

AWSS ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN IN SLAVIC STUDIES

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Founding Mothers: Barbara Heldt on Women in Slavic Studies and the AWSS

Even a comfortable suburban background in the forties and fifties could not hide the fact that something was wrong with a world where women aspired only to the familial and social, men disappeared weekdays on the train to Manhattan, and children were educated to be equal up to a point, not beyond: the older the girls, the lower the expectations for us. Parents were marked by the depression and the war, so their idea of gendered safety was perhaps understandable, but....

I chose a women's college after a co-ed high school, and all was good until senior year, when the Head of the Placement Office asked me if I had any secretarial skills. I had purposely not acquired them, wanting to avoid the Woman's Fate. Her reply to my honors student arrogance: "My dear, you are pure as the driven snow." These practical New England words drove me from her office in tears of shame and outrage.



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Founding Mothers: Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild on the Origins of the AWSS

Beginning in the early sixties, I was drawn to social activism and from then on have balanced this activism with my academic work, more or less successfully. In Berkeley in 1968-69 a difficult divorce and the general social climate raised my feminist consciousness and led me to join a consciousness raising group with, among others, Laura X, the pioneering feminist activist and archivist. Moving to Boston in 1969 to teach at Cardinal Cushing College, I joined both Female Liberation and Bread and Roses. This was a heady time, as we challenged traditional stereotypes, gained strength in self-defense classes, fixed our own cars, built and repaired houses, lived communally.

I taught one of the first Women's Studies courses in the U.S. at Cardinal Cushing College, a conservative women's college, and when the College closed in 1972, began teaching an ovular (our language reform, replacing seminar) on women's history at the Goddard-Cambridge Graduate Program for Social Change, a Masters degree program affiliated with Vermont's Goddard College. In 1974 I became core faculty for the Feminist Studies section, which was considered quite daring at the time for its offerings on women and spirituality, race, class and gender, and lesbian culture. [Read More.](#)

2015 Mary Zirin Prize

The Association for Women in Slavic Studies (AWSS) is pleased to announce a call for nominations for the Mary Zirin Prize in recognition of an independent scholar in the field of Slavic Studies. The award of \$500 is named for Mary Zirin, the founder of Women East-West. Working as an independent scholar, Zirin produced and encouraged fundamental works in Slavic/East European Women's Studies and has been instrumental in the development of the AWSS. The Prize aims to recognize the achievements of independent scholars and to encourage their continued scholarship and service in the fields of Slavic or Central and Eastern European Women's Studies. The Committee encourages the nomination of candidates at all career stages. For the purpose of this award, an independent scholar is defined as a scholar who is not employed at an institution of higher learning, or an employee of a university or college who is not eligible to compete for institutional support for research (for example, those teaching under short-term

contracts or working in administrative posts). We welcome nominations from CIS and Central and Eastern Europe. The Zirin Prize Committee will accept nominations (including self-nominations) until September 1, 2015.

Nominations must include: (1) a nomination letter of be no more than two-pages double-spaced; (2) the nominee's current curriculum vitae; and (3) a sample publication (e.g., article or book chapter). The nomination letter must describe the scholar's contribution to the field, as well as work in progress. Nominations should be sent to Marilyn Smith at msmith@fivecolleges.edu, or by postal mail to Marilyn Schwinn Smith, 14 Allen Street, Amherst, MA 01002.

AWSS Conference, March 5, 2015

The 7th Biennial AWSS conference was held in the winsome but water-logged and snow bound city of Lexington, Kentucky, on March 5, 2015. Despite the unprecedented seventeen inches of rain and snow that fell the day before the conference, playing havoc with the travel plans of the attendees, Karen Petrone (Past President of AWSS) and intrepid organizer of the conference on "Gender and Transnationalism," re-scheduled talks and reconfigured panels with aplomb and dispatch. Karen was ably assisted by her efficient graduate student, Jason Warren. The all-day event took place the day before the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Southern Conference on Slavic Studies. As we received a large number of paper proposals, we requested Alice Pate to allow us to schedule three AWSS panels during the SCSS conference that began the following day on Friday, April 6, and she graciously agreed. Beth Holmgren, our keynote speaker, gave a scintillating talk from her new transnational research project entitled *The Uses of Starlight: Female Entertainers in the Anders Army, 1942-1945*, marking the end of an intellectually rigorous conference. [Read More.](#)

Ask Aleksandra!

With more than two decades of experience in Slavic Studies and lots of chutzpah, she'll share with you her hard-won wisdom. Under a cloak of anonymity, you can safely ask Aleksandra anything you like, and in doing so you'll help not just yourself but probably others as well who no



doubt have the same questions. Please send your questions to awssnewsletter@gmail.com and put "Ask Aleksandra" in the subject line.

Dear Aleksandra,

I can hardly believe that I need to write to you about my situation, which outwardly seems ideal. I am currently in my second year of graduate school and serving as one of two TAs for a well- respected female faculty member in my field. Going into the semester, I felt so fortunate to have netted this assignment; after working for several male professors with ego issues, I was sure it would be the pinnacle of my TA experience. Unfortunately, however, it has proved to be the most problematic of all. My professor is not only arrogant and patronizing toward us TAs -- both of whom are women -- but she also apparently thinks that as a new mother, she is entitled to make every possible use of us. This week she actually left the class in our hands, without advance notice, so that she could go breastfeed! Please help me, Aleksandra -- this is so not my idea of feminism.

Lidiia E.

