for female industrial workers, a common practice throughout Europe generally. In Austria traditions of gender-specific labor protection, such as restrictions on night work, reached further back. In a number of countries, additional gender-specific restrictions on working hours for female workers were introduced in the interwar period. At the same time, some social guarantees and benefits for working mothers were introduced, mostly within the framework of social insurance policies.³⁷

Many elements of these gender-specific policies had an ambiguous impact on working women. Night work restrictions, while certainly a gain in terms of labor protection, also aimed at preserving or re-creating the traditional gender order by keeping women home at night; in addition, the effect of such legislation was often, as in Hungary, to bar women from well-paid positions while still allowing them to take low-paid night work, for example in industries requiring continuous operation and therefore exempted from the women-specific prohibition of night work. In turn, the history of motherhood protection measures points to the fact that the integration of women into the paid labor force did not necessarily make them ‘independent’; more often than not their new roles replaced traditional forms of subordination to patriarchal authority within the family by new forms of multiple dependency. Motherhood protection measures as a rule did little to substantially ease the burden of combining care responsibilities, which rested largely on women, and paid work.

State socialism brought an enormous and forceful mobilization of women into the world of paid labor. While earlier research tended to create a rather uniform and monochrome picture of this process,

more recent studies have foregrounded the complexity and unevenness of these developments as well as change over time. Women were a key focus of policies aimed at speeding up the inclusion of new groups into formal employment. It was obvious to socialist planners that the massive industrial development they envisioned would not be possible without women's participation in the labor market. Accordingly, women's labor force participation rates rose sharply everywhere in the region. In Yugoslavia, women's proportion of the labor force grew from 18 percent in 1940 to 23.7 percent in 1953. By 1978, 34.7 percent of the workforce in the country was female, albeit with huge differences between the regions (44 percent in Slovenia versus 20 percent in Kosovo).³⁸ In Hungary, women's labor force participation rose from 35 percent in 1949 to 64 percent in 1970 and finally to 69 percent in 1990.³⁹ Among the disadvantaged Roma minority, however, this figure remained much lower in Hungary than the average figures for women as a whole. In 1970 only 30 percent of Hungarian Roma women of working age were in formal employment, and even in 1987 this figure did not exceed 49 percent (and by 1993 it fell sharply to only 16 percent).⁴⁰ In Bulgaria, by the late 1970s, 80 percent of all economically active women worked in the paid labor force, and in 1988 women represented 49.9 percent of the workforce in the country.⁴¹

The sustained employment of women during state socialism unmistakably, and in some senses radically, altered women's subjectivities and improved their social position. Involvement in the world of work functioned as a source of self-respect not based on traditional female roles in the family, gave rise to new social relationships and reciprocal commitment among women, and to some extent between women and men, and it generated social and economic security on low, albeit improving, levels.⁴² A sociological study on Bulgarian working women from the late 1970s showed that 90 percent of the women interviewed thought that women should be present in the labor market (for women with university degrees the share was 98 percent).⁴³ Yet at the same time paid work, once again, did not make women independent and equal. Women's work continued to be devalued and most women worked at jobs that had lower pay and status than men's. The labor market remained largely segregated and stratified by gender. Some feminist economists have argued that definitions of "skill" itself is saturated by sexual bias; that is, the fact that a certain kind of work is performed by women may mark it as unskilled and unimportant.⁴⁴ In Budapest in the early 1970s, 40 percent of male workers were classified as skilled, compared with only 15 percent of female workers; women were heavily concentrated in low-paid, "unskilled" sectors of the labor market. In 1980, women outnumbered men in leading positions in a few sectors, but they remained heavily underrepresented in others, including national-level public administration, where only 16 percent of leadership positions were occupied by women.⁴⁵

Because the burden of domestic work continued to fall primarily on women, full-time work in the factory and the office meant continuous hardship for many women (and their families), mainly because services to assist women in coping with the burden of paid work (such as public transportation, day care facilities, readily available processed food, etc.) were insufficient and their expansion was delayed unlike the increasing proportion of women working in full time jobs.⁴⁶ The inherent tension between women's

‘emancipation’ through their participation in the paid labor market and pro-natalist party politics formed another element of the ambiguous experience of women with state socialism.⁴⁷

Some historians have argued that women’s participation in paid labor under socialism was not simply imposed by ‘the system’, but was actively negotiated by women themselves. For example, a recent study of three different groups of female workers in Poland demonstrates how one group mobilized both traditional notions of family and their new identities as socialist workers to improve working conditions and the circumstances of social reproduction, while in another city ‘regulated work hours, leisure time, and relatively limited domestic tasks’ allowed young female migrants from the countryside ‘to explore the pleasures of being a woman to a greater extent than in a rural setting.’⁴⁸ Such research demonstrates working women’s agency under state socialism, but it has not yet provoked a more general re-conceptualization of that system, which still tends to be understood as having been invariably ruled by an omnipotent state. Yet recent oral histories suggest that the policies and institutions socialist states used to mobilize women into the labor force played a role in shaping women workers’ agency and their relationship to party and state.⁴⁹

A second important question within the history of work under state socialism is the vexed relationship between formal gender equality and persistent ideas of gender difference in practice. Socialist governments officially proclaimed men and women legally equal, but they continued to promulgate policies dependent on notions of gender difference. Many historians agree that such policies worked to perpetuate women’s inferiority in the paid labor force and their gender-specific exploitation as unpaid labor.⁵⁰ For example, generous maternity leave policies were introduced in many East Central European state socialist countries beginning in the 1960s (e.g. Hungary 1967, Bulgaria 1968, Poland 1968, Czechoslovakia 1970), followed by the Soviet Union in the 1970s.⁵¹ On one hand, these policies eased women’s infamous “double burden” of being expected to pursue full-time paid occupations while discharging the full-time duties of raising a family. On the other, they also supported a traditionally gendered division of labor in the family in line with inherited patriarchal or male interest, since generally only women took advantage of childcare leave even after it was made legally available to men too. Yet at least in some countries a discourse of more egalitarian gender relations remained strong. In Bulgaria, even during the pro-natalist campaign of the 1980s, officials envisioned fathers, grand-mothers and grand-fathers taking advantage of the “maternity” leave.⁵²

These kinds of policies did not affect all women in the same ways. New forms of maternity leave common in the 1980s enhanced differences among women. In Hungary, Roma, women living in rural areas, and women with low-skilled jobs were clearly discriminated against in the new system of maternity leave because of their lower level of integration into paid labor relative to other women.⁵³ On the other hand, for many Roma in Hungary and Bulgaria (and other countries), bearing children was often the only legal way to acquire the money necessary for mere survival. But discrimination extended to pro-natalist policies as well. Measures introduced in Bulgaria in the 1960s to increase the birthrate were explicitly directed towards the ethnic Bulgarian population alone.⁵⁴

Law and citizenship

Historians of legal and political history have generally described the period between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries as gradually bringing more equality to the citizens of a given nation or territory. However, this perspective has, implicitly or (less often) explicitly, concentrated on men alone—so much so that until very recently historians have talked about ‘universal suffrage’ when they were really referring only to universal male suffrage, to give but one example. Broadening our perspective to include both women and men challenges the idea of a rocky, but eventually successful road to legal equality. As compared to the eighteenth century, in the nineteenth century legal differences between women and men became even more pronounced in quite a number of areas. Campaigns to create more egalitarian legal codes for both women and men were often fiercely resisted by supporters of traditional patriarchal values well into the twentieth century. However, because high-quality and comparative research into the gendered social-legal history of East Central Europe remains rare, it is difficult to make any generalizing claims about the region, either relative to the West or among the sub-regions or lands of East Central Europe.

