



A Tribute to Francisca de Haan

Masha Semashyna, Krassimira Daskalova, Ioana Cîrstocea, Mineke Bosch, Samin Rashidbeigi, Lauritz Guldal Einarsen, Isidora Grubački, Jasmina Lukić, and Agnieszka Mroziak

ABSTRACT

On 1 April 2023, the Central European University (CEU) Department of Gender Studies and Department of History held a panel and book launch to celebrate the retirement of Francisca de Haan and to recognize her scholarly contributions. Following a summary of the event, the texts of those who spoke that day are reproduced here, offering an opportunity to consider the impact Francisca de Haan had on her students, her colleagues, this journal, and the field of Central and Eastern European women's history in general through the words of those she impacted most directly.

KEYWORDS: communist women, feminism, Francisca de Haan, scholarship, teaching, women's history



Report on “Women in International History: A Panel in Honor of Francisca De Haan and the Book Launch for *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World*”

On 1 April 2023, a joint event called “Women in International History” was held by the Department of Gender Studies and the Department of History at Central European University in Vienna: a panel in honor of Professor Francisca de Haan, followed by a book launch for a volume she edited, *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World*.¹

The first part of the event was a roundtable discussion, “A Feminist Historian in Review”—a celebratory look back on Francisca's work as a researcher, editor, teacher, and mentor, with contributions from colleagues and students present in person as well as online from several different countries, underscoring the sprawling nature of feminist networks in today's academia.

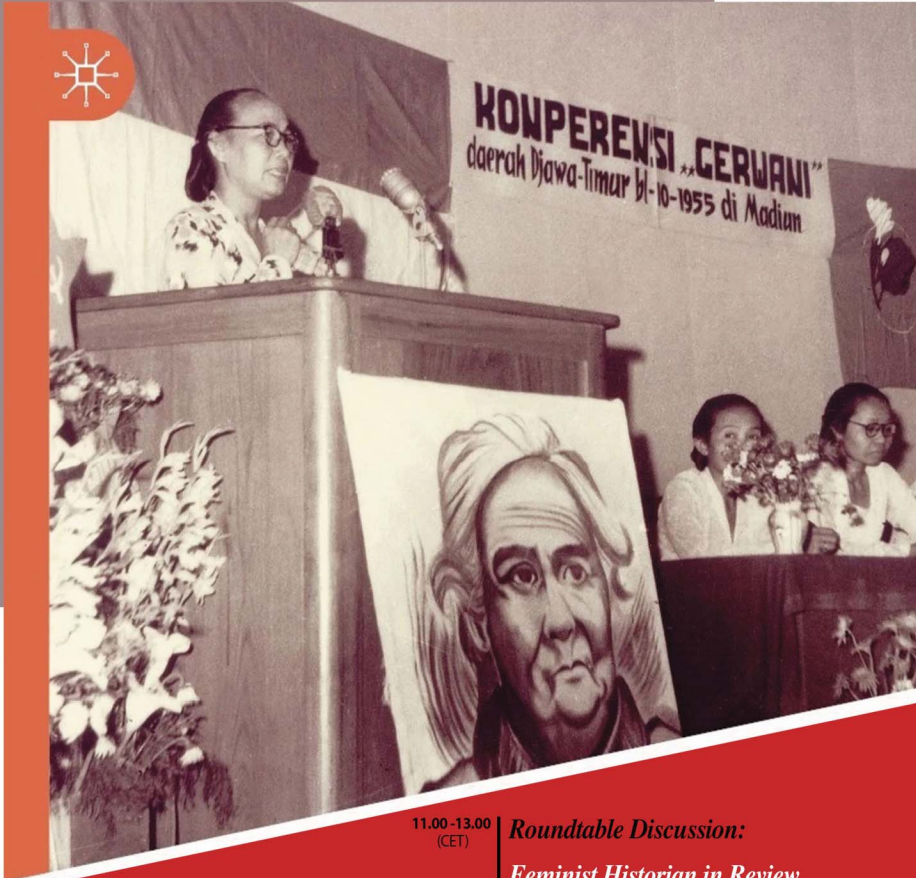
As a way to mark Francisca's retirement from CEU's Department of Gender Studies after years of teaching, this felt particularly fitting, as such feminist networks have