[Read More.](#)

The Eastern Front and the Russian Revolution: A Scholarly Commemoration

Adele Lindenmeyr (Villanova University)

As the one-hundredth anniversary of World War I approached, an international group of scholars met in 2008 in Aberdeen, Scotland to lay plans for a most ambitious project. Their aim: a multi-volume series that would publish the latest research by historians around the world on the military, political, economic, social and cultural history of Russia from the fateful year of 1914 to the end of the Civil War. The editors faced the challenges of finding a willing publisher, recruiting contributors, and determining the necessary elements for a successful series - how many volumes? Could the series aspire to be comprehensive? [Read More.](#)

Book Reviews: Introducing a New Editor - and Inviting Reviews

We are pleased to announce that Sharon Kowalsky is taking over the book review editor position for *Women East-West*, effective with the Spring 2015 issue. An associate professor of History at Texas A & M-Commerce, Sharon has been active in AWSS and the Southern Conference on Slavic Studies (SCSS) for many years. She is the author of *Deviant Women: Female Crime and Criminology in Revolutionary Russia, 1880-1930* (NIU Press, 2009) as well as several articles on female crime and criminology.

The book review feature of *WEW* has now been in place for nearly ten years. The three or four reviews we publish each year, while not a staggering number, represent the continued commitment of our members to supporting one another's work and to getting some lesser known scholarship accessible to a wider audience. We have also seen a number of graduate students and younger scholars contribute to the newsletter through this forum. We look forward to seeing more reviews guided by Sharon's editorial expertise.

[Read More.](#)

Book Reviews

Steven Saxonberg. *Gendering Family Policies in Post-Communist Europe: A Historical-Institutional Analysis*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 292 pp. Notes. References. Index. \$105.00, hard bound.

Reviewed by: Elaine Weiner, McGill University, Montreal

Steven Saxonberg's *Gendering Family Policies in Post-Communist Europe: A Historical-Institutional Analysis* is an ambitious book that explains the development of family policy in the Central European states of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia (also known as the Visegrad Group) over a span of nearly 150 years. His analysis draws on an impressive trove of empirical material, involving principally more than 100 interviews with various actors (e.g., policymakers, civil society activists, nursery directors) and national as well as international survey data. For Saxonberg, the enduring distinctiveness of family policies in post-communist Central Europe despite "the attempts of the Soviet Union under Stalin to force a unitary model on the Soviet Bloc countries" and the ultimate demise of Communist-party rule in 1989 denotes the core conundrum motivating his study (p. 1).

[Read More.](#)

Wanda Wyporska. *Witchcraft in Early Modern Poland, 1500-1800*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 245 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Figures. Index. Tables. Maps. \$105.00, hard bound.

Reviewed by: Agnieszka Doll, University of Victoria, British Columbia

In *Witchcraft in Early Modern Poland 1500-1800*, Wanda Wyporska presents a complex and nuanced study of witchcraft in Wielkopolska, one of Poland's most religiously and ethnically diverse regions of that period. The author focuses on a witch paradigm within the context of witchcraft prosecutions. Through her intersectional and contextual analysis, Wyporska shows how the various tensions that characterized life in early modern Wielkopolska manifested themselves on the bodies of peasant women, the predominately accused of witchcraft. In her analysis, Wyporska is particularly attentive to sites (trials, households, etc.) and moments (events leading to trials, evidence testing, accused dispositions, etc.) where various normative orders and discourses intersect. Using a witchcraft trial as an analytical site, Wyporska maps an interplay (or the lack of one) between the local and the extra-local, the formal and the informal, the ecclesiastical and the secular regimes involved in producing a witch paradigm. [Read More.](#)

Member News

If you would like to be included in "Member News" send your accomplishments to awssnewsletter@gmail.com. Please include your affiliation. For articles and books, send full publication information. We are also happy to publish photos from members' travels and research in the region; please include a caption.

Barbara C. Allen (La Salle University) has published *Alexander Shlyapnikov, 1885-1937: Life of an Old Bolshevik* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015), in which she recounts the political formation and positions of Russian Communist and trade unionist, Alexander Shlyapnikov. Allen conducted extensive research in the Central Archive of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, and in other archives in Moscow, Russia. For more information, [click here](#).



Maria Bucur (Indiana University, Bloomington) writes that she is "hanging out with Woody in DC at the Woodrow Wilson Center (visiting scholar with the Global Europe program), sharing my research on the history of property rights and gender regimes in East-Central Europe."

In March, **Julie deGraffenried** received tenure and promotion to Associate Professor of History at Baylor University.

Helena Margaret B. Goscilo (University of Pittsburgh) has published *Fade from Red: The Cold War Ex-Enemy in Russian and American Film, 1990-2005* (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2014). The book devotes a lot of attention to gender and some attention to race.

During spring 2015, **Sarah D. Phillips** (AWSS Treasurer) has been serving as the interim director of Indiana University's Russian and East European Institute. She published two articles on injecting drug use and HIV in Ukraine: Jill Owczarzak, Mikhail Karelin, and Sarah D. Phillips, "A View from the Frontlines in Slavyansk, Ukraine: HIV Prevention, Drug Treatment, and Help for People Who Use Drugs in a Conflict Zone," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 26, no. 1 (2015); and Jill Owczarzak and Sarah D. Phillips, "Responsibility, Trust, and Transformation in Ukrainian Public Health," *Perspectives on Europe* 44, no. 2 (2014).

Valerie Sperling (Clark University, Worcester, MA) is happy to announce the publication of her book, *Sex, Politics and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (Oxford University Press, 2014). Written to be accessible to the general public as well as for use in Russian politics and gender studies courses, the book examines the ways in which politicians and political activists in Russia use masculinity, femininity, and homophobia to bolster their legitimacy and to undermine their opponents. It includes plentiful and lively (if somewhat depressing!) material on homophobia, sexism, and misogyny in Russian politics, as well as a chapter on feminist activism in Russia from 2010 to the present, including Pussy Riot. For more information, [click here](#).