During the “long nineteenth century,” forms of gender inequality rooted in older legal traditions often continued through a system of legal pluralism (i.e. the existence of multiple legal systems within one territory and governing different groups of people and branches of law) and the creation of new civil law codes solidified gender hierarchies in new ways. In addition, the legal status of women varied widely among different groups between and within states over long periods of time, and in the many different areas of civil and criminal law.

Civil law in East Central Europe was influenced by various secular legal systems – French, Italian, German and Russian – as well as by the canon law of different Christian denominations. In particular, the (in)famous French *Code Civil* of 1804, referred to as the *Code Napoléon* from 1807, the Italian *Codice civile* and the Swiss *Zivilgesetzbuch*, greatly influenced the development of civil law in East Central Europe. These new civil law codes did not always depart significantly from eighteenth century customary laws or traditions, but they did entrench and deepen a hierarchical conception of the family within the law. The influential French *Code Civil* was greatly informed by pre-revolutionary customary law and based around a typically bourgeois conception of the family, where the male head of the household was the family’s sole legal person and citizen. The legal regulations contained in it increasingly functioned as a “bastion of relationships of authority and dependency that came close to resembling the Middle Ages.”⁵⁵ A similar legal vision of the family worked its way into civil law codes around the region of East Central Europe. The Austrian *Allgemeine Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch* (General Civil Code) of 1812 remained unchanged in its gender regulations until 1914, when it finally became easier for women to assume legal guardianship of their own children; this was imperative especially for unwed mothers who wished to establish legal paternity and claim material support for their child. Other discriminatory regulations from the 1812 civil code remained intact in some Habsburg successor states even beyond 1914. According to

these laws, a husband (or father) had the right to make all decisions on behalf of his family; he had absolute rights over all of the couple's property, including all assets they had acquired during marriage. When a marriage was dissolved, in many cases women were deprived of the material status the family had enjoyed earlier.⁵⁶ In a similar vein, the Serbian civil code prescribed the far-reaching subordination of women to men in family and marriage law and deprived women of inheritance rights.⁵⁷ Lacking legal and financial autonomy, a wife (especially one from the lower-middle and middle classes) was dependent on her husband and thus women were, in effect, chained to the institution of marriage.

The picture was somewhat different under Ottoman law. For the eighteenth century some scholars have argued that women's property rights were particularly strong under Muslim law, and that in the Ottoman territories Christian and Jewish women in considerable numbers sought recourse to Muslim courts for this reason. Strongly cautioning against assuming any general legal advantage of women in the West over women in the East, or the other way around, Hunt presents an extremely complex picture of women's property and inheritance rights, underlining difference related to civil status, class status, and religion.⁵⁸

These Ottoman-era traditions were often eroded as new Balkan nation-states created their own legal systems, which emulated Western European (often French) legal codes. Some recent studies argue that at the end of Ottoman rule Greek women had strong social and economic power within the family and community thanks to their inalienable property in the form of their dowry. After the 1821-1829 war of independence, however, the Greek government introduced procedures that increased the monetization of family property, and little by little diminished women's inherited social and economic status.⁵⁹ Thus, although according to prevailing Roman law, marriage did not prevent women from owning their own property and income, the ruling 'principle of men's supremacy' recognized men's full authority over all members and things of the household.⁶⁰ In the neighboring Bulgarian nation state, women and men were not treated equally in several aspects of civil law: inheritance laws favored male children and wives could not engage in economic activity without the approval of their husbands, nor did they have rights to the custody of their children.⁶¹ The inheritance law passed in Bulgaria in 1890 stipulated the equal division of landed property among both male and female children of the household, seemingly an advance for women. *De facto*, however, this regulation was neglected almost everywhere and women continued to be disinherited. A 1906 amendment to the law privileged male heirs by allowing them to inherit twice as much as their sisters. In reality up until the 1930s women in the countryside very often relinquished their lawful shares 'of their own free will'.⁶²

Following the 1867 Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich*, Hungary gained domestic legal sovereignty and repudiated Austrian civil law. After this, its civil law was decided through a complicated patchwork of pre-1848 law, case and customary law, and some new reforms, including the introduction of civil marriage in 1895. Civil marriage was not legalized elsewhere in the region before 1918 or even in some cases before 1945, as was the case in Bulgaria.⁶³ Because of this lack of uniform national legislation, at

least some Hungarian women, depending on social status and religious affiliation, were in a better position to make legal claims than to their Austrian counterparts.⁶⁴

In a number of other countries, the interwar period brought some reform of marriage and family law codes. The Romanian civil code, first issued in 1864, was revised and made less discriminatory in 1932, although both the 1932 and the 1937 codes continued to prohibit the determination of paternity for illegitimate children (except in the case of rape, seduction, or if the mother cohabited with the father of the child).⁶⁵ In the newly independent Czechoslovakia, modernizing marriage law and equalizing the civil status of women was regarded a symbol of the progressiveness of the young state. However, male anxiety and a policy that protected family unity limited the progress made towards civil equality between women and men.⁶⁶ In independent Poland dominant political forces regarded the creation of a unified civil law that included active citizenship for women as an instrument of nation-building, uniting the Catholic Polish majority and ethnic and religious minorities under a common legal roof. In this context, the reform of 1921 allowed married women control over their personal property and the right to appear in court. Yet further reform aspirations foundered on a traditionalist defense of the patriarchal family unit and the continued power of the Catholic Church, whose supporters blocked, among other things, obligatory civil marriage.⁶⁷

In the arena of political rights, new gender asymmetries emerged during the “long nineteenth century” after the model of the French Revolution where women were excluded from citizenship at the very moment that political citizenship came into being.⁶⁸ This development stands in sharp tension with the findings of masculinist scholarship, which has largely focused on the process of increasing male political inclusion. In the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy, women were denied the right to form or belong to political organizations long after men had acquired it; the same was true for the Polish lands under German rule, where women were denied this right until 1908. In dualist Hungary and in various Southeastern European states, however, women could participate in political organizations.⁶⁹ The development of suffrage laws in Austria in the second half of the nineteenth century provides another example of how discrimination against women evolved in the very course of expanding men’s political rights. There, wealthy, property-holding or tax-paying women had long possessed voting rights at the local or crownland (region) level. But when the suffrage for Reichsrat elections was gradually extended to middle and lower class men beginning in 1873, women were completely excluded on the grounds of their female sex. In parallel, in view of this new “model,” wealthy women’s longstanding voting rights on crownland and local levels were gradually abrogated so that by 1907, when (nearly) general male suffrage was introduced, these previously enfranchised women had lost many of their traditional voting rights, while at the same time being excluded from new political rights based on gender rather than estate.⁷⁰

World War One, a watershed in women’s suffrage, marked the end of the hermetic exclusion of women from passive (i.e. right to be elected) as well as active (i.e. right to vote) voting rights in many countries. However this breakthrough was not universal. Women gained suffrage rights in Estonia and Lithuania with the Russian Revolution of 1917 and kept their voting rights after independence without

further political struggle. In Poland and Czechoslovakia women were granted general equal suffrage in the constitutions of those newly-independent nation-states. In Hungary, suffrage was extended to women during the short-lived socialist republic of 1919; however, an added gendered discrimination clause banned illiterate women (but not men) from voting. During the 1920s new gendered suffrage regulations prevented many more Hungarian women from voting; for example the age limit for the active vote was raised to 30 years for women (except those with a university degree) whereas for men it was 24, and while for men four years of elementary schooling were required for women it was six years (the latter did not apply to married women with at least three children and to female heads of household living from their own income).⁷¹ Romanian women were granted voting rights in local elections in 1929 and in parliamentary elections with the new constitution of 1938, but with restrictions in both cases. Only women above the age of 21, with secondary education or vocational training, employed by the state or leading civic organizations, who were war widows, and those who had received decorations were granted the right to vote and to be elected in local elections. In parliamentary elections, only women above the age of 30 had the right to vote for the Chamber of Deputies, and only those above 40 could stand for election or vote for the Senate.⁷² In 1937, legally married Bulgarian women who were mothers achieved the right to participate in local elections. But while voting was obligatory for men, it was optional for women. With the restoration of the constitution in 1938 (which had been suspended after a *coup d'état* in 1934), the new electoral law defined 'all Bulgarian subjects' above 21 years of age as potential voters, but women could exercise that right only 'if married, divorced or widowed'. Nor could women, regardless of marital status, stand for election to national office.⁷³ Although women had been promised voting rights within the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), Yugoslav women did not gain access to the ballot box before the end of World War Two, despite several campaigns organized by the interwar women's movement in support of women's suffrage. In Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia, general equal suffrage was implemented only as a consequence of World War Two and the political changes that followed.⁷⁴