Women in International History

A Panel in Honor of Francisca de Haan
and a Book Launch

CEU CENTRAL
EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY
Gender Studies Department
History Department



01 Saturday
April 2023

11.00 -13.00
(CET)

Roundtable Discussion:

Feminist Historian in Review

15.00 -17.00
(CET)

Book Launch:

*The Palgrave Handbook of Communist
Women Activists Around the World*

QSB505+Zoom

<https://bit.ly/3YltIAM>

Meeting ID: 982 2759 9748

Passcode: 961523



Central European University Quellenstraße 51, 1100 Wien

Image 1. Poster from event celebrating Francisca de Haan, 1 April 2023, by the Central European University Department of History and Department of Gender Studies.

been a persistent focus in Francisca's work. Her most influential interventions in the field include a biographical volume on the life of the Dutch international feminist activist Rosa Manus (coedited with Myriam Everard); *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries* (coedited with Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi); *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists*, cited above; and a number of articles on left-wing feminist networks and transnational connections in the twentieth century, among them most notably "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)."² The WIDF is the focus of Francisca's current book project as well. Importantly, her feminist practice was centered around creating platforms for such intellectual networks: from the founding and editing of *Aspasia* to her work at the Department of Gender Studies, where she taught courses with a particular focus on the methodology of researching women's history, ran the MATILDA master's program in women's and gender history, and served as Department Head in the tumultuous years of CEU's forced relocation from Budapest to Vienna. Unsurprisingly, most of the contributions to the panel and the book launch focused on this power of network-making and the radical openings into the future that it offers.

The panel, moderated by Dr. Jan Hennings, Head of CEU's History Department, was held in a warm and celebratory mood. The first contribution was by Professor Krassimira Daskalova (Sofia University), who spoke of working together with Francisca, paid attention to Francisca's contribution to the paradigm shift in both mainstream East European history (with research and publications on the history of women and gender) and European women's and gender history (with a focus on East European developments), and remarked in particular (as did many other speakers) on Francisca's exceptional work ethic and perfectionism, which in practice turned editing into painstaking co-creation of texts together with their authors. Dr. Ioana Cîrstocea (Centre européen de sociologie et de science politique, CNRS, Paris) spoke of the importance of *Aspasia* in providing a stable platform for scholarship exploring previously obscured strands of women's leftist activism, taking feminism as "unstable, context-dependent, entangled, and conflicting with other political struggles." Dr. Victor Strazzeri (Bern University) echoed these contributions in talking about Francisca's generosity in supporting colleagues and especially younger scholars, and the importance of her work in counteracting the "double blind spot" regarding the role of women activists in leftist movements, inviting them instead to reshape not just the narrative of history we tell ourselves, but the way that narrative is told. Prof. Em. Mineke Bosch (Groningen University) offered a personal angle on this topic of transformative conversations, displaying pictures dating back years and illustrating a long-standing intellectual friendship that started when she and Francisca studied together in Amsterdam: a collaborative working-out of the ways to study women's history, following the then-recent publication of Joan Scott's "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," which both inspired and provoked disagreement.

The second part of the panel was dedicated to Francisca de Haan's work at the Department of Gender Studies at CEU as a teacher, supervisor, and colleague. Samin Rashidbeigi, now a PhD candidate at Princeton University, was a student at CEU ten