Lastly, changes made to criminal codes in the pre-socialist era expanded the state's purview over female bodies. The secularization of criminal law in the nineteenth century typically resulted in the criminalization of abortion. In the Ottoman Empire, the expansion of secular criminal law was associated with its complete prohibition.⁷⁵ In Austria, the Josephinian Criminal Code of 1787 introduced the draconian punishment of up to five years imprisonment for abortion. This secular innovation marked a change from earlier Catholic canon law, which had morally condemned and punished abortion, but defined it in a more limited fashion. Under the Catholic statutes, abortion was the termination of an "ensouled" fetus—this occurred forty days after conception if the fetus was male and eighty days if it was female. In Hungary, by contrast, continued legal pluralism in effect took precedence until after the Compromise of 1867, over repeated endeavors to introduce Austrian criminal law. The Hungarian Criminal Code of 1878 did include abortion, punishing married women with up to three years in jail for

terminating a pregnancy. However, abortion committed by an unwed woman was considered a lesser crime, without as strict a punishment.⁷⁶

If we consider the entire period up to 1945, it is still difficult to judge whether the expansion of modern legal systems improved women's legal position or whether it created new disadvantages to surmount. In particular, historians need to consider the variations in women's legal status according to estate or other group differences in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and examine how changes in legal systems affected different groups of women. The continued relevance of legal pluralism also needs to be investigated more systematically.

The advent of socialism unquestionably brought the single most important historical rupture in women's legal status. Socialism removed the props of women's earlier legal subordination and equalized the legal status of women and men throughout Eastern Europe. All of the region's post-1945 constitutions guaranteed economic, social and political gender equality. In the case of Yugoslavia, women had achieved many elements of equal status in practical terms already during the war, by means of their participation in armed struggle.⁷⁷ Other reforms were soon to follow. In Hungary, a new law on marriage, family and guardianship was introduced in 1952, establishing the principle of 'equal rights for women in marriage and family life' and abolishing the legal discrimination of children born out of wedlock.⁷⁸ In all state-socialist countries, all or nearly all professions and occupations were opened to women, the right to identical labor conditions was declared, equality in suffrage was granted, and legal barriers against the full integration of women in public life were removed. Women's full legal emancipation and equality was the slogan of the day and in many areas it was indeed realized.

At the same time, state socialism was less of a rupture in terms of socio-legal individualization than earlier research has often assumed. Laws did not challenge women's assumed roles as wives and mothers. Instead, socialist leaders wanted to stabilize the family as a locus of social reproduction and to use men's and (especially) women's reproductive and domestic labor to realize the state socialist project of economic catching-up and modernization. With this came increased state intervention and surveillance of the family.⁷⁹ In addition, legal equality between men and women was far from being an absolute socialist principle; some socialist policies rested on or re-created gendered legal differences, as mentioned above. Nevertheless, state socialism on the whole did much more to abolish the legal subordination of both married and single women than the pluralist governments of Western Europe. Together with other elements of a rapidly changing gender regime, this legal progress contributed to the development of major tensions and struggles in the private, civil, and political realms of life over gender relations and their desirable development, some of which will be discussed in the section on gendered scripts of sexualities and intimate relationships below.

Empire, nation, ethnicity

The concepts and methods of gender history, which insist that gender itself is not a natural given, but something that is historically constructed and changes over time and place, are useful tools for

considering the history of nationalism and nationalist movements. They suggest that we need to also consider national identities as historically constructed and diverse. If malleable constructions of gender have been a significant element of nationalisms in the region, then in turn these same nationalisms have to be re-conceptualized as socio-cultural and political constructs, subject to historical circumstances, and shaped by diverse and at times conflicting agency. In East Central Europe, these two categories of identity have been intimately intertwined and in many cases rely on each other. Accordingly, gender historians have examined the intersection of gender with categories of national, ethnic and religious belonging. Gender historians have shown how women were co-opted into nationalist movements, how gender was mobilized within and for various national and ethnic enterprises and how this engagement changed over time.⁸⁰ Their work has also investigated the role of gender in national struggle, war and violent confrontation. This research has produced a number of fundamental insights, altering our vision of the history of empires, nations, and ethnicity.

As mentioned in this chapter's section on education, the impact of nationalist ideologies on gender ideologies has been mixed. At times, nationalisms have helped to produce social and cultural practices that at least partly mitigated existing gender hierarchies or challenged gendered forms of political exclusion. An early example is the famous 1790 pamphlet of the 'Hungarian Mothers'—in fact penned by a man—which demanded the right for Hungarian noble women to participate 'as spectators' in the revived Hungarian Diet, described in the text as the 'temple of the homeland's felicity.' Arguing that women had a right and a duty to be involved in 'the affairs of the country,' this pamphlet forcefully argued that the revival of the Hungarian nation (still conceived as *natio*, or "nation" of the noble estate) within the absolutist Habsburg Empire needed to involve both women and men, albeit in a clearly unequal manner.⁸¹ There are similar sentiments in Polish national historiography and fiction from the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. These texts relied on notions of gender complementarity, which assigned men and women essentially different, but equally necessary and active, roles in the national community. In this way, nationalist ideology helped to construct a new socio-cultural and political space for women within Polish nationalism that transgressed the boundaries of a strictly circumscribed private sphere. While staying within the framework of gender complementarity, this discourse recast traditional female roles in ways that made it possible for women to be involved in the national struggle of divided Poland, if in distinctly feminine ways.⁸²

Typically, women were portrayed as the patriotic mothers and daughters of the nation. They were supposed to support men in their struggles unselfishly, seek education in order to educate their children or the community's children for the good of the nation, epitomize the appropriate national spirit through their dress and behavior, and take part in various national cultural activities.⁸³ It was to educate women to be good mothers of the nation that the Czech national movement of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries proudly promoted educational opportunities for girls and women, resulting among other things in the establishment of the first women's gymnasium in Prague mentioned earlier.⁸⁴ The largely German-speaking Jewish population of Prague pursued highly gendered strategies of adapting the

community to changing circumstances. As Prague gradually became dominated by Czech-speakers, this community began to favor Czech-language schooling for boys and German-language schooling for girls.⁸⁵ Jewish boys would thus learn the language that would help them assimilate into the growing Czech-language public world of business and politics, while the girls would serve as the bearers of tradition and embody continuity within the Jewish community. In southern East Central Europe as a whole, patriotic motherhood was seen as a woman's form of citizenship and the education of mothers was constructed here following the national obligation model of eighteenth century France, where the revolutionary notion of mother-educator gave women a new and quasi-public role which not only helped them to receive a more formal education but allowed woman activists to enlarge women's access to public roles as well.⁸⁶