years ago, in the MATILDA program. Bringing forward examples from her experience, Samin talked about Francisca's ability to be both very demanding in the standards she set for students and very compassionate, which ultimately stemmed from her willingness to take students seriously as colleagues in the field. This was echoed later in the general discussion by Alexandra Talaver, Francisca's current student and one of the authors in *The Palgrave Handbook*, underscoring Francisca's approach to pedagogy as empowerment (which, having taken Francisca's courses and worked with her, I am happy to echo as well). Samin was followed by Lauritz Einarsen, a former master's student, who is now continuing the research he started for his master's thesis as Francisca's supervisee—with intriguing hints at how some of Francisca's intuitions about his subject, the life and work of the Norwegian feminist Kirsten Hansteen, may have proven prophetic since then. Isidora Grubacki, a current PhD student, also spoke of Francisca's support for students venturing into new topics and methods, as in her own case, when Isidora, originally trained as a literary scholar, was doubtful of her ability to do archival research. The roundtable closed with a contribution from Prof. Jasmina Lukic from the Gender Studies Department, who spoke of Francisca as a colleague and a friend: the joys of teaching a course together and having heated but illuminating debates in class, as well as the difficulties of being friends with someone with such high standards for her own work (which meant little free time even outside of strictly working hours).

After a break, the roundtable was followed by the book launch in a similarly dialogic format, moderated by the Head of the Department of Gender Studies, Dr. Nadia Jones-Gailani. Francisca introduced the volume and discussed how it came together, with twenty-five chapters, not counting the introduction, and contributions from thirty-two authors. Dr. Eloisa Betti (University of Padua) spoke about her chapter on Teresa Noce and the injustices of her representation in public history. In their responses, both Prof. Elisabeth Armstrong (Smith College) and Dr. Agnieszka Mroziak (Polish Academy of Sciences) noted the crucial importance of biographies in the study of women's activism, which allows, as this edited volume illustrated, for making visible the connections, dialogues, and exchanges between different contexts, and carrying these dialogues further, in space as well as time. This was very much the spirit in which the event ended, with a general discussion including participants in person and online: as a celebration of an individual scholar but also of collaboration as a still-radical approach in scholarship.

Masha Semashyna

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

First, I would like to thank the organizers for the invitation to join this panel honoring my friend Francisca de Haan. If I have to summarize what Francisca did during the twenty years of our collaboration,³ I should just say: "She changed my scholarly life." But what is more important, according to me—she changed the attitude of Western academia toward research on women and gender history in Eastern Europe.

Before meeting Francisca, I had a dream, a dream to make visible East European research on women and gender to both Western and Eastern European scholars and academia, to defend the importance of knowing East European perspectives and the

idea that “European women’s and gender history” has to pay attention to the developments in the eastern part of Europe as well, and to overcome the negligence and—I would dare to say—ignorance of some scholars of “the things East European” and women and gender relations in particular. I do not know how, but it seems that Francisca anticipated this dream of mine, and almost immediately after she was appointed at Central European University, she invited me to Budapest. We had long conversations about the things that had to be done in the field.

I was impressed by Francisca’s strong commitment to changing the European academic landscape by bringing more of Eastern Europe into what was called “European women’s and gender history.” Almost immediately she initiated the two big publishing projects that I am sure all of you know: *The Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries* and *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women’s and Gender History*.

The goal of the first one was to counter the widespread belief in the West (but also in Eastern Europe) that there was no historical feminism or feminisms in our region. As Francisca herself put it: “In neither Eastern nor Western Europe, there is no (not enough) sense of the shared and entangled women’s histories (as if the Berlin wall/“Iron curtain” has been projected back in time.”

Now, I have to confess something. When we started the work on the *Biographical Dictionary (BD)*, I had the naivety, the illusion, that as editors, we were just supposed to design the structure of the volume, to coordinate the work of the team (of these about one hundred authors), and to edit the final drafts of the entries written by the selected contributors. When Francisca came to Sofia to work with me on the already received texts, however, little by little I realized that she understood our job differently and wanted us to actually rewrite the texts about most of the personalities to be included in this feminist *BD*. Which, in the end, we did! All the scholars from Eastern Europe and the United States who participated in the preparation of the *BD* were satisfied with the final product, published by CEU Press in 2006. The book was selected as the “Outstanding academic title for 2006” by the American *Choice* magazine. Its quality is due mainly to Francisca’s meticulousness and perfectionism.