As the political landscape changed, nationalist politics changed along with it. In the late nineteenth century, insurgent nationalists fighting for autonomy might look to women as additional resources for advancing the national cause. In trying to gain superior numbers and distinguish themselves from their rivals, they often welcomed women into the movement. So, they might even support women as equal political actors, as some Czech nationalists did by electing the female nationalist Božena Vitková-Kunětická to the Bohemian Diet in 1912 as a form of nationalist protest. But once the nation-state was achieved, such politics took on a different disposition. In the case of Czechoslovakia, enthusiasm for women's equality waned during the interwar period. Some Czech nationalists now argued that the real way to protect the nation was not by guaranteeing gender equality, but by protecting the traditional family.⁸⁷

In the twentieth century, nationalist policies often lacked any emancipatory dimension for women. Instead, they tended to reinforce oppressive hierarchical or asymmetrical notions of gender relations and some clearly served repressive and reactionary purposes. This was especially true during moments when new forms of national domination were imposed by force of arms, such as in Hungary in 1919, when the short-lived Communist regime of Béla Kun (the 'reds') battled with nationalist counter-revolutionaries (or 'whites') for control of the country. Representatives of both the red and the white camps tried to tar their opponents by accusing them of promoting gender disorder. On 'both sides of the political divide women were considered symbolic representations of their community: either the Christian National cause or the emancipatory revolutionary movement'. For the white nationalists, protecting the nation became synonymous with protecting the traditional gender order. They identified women's equality with their socialist opponents and saw it as a threat to the nation. 'Both sides ... emphasized rapes committed by the enemy in their rhetoric to highlight this general sexual pathology'.⁸⁸ In interwar Romania, nationalists influenced by eugenic discourse aggressively argued that the women's movement and feminism were based on selfish ideas about women's individualism that ignored women's larger social and reproductive destiny and were harmful to the interest of the nation.⁸⁹ Such (neo)traditionalist, anti-individualist and at times eugenicist ideas about women existed in other East Central European societies, such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia, as well.⁹⁰

It is tempting to want to see a general trend, where East Central European nationalist movements began as more supportive of women's rights and became more reactionary as they gained power. Yet, it is difficult to generalize. In many territories, developments were highly complex. In Russian Estonia, for instance, the Estonian national movement struggled against the local German-speaking elites to have at least elementary schooling overseen by the more secular Russian public authorities. This was achieved in the 1880s. The Estonian national interest in fostering girls' education was clearly limited, but the Russification of schooling happened more slowly for girls than for boys.⁹¹ In the Polish lands ruled by Russia and the Habsburg Empire, and later in the independent Polish state, the access of some Jewish girls and women to secular education was furthered through a complicated interplay of factors, including the exclusion of Jewish girls from traditional religious education and the secondary role Jewish women had compared to men in maintaining religious institutions and culture.⁹²

Much of the literature on gender and nationalism focuses on national movements aiming for more rights and autonomy within a larger empire or state, or for national independence. One area that deserves more attention is the connection between gender and dominant or 'state-owning' nations. Indeed, the historiography on gender in East Central Europe (and in Western Europe, too) has been selective in its attention to the connection between gender and nation. Historians have tended to be much less interested in analyzing the link between the two categories when their narratives centered on the dominant national groups within empires and nation-states. If, however, both historical actors and historians have been silent on the subject, it is not because nationalisms have not been gendered. It is rather because historical narratives have given preference to the category of nation over the category of gender. Germans in Austria, Hungarians in the Kingdom of Hungary after 1867 (or even in the People's Republic of Hungary), Czechs in interwar Czechoslovakia, or Bulgarians in independent Bulgaria clearly exerted dominance over the other national or ethnic groups populating 'their' states. Women's organizations representing 'Hungary' or 'Austria' in international organizations before 1914 were clearly dominated by Hungarians and German-Austrians respectively, despite the fierce resistance of Czech women to this practice. Ethnic Bulgarian women, within the bourgeois nation-state (1878-1944) and especially during state socialism (1944-1989), believed in their 'cultural mission' among Muslim—both ethnic Turkish and Pomak—women, and undertook state orchestrated measures in order to raise the 'cultural level' of these Muslim women.⁹³

Racialized practices of national identification and racialized policies of domination became especially virulent in wartime and during periods of violent confrontation between ethnic groups. World War Two in particular brought extermination and radicalized population politics in which 'race' took precedent over gender⁹⁴ But racist ideologies and policies also relied on notions of gender relations and were enforced and enacted in gendered ways. German women were sent to occupied Poland in the service of the Nazi regime not only to enforce the social distance between Germans on one hand and Poles and Jews on the other, but indeed to destroy Polish nationhood. Their task was both explicitly gendered—to mother the German community—and racist—to exclude Poles and Jews from the German nation.

Because their work took place within a ‘womanly sphere of action’, it served to naturalize racial segregation and violence, allowing those categorized as Germans to simply blot out any awareness of the plight of the non-German population.⁹⁵

Gendered scripts of sexualities and intimate relationships

Sexuality and intimate relationships are closely intertwined with the history of gender and gender relations. The ways in which women and men experienced or thought about sexuality varied by many factors, including class, race, and religion. We can, however, identify some common assumptions and normative prescriptions about both male and female sexuality and intimate relationships that span the various Christian and Ottoman civilizations of East Central Europe. We refer to these common sets of assumptions and prescriptions as gendered scripts of sexuality and intimate relationships. These scripts have shaped society and culture throughout modernity in many ways. In this section we highlight three important dimensions of these scripts: how reference to sexuality, masculinity and femininity contributed to creating the dominant cultural imaginary; the ways in which women’s lives were sexualized in gender-specific ways; and the hegemony of a ‘classically’ gendered model of heterosexuality, which was sustained by marginalizing and persecuting non-dominant sexualities and sexual behaviors.

One of the fundamental precepts of gender history is that gender is a primary way of signifying power relations. In any given cultural imaginary, gender provides one way of understanding and symbolizing power and that is why political discourses often rely on gendered and sexualized imagery. In East Central Europe, as elsewhere, debates over what constituted “right,” “wrong,” “worthy” or “unworthy” femininities and masculinities lay at the heart of many political debates. One example comes from political conflicts within the Jewish community in interwar Poland. Here, conflicts over political philosophy were encapsulated in debates over what constituted a “good” or powerful masculinity. Some Polish Zionists identified the Yiddish language and Yiddish culture with weakness and femaleness. For them, male lifestyles rooted in traditional Yiddish culture represented an effeminate masculinity; they even linked the Yiddish-speaking labor organization the *Bund* with this effeminacy. In contrast, Polish Zionists identified the Hebrew language with a strong, “muscular,” male Jewishness. Some *Bundists* in turn did not hesitate to mobilize a discourse which in masculinist terms pointed to (their) Jewish socialist class identity as transgressing difference between Jews and non-Jews and ascribed a Jewish inferiority complex to the Zionists. At the same time, the Jewish women’s journal *Ewa* advocated a highly modernist vision of egalitarian and ‘rationalized’ partnerships between women and men within an open-ended Zionist horizon.⁹⁶

Debates on female prostitution in South Eastern Europe, or male taxonomies of, and stereotypes about, women in the Habsburg empire were similarly multi-layered and exemplify how the symbolic order was permeated by sexualized imaginary in a highly gendered manner. .At a time when there was a decline of the “collective charisma of the West” (Oswald Spengler), debates over prostitution in southern East Central Europe were simultaneously debates on the question of Balkan nationalism and

modernization (westernization, Europeanization). Bulgarian discourse on prostitution in the early twentieth century associated ‘European civilization’, which was said to have more recently arrived in the country, with the spread of prostitution: ‘dissolute life’ escalated, ‘lewdness’ increased, ‘people’s morals’ decayed and prostitution reached its apogee, especially in the capital and the big cities. Thus the modern urban context and urban way of life—in principle a diverse social space—was equated in peasant Bulgaria with the ‘reprobate’ influence of Western modernity and civilization.⁹⁷ In the Habsburg Empire, discourses which mobilized sexual stereotypes about women and men of different nationalities served to create or challenge national difference and superiority or to promote interethnic co-operation. Hungarian women ‘who engage[d] in certain behaviors’ were ‘sanctioned as unpatriotic, not merely as vain coquettes’; ‘Czechs accepted that Hungarian women were beautiful but sought to claim that this beauty was “really” Slavic;’ desiring ‘male subjects were frequently associated with political agency and political structures, such as the kingdom of Hungary’, and ‘the desire to show respect to other members of the same “political nation” informed the descriptions of foreign sexuality, particularly the sexuality of foreign men.’⁹⁸

Sexualized and sexualizing treatment of women in many, and often unexpected, realms of life formed a second important element of the gendered scripts of sexuality and intimate relationships. In many cases, women’s actual social situation and needs were discussed and handled in a gender-specific sexualizing manner. Women’s poverty was often viewed through such a sexualized lens. For instance, poor women wandering the streets of pre-1914 Budapest or Prague were considered ‘prostitutes’ by default and accordingly treated as ‘fallen women’ who did not deserve any support due to their incurably weak morality. Their male peers, by contrast, were considered ‘vagrants’ and ‘beggars’ and thus legitimate recipients of poor relief, which was constructed with reference to social and criminal categories that did not refer to sexuality at all.⁹⁹ More well-known is the fact that the socio-cultural norms governing agrarian communities well into the twentieth century aimed to control the sexuality of unmarried girls and young women by ‘protecting’ them from sexual activity before marriage. This ‘protection’ was considered a means to preserve their female sexual honor, the loss of which would destroy a young women’s overall respectability and status whereas behavioral norms for young men did not contain such sexualized restrictions. Daughters of the more wealthy strata were often more strictly monitored, but the consequences of becoming pregnant could be more severe for poorer girls. Behavioral norms for youth in Hungarian village society clearly expressed these corresponding gender differences. ‘While the majority of the norms regarding the girls focused on what they were not to do, from the young men the village expected that their presence should be noticeable.’¹⁰⁰ In Bulgarian pseudoscientific texts—some of them published in authoritative ‘scholarly’ journals such as *Filosofski pregled* (Philosophical Review) in the 1930s—women were presented as entirely dominated by their reproductive ‘functions’ and their supposedly inferior, intuitive, irrational and impulsive ‘nature’.¹⁰¹ In these and other ways, women were described either as having no history (with history constructed as opposed to a ‘natural’ state of being), or

their history was constructed as being entirely dominated by their 'nature' and sexuality. It can be argued, then, that the social history of women as a whole was sexualized in a highly gender-specific manner.¹⁰²

Third, dominant gendered scripts of intimate relations have consistently devalued and thoroughly controlled heterosexual women for centuries, just as they marginalized and discriminated against all individuals and groups whose gendered life style and sexual practices did not conform to prescribed values and norms. Male sexual control and domination of women has been a key feature of this gender order. Within the framework of the classical sexual double standard, heterosexual men enjoyed much more sexual liberty and sexual agency was seen as a fundamentally male prerogative. Among Christian populations women were defined to a large extent by reference to rigid standards of monogamous heterosexual behavior, and traditional Christian morality in this way was far more tolerant towards men's sexual transgressions than those of women. Among Muslim populations in southern East Central Europe during the Ottoman period, polygamy was a socially recognized norm and (at least in the eighteenth century) practiced especially by prosperous men.¹⁰³

Throughout the modern period, including the period of state socialism, those who transgressed accepted sexual norms were harshly persecuted. Instances of transgressive female sexuality, such as same-sex relations, unwed motherhood and prostitution, were publicly condemned in East Central European societies, and women's 'frivolous' behavior was denounced and persecuted for undermining the social order. There are many individual examples from different time periods. They hold in common a drive to punish women and men who deviated from the dominant sexual standards. In the eighteenth century, wives who were found to have committed adultery in Hungary had to forfeit all their property. Male adultery faced no such punishment in any of the Christian or Muslim regimes in the region.¹⁰⁴ A study based on an analysis of more than 3,500 court cases of 'fornication' in eighteenth century rural Greater Hungary shows that maidservants in particular were sexually vulnerable. Their attempts to bargain with their sexuality, to achieve, for example, marriage with the son of their master, invariably failed. According to this study, the peasant society of the time conceived of homosexuality as witchcraft or magic rather than as an act concerned with sexual pleasure or fulfilment. In one exceptional case of documented same-sex relationships between peasant women, a widow found guilty of seducing a married woman (and said to have had other female partners too) was whipped and banished from the county. Her partner, who on top of 'fornication' was also found to be adulterous, received an even stricter punishment. She was to be whipped and imprisoned for a year.¹⁰⁵ In Slovakian villages during the era of mass male emigration, when men might be away from their homes for long periods, married women with absent husbands were punished and condemned by the community for giving birth to so-called 'bastard children.' Unwed mothers were similarly humiliated; in some cases they 'were forced to walk around the church draped in a black sheet'.¹⁰⁶ Various Bulgarian texts asserted a double moral standard for men and women in marital life; spinsters were regarded as deviations from the norm, possessing peculiar bodily qualities which were seen as determining their social behavior. Prostitution was constructed as deriving

from women's intrinsic qualities ('natural sinfulness') so as to stigmatize female prostitutes as the source of evil.¹⁰⁷

Sexual subordination and violence within the 'classical' heterosexual relationship is another element of how the dominant gendered script of intimate relations controlled women. Legal records illuminate both accepted practices of sexual domination or gendered violence as well as strategies of resistance. In eighteenth century Wallachia, for example, the Orthodox Church was responsible for all civilian matters, including the life and good morals of married couples. An analysis of the relevant judicial sources reveals not only how marital contracts were negotiated, but also the extent to which divorces were granted with reference to specific socio-sexual practices: adultery, homosexuality, bigamy, promiscuity. Divorce was considered the last solution to a family crisis and not easily granted.¹⁰⁸ Divorce and separation cases brought to ecclesiastical as well as secular courts by Lithuanian peasants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries demonstrate how women successfully resisted particular types of violent practices of their partners which both the women themselves and in many cases the responsible authorities considered illegitimate. In these cases, women managed to put an end to excessively unloving and unsatisfactory marital relationships, whereas male strategies 'were always based on seeking control over women'.¹⁰⁹

For a long time women did not have an openly political language to address sexual subordination and heteronormativity critically. But they gradually developed alternative strategies to raise their voices. By the early twentieth century, writers such as Polish authors Narcyza Żmichowska (1819-1876) and Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841-1910), Czech writers Eliška Krásnohorská (1847-1926), Božena Němcová (1820?-1862), Teréza Nováková (1853-1912) and Karolina Světlá (1830-1899), Hungarian authors such as Emma Ritóok (1868-1945) and Anna Szederkényi (1882-1948), or Vela Blagoeva (1858-1921) and Anna Karima (1871-1949) in Bulgaria, and Jelena Dimitrijević (1862-1945) in Serbia had developed a variety of literary strategies to address male sexual violence as well as female heterosexual and homoerotic desire and identity.¹¹⁰ Women's and gender historians have recently studied this literary production as well as women's ego-documents, such as diaries or letters, in order to restore to the historical record women's own critique of the dominant gendered script of sexuality and intimate relationships.