Most of the entries in the book, however, were about feminist activists before 1945. At that point we were not ready to look for feminist actions during the period of state socialism. Now, at least, my position is different, and the change happened thanks to Francisca’s work on the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), left feminisms after World War II in general, and entanglements between East and West women’s and feminist actions.⁴ As Francisca put it recently in an interview I did with her, public memory of socialist women’s activism collapsed along with European state socialism even though “women in socialist countries had more rights and a better social status than women in many capitalist or Third World countries.”⁵ The loss of memory—or to put it better, from my perspective, the manipulation of memory—was achieved by the ideology of the political winners after 1989, who stigmatized everything done by state-socialist countries, including their policies toward women.

The second big—and I would even dare to say “historic”—project was the creation of the first periodical dedicated to women’s and gender history in Central, Eastern,

and Southeastern Europe (CESEE)—*Aspasia*. Francisca invited Maria Bucur, a historian of Eastern Europe from Indiana University, and me to work with her on *Aspasia*. Our idea was to bring forward the best new scholarship in women's and gender history in CESEE and to help transform (as is stated now in the journal itself) "European women's and gender history by expanding comparative research on women and gender to all parts of Europe, creating a European history of women and gender that encompasses more than the traditional Western European perspective."⁶ Francisca—the driving force behind this important periodical—was Senior Editor for the first ten years of *Aspasia*, from 2007 until 2016. Apart from the management of the journal, and the greater part of the editorial and coordinating work, she organized and edited several important discussion forums, which, I believe, are among the turning points: (1) in the study of "gender contracts" under state socialism in the region; and (2) in the paradigm shift helping to change the balance between "totalitarian" and "revisionist" knowledge production about women and gender relations in the countries of the former Soviet bloc. Under Francisca's leadership, *Aspasia* helped to create a more nuanced and—I would claim—a more authentic vision about women under state socialism.⁷ During her ten years as Senior Editor, Francisca managed to gather as editors and members of the editorial board of *Aspasia* some of the leading women's and gender historians from European and American universities.

Last but not least, Francisca and I served the International Federation for Research on Women's History (IFRWH) as President and Vice-President⁸ between 2005 (we were elected in Sydney at the IFRWH conference held within the World Congress of the International Committee of Historical Sciences, ICHS⁹) and 2010 (the Amsterdam Congress of the ICHS). As a team, we organized two big conferences for the Federation—in Sofia and Amsterdam—and published selected articles from the Sofia 2005 conference as a special issue of *Women's History Review*¹⁰ and those from the Amsterdam 2010 conference as a separate volume, *Women's Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present*.¹¹

As a person working in the field of the (gender-sensitive) history of the book (studying the whole communication circuit, which includes the creators and consumers of books: among them, authors, printers, publishers, booksellers, libraries, and readers),¹² I am very well aware of how difficult it is for historians to find information about the "real" readers¹³ of books, and of texts in general. But I tend to believe the opinion, supported by many of my fellow book historians, that the "printing press" has a huge impact and has been an "agent of change,"¹⁴ and that books and texts in general revolutionize their readers and lead to social transformations, and in this case to paradigm changes in history-writing as well.

I want to believe that all these publications did their job and helped in the transformations that we wanted to stimulate in the early 2000s. All our efforts would not have been possible without the leadership, energy, hard work, meticulous research, academic citizenship, professionalism, and perfectionism of Francisca de Haan.

Thank you, Francisca—and here, I hope, I could speak on behalf of many of us who worked together on the abovementioned publications, organizations, projects and initiatives—for our partnership and collaboration (and friendship) throughout these almost twenty years.