Women who resisted the monogamous heterosexual gendered social order of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found refuge in their own communities, which ranged from the religious to the feminist. One example is the network of woman activists in Zagreb around 1900 which Natascha Vittorelli has (re-)constructed using a specific computer software program. Analysing around 70 articles in which women of this group—which included women as diverse as a proponent of 'national needlework' and the well-known writer and feminist Zofka Kveder—paid tribute to each other, Vittorelli found that the most central figure of the network, Jagoda Truhelka, was most closely related to one 'former teacher and later confidant' and to one other woman 'with whom she run a common household for 30 years'. More generally, the network was strongly shaped by the relationships among teachers of the

first public provisional secondary school for girls and between teachers and former pupils. Missing links and absences allow for speculation about past conflicts and ongoing loyalties in this community.¹¹¹

Under state-socialism, male sexual domination and heteronormative values seem to have been largely preserved, although the extent of change under is still being debated. Some authors claim that male prerogatives, traditional masculine identities and behavioral patterns, and practices of male domestic violence were barely challenged under socialism, providing ‘a point of convergence between Western democratic and state socialist systems’. Prosecutors in state socialist Poland, Hungary and Romania often declined to punish domestic violence cases, casting the offenses as ‘either an act of male self-defense or an understandable loss of self-control in the face of a wife’s “provocation”.’¹¹² There were, however, at least some efforts to adapt male behavior into a more ‘modern’ and partnership-like gender order. Slovenian sex-manuals, for instance, called upon men to unlearn their inherited patriarchal attitudes and to become more attentive to, among other things, women’s post-coital needs. But such an attitude was not in evidence everywhere in the region. Romanian ‘sexperts’ naturalized and reified inherited insensitive masculinist sexual conduct.¹¹³ In Bulgaria, sexual behavior that deviated from the norms of heterosexual relations and procreation within marriage—as for example was the case with single mothers—was characterized as ‘anomalous’. Abortion became an extremely widespread ‘method’ of family planning in many Eastern European states during state socialism, a fact that speaks, among other things, to the lack of sexual self-determination of women.¹¹⁴ During the 1960s, however, with the explicitly felt demographic problems, restrictive anti-abortion measures were introduced by the governments throughout the region, the most repressive, Draconian reproductive policies being implemented by the Ceausescu's regime in Romania.¹¹⁵

From the relatively limited research on the history of sexuality in East Central Europe, it appears that the dominant gendered scripts of sexualities and intimate relations were pervasive and had a significant influence on the region’s society and culture. However, the the field is too premature for us to draw more far-reaching conclusions about how these norms and expectations changed over time, how sexual norms shaped the experience of individuals in different epochs and places, or the sociocultural and legal mechanisms that worked to ensure conformity with these norms.

Women’s activism and women’s movements

Throughout the modern era, women in East Central Europe participated in activism at local, national, regional and international levels. In this section, we concentrate on organizations created by and for women. While many women’s organizations had the goal of improving women’s lives in some fashion, these groups were very diverse: they sprang from a wide variety of political perspectives and were related to various other political projects, including nationalism and socialism. It is therefore impossible to speak of a single women’s movement during any period of the history of East Central Europe. Instead, as was the case elsewhere, there were many women’s movements and many forms of women’s public and political activism.

The history of women's public activism in East Central Europe reaches back well into the period before 1848. In greater Hungary, the tradition of Protestant aristocratic women publishing their own poetry dates back to the seventeenth century. The first public debate on women's proper role in public life in Hungary took place in the columns of a monthly journal in the 1820s. Around this same time, women from various denominational and ethnic backgrounds (Jews included) established a number of charitable associations, most of which did philanthropic and educational work. Women also played an important role in establishing the first kindergartens in Hungary. Promoting Hungarianness became another key area of women's public engagement in the 1840s, especially and increasingly for middle-class women. During this period, a few Slovakian women also began to engage in nationalist activism by writing and promoting education in their mother-tongue, building amateur theatres, and organizing temperance societies in the countryside. Women belonging to the German-speaking Saxon community in Transylvania formed their own organizations as well, in close connection with the Saxon Evangelic National Church (of Transylvania).¹¹⁶

During the revolutionary year of 1848, women's activism often became more directly political. On 6 April 1848, a group of young girls studying in a private institute in Pest, Hungary, established by aristocrat Blanka Teleki (1806–1862), wrote a proclamation demanding access to higher education and woman suffrage, both of which had been explicitly ruled out in the revolutionary 'April laws' of 1848. These laws eliminated the limited rights of political representation that noble women, especially widows, had possessed due to their status as noble women in the pre-1848 period.

After a short break during the neo-absolutist period of the 1850s, women's associations in the Kingdom of Hungary began to proliferate during the period of liberalization in the early 1860s. The decades prior to the 1890s saw the foundation of a whole range of denominational and non-denominational philanthropic and social aid associations all over the country, with Jewish women's organizations again prominent among them. In the 1860s and 1870s, associations aimed at the promotion of women's education were established and began to publicly agitate for their cause and several important women's journals started publication. The strong focus on education was not surprising, if we keep in mind that education functioned as a key 'gate-keeper' against women's autonomy and upward mobility. Beginning in the 1890s, women's organizations devoted more explicitly to women's emancipation were founded. Some of these espoused an ideology of gender equality, arguing that men and women deserved equal rights and opportunities. Others insisted on the value of gender difference, envisioning a future complementary gender order where women's difference would be socially and politically valued, rather than deprecated and punished. All these organizations worked to improve the legal status of women within and beyond the family, expand women's educational and professional opportunities and, especially for the equality-oriented organizations, achieve women's suffrage. Social-Democratic women established their own organizations, insisting that while women's equality was important, class emancipation was the real way to solve the so-called Woman Question (the debate over women's proper role in society and politics). Catholic organizations carried out important work as well. The *Szociális Missziótársulat* (Social

Mission Society), built in 1908 as a votive sisterhood midway between a religious order and a civil association, soon developed into the most professional and advanced organization of female social work for women.¹¹⁷

Because these organizations were culturally Hungarian and thus implicitly associated with the dominant nationality in the Hungarian Kingdom, women of different ethnic or national groups often formed their own associations. The all-Romanian organization *Reuniunea Femeilor Române* (Romanian Women's Society) was established in 1850 in Braşov (Brassó, Kronstadt). Beginning in the 1860s, branches were built in a number of Transylvanian cities, and in 1913 a federation named *Uniunea tuturor Reuniunilor femeilor române* (The Union of all Romanian Women's Reunion) was established.¹¹⁸ Some Jewish women participated in Hungarian-language groups, especially the egalitarian and socialist women's organizations described above, and a few became key leaders. Other Jewish women preferred to take part in specifically Jewish associations, both mixed-sex and single-sex. In the Slovak territories, *Živena*, named after an ancient Slavic Goddess of life, was established in 1869 at the initiative of male nationalists. It became the organizational center for women in the Slovak national revival movement. Its activists espoused the cause of women's education and closely co-operated with Czech women.¹¹⁹

Following the First World War, the most important pre-war women's associations lost most of their influence. In the very different conditions in Hungary, which had been reduced to approximately 30 percent of its former territory in 1920, the political landscape was characterized by the dominance of restrictive nationalism, anti-egalitarian politics, and mounting authoritarianism. These currents caused a substantial realignment of women's organizations and a re-direction of women's activism. Even though women had made substantial gains in the aftermath of the war, including suffrage, so-called "liberal-conservative" and progressive women's organizations lost much of their influence. While Catholic women's organizations continued to operate much as before, the new major umbrella organization for women in interwar Hungary, the *Magyar Asszonyok Nemzeti Szövetsége* (National Alliance of Hungarian Women), was right-wing nationalist, revisionist, and, especially in the early years, openly anti-Semitic. Over time, the group developed into a veritable mass organization, focusing primarily on improving women's position in higher and secondary education. In the 1930s, this organization's activities broadened to include championing the interests of working women and ultimately unsuccessful endeavors to defend existing suffrage regulations.¹²⁰

Before 1914, women's activism in Austria developed along largely similar lines as in Hungary, but here women's activism was more visibly divided along national lines. In addition to those organizations which claimed to be 'Austrian' and were predominantly German-Austrian, there were many separate Czech, Slovenian, Polish-Galician, and Ruthenian (Ukrainian) women's organizations. Non-German women, especially Czechs, insisted that they could not find true representation under an 'Austrian' aegis (i.e. one dominated by Germans) and sought an independent place in the international women's movement. In the years before World War One, separate Czech and Polish umbrella organizations or committees did gain separate representation in international women's organizations.¹²¹

As Social Democracy was far more influential in Austria than in Hungary, Social-Democratic women's organizations were also stronger and much more visible there.¹²²

During the interwar period, women's activism in the new states of Czechoslovakia and Poland had particular characteristics in common. The political culture of both countries, both of which had just gained independent statehood and aimed to build the newly independent nation, was, within limits, more conducive to liberal forms of women's activism. In Poland, although women gained equal political rights with men, women's involvement in politics remained very limited. Their activism took place in 'a large number of frequently ephemeral women's associations active in assorted fields of social life. As a rule these were domains traditionally reserved for women. ... Only a small group of such organizations described themselves as feminist.'¹²³

The trajectory of women's public activism in southern East Central Europe was similar in many ways to the history of women's activism in the Habsburg and post-Habsburg territories, but with a few distinctive differences. The first benevolent, philanthropic, and educational women's organizations were established already in the middle of the nineteenth century. The term 'feminist', was stigmatized in Greece as a 'foreign problem' and an 'apish imitation' of the 'a-social actions of unhinged women' from the developed but degenerate West. The word first appeared in Greek translation in 1873 as *gynaikofilai*, almost contemporaneously with its first use in French in 1872. Greek women activists of the late nineteenth century—Callirhoe Parren, for example—put a lot of effort into 'grecianizing' the term and, in order to legitimize it, included it in the national historical narrative. That is why Parren and her colleagues started to call themselves feminists at a relatively late date.¹²⁴ In Bulgarian socialist periodicals the notion of 'feminism' can be traced to the 1880s; it then appeared between 1893 and 1898 in a range of texts published in the first Bulgarian openly feminist journal *Zhenkii svijat* (Women's world), edited by Teodora Noeva.¹²⁵ National umbrella organizations of women started to appear at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. In Romania, the short-lived *Liga Femeilor* (Women's League) was formed in 1894. It was succeeded in 1910 by *Emanciparea Femeii* (Women's Emancipation), which evolved into the 'first long-lived Romanian women's organization to undertake a sustained suffragist campaign.' *Enosis ton Ellinidon* (Union of Greek Women) was established in 1896 and the first all-Bulgarian national women's organization *Bulgarski Zhenski Sujuz* (Bulgarian Women's Union) in 1901. The largest Serbian organizations before World War One were *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* (Circle of Serbian Sisters, 1903) and *Srpski Ženski Savez* (Serbian Women's Alliance, 1906), the latter was established to coordinate the activities of all Serbian women's organizations.¹²⁶

The interwar period brought the formation of new organizations and the restructuring of the women's movement across South Eastern Europe.¹²⁷ While many women's interwar organizations saw women's political emancipation as a secondary goal and concentrated their activities on humanitarian projects and 'social work,' still others continued to struggle for women's suffrage and full political citizenship and even managed to achieve some results. As already mentioned, in Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, for example, certain categories of women—under certain conditions—got the right to vote in both

local and parliamentary elections; thanks to the work of feminist interwar organizations women in Greece were also granted the right to vote at the municipal level. Women's still restricted social rights were at the core of interwar feminist struggles, as well. At stake were the protection of motherhood, protection at work, the issue of 'illegitimate' children and their rights, abolition of state-regulated prostitution and penalization of clients, etc.¹²⁸

The question of class left distinctive marks on the history of South Eastern European women's activism. Influenced by the tensions within both international women's organizations and national men's organizations, some women's movements in the Balkans in the period prior to World War One experienced strong divisions along class lines. Countries with strong socialist parties and movements such as Bulgaria and Serbia experienced the most visible confrontations between 'middle class' feminist and socialist 'proletarian' ideas. The more successful socialist movements in the region tended to have a strong feminist strain, while the less successful, as in Romania and Greece, did not. Thus, while in Bulgaria and Serbia the socialist movement also disseminated its own strand of feminist critique (involving activists such as Vela Blagoeva, Anna Karima, Kina Konova, Svetozar Marković, Milica and Anka Ninković, Angela Vode, Vida Tomšić), in Romania and Greece there was no strong socialist feminism.¹²⁹ At the same time, many socialist women worked with 'bourgeois' women's organizations at both national and international levels. Left-wingers, such as the Bulgarian socialist feminist Zheni Bozhilova-Pateva, Slovenian feminist and social-democrat Angela Vode and the communist Vida Tomšič, participated in the work of the more 'conservative' international women's organizations such as the International Council of Women; Bulgarian socialist Kina Konova was affiliated with both the socialist and 'bourgeois' women's movement in her country.¹³⁰ While these women were always between the two emancipatory currents and really nowhere at home, their life trajectories and struggles show their human agency, which goes beyond political structures and simple political divisions.

The advent of state socialism had a tremendous effect on the character of women's activism around the entire region. There were three starting points common to most East Central European countries after the end of World War Two. First, women's emancipation—in its socialist guise—mutated into state doctrine and transformations of gender order were "expropriated" by the communist regimes which underestimated the activities of the existing women's organizations. Second, socialist governments dismantled or 'appropriated' non-socialist women's organizations; in many cases this happened before the actual establishment of the one-party state.¹³¹ Even in Yugoslavia—considered to be the most liberal East European country—the *Jugoslavenski Ženski Savez* (Yugoslav women's alliance), an interwar organization, was banned by the government in 1961 and replaced by the Conference for Women's Social Work. This meant that there was no longer any organization dedicated to changing problematic elements in the existing gender order. Some activists from the interwar period, such as the Slovenian Vida Tomšič, did continue to work after the war. But their efforts to influence regulations on family planning and women's reproductive rights and to create a state policy open to and tolerant of women's issues were

often dismissed by their male comrades.¹³² Third, women's organizations closely related to the communist movement were established or gained in strength and importance beginning in 1945.

Resulting developments after World War Two allow in particular for carefully re-thinking the relationship between the project of women's emancipation, women's organizations, and the political system. Women's activism under state socialism repeatedly underwent complex changes and was constituted by a number of interacting and conflicting interests. Some of the old questions of socialist women's activism – such as the degree of organizational autonomy of women's groups within or alongside the party structure which male functionaries were willing to concede, or the relationship between grassroots activists, and central functionaries – reemerged in new guises. The core structure of these politics was characterized by shifting networks comprising separate women's organizations, socialist party departments focusing on women's issues, and trade union women and organizations. At the same time, the party itself had become a much more powerful actor and was closely related to the state. In other sections of this study we have discussed some of the characteristics, shortcomings and shifts in the state socialist project of women's emancipation, and how they were furthered and debated by actors such as these organizations and networks. Many women activists identified with the socialist state and aimed to get women more actively involved with it. But they also aimed to alter its politics and policies by directing attention to ongoing gender inequalities, especially in the world of work. Women activists and functionaries in multiple arenas developed various strategies for supporting women's interests and aimed to expand on the state's policies on women.¹³³ The life trajectories, ideas and struggles of women activists such as the Slovenian feminists Vida Tomšič and Angela Vode, or of the Bulgarian communist functionaries and women's activists Tsola Dragoicheva and Elena Lagadinova, or even of the Romanian Communist Party foreign minister Anna Pauker—i.e. of women involved with the state socialist establishment and sensitive towards gender inequality—similarly invite us to think carefully and in complex terms about the history of women's activism under state socialism. All these women found it perfectly compatible to simultaneously serve the socialist and the women's cause, since both required an awareness of social, economic and political injustice. As members of the state socialist “establishment,” they helped introduce emancipatory measures in their respective national settings, following the international leftist feminist agenda of the time as epitomized by the political program of the *Women's International Democratic Federation* (WIDF).

Women's political organizing under state socialism demonstrates that the history of women's activism extends well beyond middle-class dominated, non-socialist, single-sex movements. Many East Central European female political actors throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had diverse, multi-layered agendas that cannot be labelled simply liberal, socialist, philanthropist, feminist, nationalist, or internationalist. Often, questions of class, religion, or nation were as important to them as those of gender. As a result, many women chose to cooperate with mixed-sex workers' and national movements as a means of promoting female emancipation, or otherwise divided their energy between women's organizations and other political organizations. Whichever strategy they chose, they had to wrestle for the

recognition of their double or triple agendas in each of these contexts. Finding their respective states to be unresponsive, Ukrainian women in the Russian and Habsburg Empires organized within their own communities.¹³⁴ In 1915, it was Polish women who presented before the Women's Peace Congress in the Hague a resolution demanding 'autonomy' for all peoples, insisting that the Congress engage with the issue of national self-determination, a matter not specific to women.¹³⁵ This move prefigured the well-known connection between national and women's liberation in the anticolonial struggles that unfolded later in the twentieth century. The participation of Yugoslav women's organizations in their country's armed uprising during World War Two is another case in point; because of their participation, women were accepted as equal by the military forces and the new civic administration of the new, postwar Yugoslavia.¹³⁶

Some scholars have considered women's activism in East Central Europe to be "backward" or "belated" relative to Western Europe. But the problem with this characterization is that it presents the history of one particular type of women's activism, the Western, as "the" women's movement. If we broaden our perspective to take in the entire rich panorama of women's involvement in political and associational life, this argument simply evaporates.¹³⁷ The variety of experiences of the 150 East Central European women activists described in the *Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms, Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, nineteenth and twentieth Centuries* provides additional evidence on this point.¹³⁸ De-centering the focus of women's activism away from purely 'women's agendas, single-sex organizations, and a focus on middle class women helps us to see that East Central European women's activism appears to be derivative of the West only if it is being considered along criteria developed in Western contexts and not in more inclusive terms.¹³⁹

While East Central European women's activism should not be judged against a Western yardstick, it developed in tandem with women's movements all over the globe and was influenced by global contexts. One example is how from the beginning of the twentieth century East Central European women and their organizations participated in the major international networks of women, the International Council of Women (ICW), the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) and its successor, the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC), and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Women from Eastern Europe gained representation in these organizations in part due to the conscious efforts of leading international women's activists from outside the region. In turn, these big international organizations functioned as a space of opportunity for Eastern European women. Before 1945, they proactively used their participation in these groups to lend weight to their domestic demands and to promote, among other things, their national(ist) agendas internationally.¹⁴⁰ In 1945, leftist women from Eastern Europe were among the founding members of the WIDF created in Paris with Eugénie Cotton as its president.¹⁴¹ They continued to play an important role in this global organization. While almost all East European national women's organizations joined the WIDF after 1945, it should be noted that the membership of Yugoslav women was marked by the tensions between the Stalinist Soviet Union and Tito's post-World War Two Yugoslavia.¹⁴²

In sum, the history of women's activism in Eastern Europe forces us to rethink the very meaning of the concepts of 'feminism' and 'women's movements.' We must consider the relationship between feminist activism and the state, the animosity between socialist and non-socialist feminist visions of women's emancipation and gender equity, and the relationship between women's emancipation and other emancipatory projects. The multiple history of women's activism in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has the potential to overcome the reproduction and reification of East-West (and North-South) divides that have served to normalize Western histories of women's activism while particularizing experiences in East Central Europe.

Gendered histories of East Central Europe in perspective

East Central European historiography has tended to marginalize women and gender, while gender history has tended to marginalize East Central Europe. We believe that considering gendered histories of East Central Europe¹⁴³ can help us rethink both of these fields in productive ways and develop a more inclusive form of historical writing more generally. In dialogue with other scholars who have written on gender in European history and East Central European history in particular,¹⁴⁴ we would like to draw a few conclusions.

Within the field of East Central European history, women's and gender history has helped expand the very scope of historical inquiry, especially in the realms of social and cultural history, the history of everyday life, and transnational history. It has contributed to denaturalizing core categories of East Central European history such as the nation and has encouraged scholars to consider asymmetry, hierarchy and subordination in gender relations as a product of history rather than an ahistorical given, and thus as the subject of change over time and as an object of intense social and political and struggle. And it has demonstrated that 'even' political and diplomatic history cannot be considered gender-free or merely the realm of male agency. Topics like war, Stalinism, the Cold War or international politics cannot be adequately understood without considering gender as a category. However, these insights have not yet impacted on East Central European historiography in general to a degree we would consider adequate in light of the richness of the findings of women's and gender history discussed throughout this article.

The impact of East Central European gender history on the broader field of gender history has been more complicated. While gender historians dealing with East Central Europe have productively challenged prevailing narratives within the history of the region, they have been less successful, and probably less interested, in translating the (gendered) difference of East Central European history into a challenge of false universalisms in Western (gender) historiography. The overall impact of scholarship about East Central Europe on gender history as a whole has been minimal, notwithstanding the collaboration between scholars physically located inside and outside the region working on the field of East Central European gender history itself. Gender historians focusing on the West have been astonishingly reluctant to consider how the findings of gender historians about experiences in East Central Europe might affect their own work. We believe, however, that knowledge and ways of knowing

about women and gender in East Central Europe can contribute to the de-centering of our knowledge of gender history in global perspective. We find in them a productive critique of some of the implicit claims to universality so deeply ingrained in Western historiography.

The work done by gender historians of this region suggests that we rethink some dominant narratives of historical change. First, if we put this research into a global perspective, we find that what might be called gender-relevant change has been related in many complex ways to other elements of historical change. For example, political equality or an egalitarian civil law does not necessarily follow national independence or the building of the liberal state. Rather than relying on categories like backwardness and advancement, it is more accurate to see the diversity of historical experiences.

A second key to understanding the history of gender in East Central Europe is considering the complicated effects of the entangled histories of Western and East Central Europe, including the imbalance of power and other unequal relationships between the regions. Certain gendered legal and socio-economic arrangements and ideologies traveled from Western to East Central Europe and made a profound impact on both regions. But this was not a one-dimensional exchange. Western gender ideologies and practices met and intermingled with the varieties of the East Central European gender order. They were shaped and remodeled by specifically East Central European historical trajectories of change and also by local resistance to East Central European forms of ‘modernization’ and to ‘Westernization’ and domination. In these struggles, the invention of patriarchal ‘tradition’ or ‘authenticity’ played an important role and so did visions of radical, anti-capitalist change.

Finally, material scarcity has played a particularly important role in shaping the gendered history of East Central Europe. The persistent poverty of the region is related to intra-European domination and unequal economic integration and is a fundamental difference between East Central and Western Europe. This difference cannot be conflated with the unequal distribution of income and wealth, i.e. the category of class, within East Central as well as Western European societies. Material scarcity has shaped every aspect of women’s experience in the region), including women’s integration into the paid labor force, women’s struggle against male domination in the family, and many other factors that have been identified as crucial in engendering in particular ways the history of women and men. Considering this, we argue that gendered historical writing in global perspective must systematically integrate an awareness of this difference into its conceptual framework. Scholarship on the gender history of East Central Europe carries an enormous potential to promote such development.

ENDNOTES:

¹ We thank Melissa Feinberg for her comments on an earlier version of this chapter, and we gratefully accepted her generous offer to help finalize this text which resulted in an enormous investment. This chapter was finalized in 2013.

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