Krassimira Daskalova

An Inspiring and Empowering Encounter

I would like first to thank the organizers of this event for the invitation; I am happy and honored to be able to share this moment with Francisca's colleagues, students, and friends, and very pleased to be back, even if remotely, at the Gender Studies Department of Central European University, whose landscape has changed a lot since I first visited in the late 2000s. This is where I met Francisca fifteen years ago, during a research stay in Budapest as a scholar in residence, when I was starting fieldwork for what would later become a book on the transnational making of expertise in gender matters in the postsocialist countries.¹⁵ Central European University provided library resources and archives that helped me to understand how groundbreaking endeavors took shape via East–West encounters and exchanges. People of the Gender Studies Department, Francisca de Haan included, opened their classrooms to me and agreed to be interviewed for the purpose of my research. My gratefulness for this goes to all of them, and especially to Jasmina Lukic and Krassimira Daskalova, also members of the panel that has gathered us together around our friend's work.

While I was in Budapest in 2008, Francisca invited me to attend Cold War movie screenings and debates she organized for her students at the time. It was a very stimulating, eye-opening experience, and also the beginning of friendships that would last. We stayed close to each other afterward despite the geographic distance and our various professional commitments. Beyond her genuine interest in my research topic, Francisca facilitated my work on a very practical basis. She was, for instance, one of my referees for the Fulbright fellowship that eventually allowed me to do research on the Network of East–West Women in the United States. Later, she was among the very first readers of my book in progress. She provided feedback and fact-checking on the manuscript, and she agreed to endorse the English translation. I am very grateful for all these things and I am happy to express my gratitude for her support, which has been precious and empowering; that says a lot about her pedagogical skills, generosity, and, last but not least, feminist solidarity.

From time to time we met again, at a conference abroad, or during Francisca's own trips to Paris in search of documents and people related to the Women's International Democratic Federation. In our conversations over dinner or coffee, "The Federation" took up more and more space in the 2010s. My friend was fascinated by this organization that she had discovered, in the manner of one who finds a lost and secret island. She has written many pieces of research to uncover the extent of the Federation's transnational work on behalf of the women of the world, aimed at advancing political and practical solidarities beyond borders and at building international law and institutions to consolidate women's rights in the Cold War context. Besides inspiring many scholars to explore bases for understanding the international work of communist women, Francisca put together an impressive handbook¹⁶ that came out earlier this year and fully embodies her sense of building collaborative undertakings, as well as her capacity for renewing scholarship.

Since space is not enough here for stressing the many features that make this book outstanding, I would limit myself to briefly underlining Francisca's stubborn willing to uncover both the ethnocentric limitations of mainstream scholarship on international

feminism, and the extent of the historiographic concealing of what she terms “left-wing feminism.” Endorsed by “foremothers” such as Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai and promoted by socialist governments, this ideological stream was advanced after World War II under the aegis of the Women’s International Democratic Federation. It blends the defense of women’s rights with peace activism, political demands of welfare for mothers and children, and anti-imperialist and antiracist claims. Considering this activism from a perspective liberated from the “Cold War paradigms”¹⁷ proves to be full of potential for innovative scholarship. This approach destabilizes the waves-based chronology of women’s movements and displaces the prominent role of the Western, white, middle-class women criticizing the New Left, as it reveals a history that is far longer than the usual “post-1968” frame implies and encompasses multiple geographies on a global scale. Last but not least, it extends the very political focus of feminism from denouncing “patriarchy” and gender oppression *stricto sensu* to exposing multiple and “intersecting” forms of domination and geopolitical dynamics.

Since the late 2000s, *Aspasia: The Yearbook of Women’s and Gender History in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe*—the journal Francisca founded and coedited—has been consolidating, among other innovative themes, a research venue that concentrates on the history of women’s agency within the socialist state bureaucracy. Several principles orient this scholarship: in the first place, the idea that women’s understanding of state-led emancipation needs to be studied as an open project, apart from the sense of failure attached to it after the collapse of socialist regimes; that the definition of feminism is unstable, context-dependent, entangled, and conflicting with other political struggles; and that a multiscalar perspective combined with a thick biographical approach are crucial research tools to uncover communist women’s political work and subjectivities. New understandings of activism stem from the close study of organizations and projects crisscrossing personal lives, transnational solidarities, and bureaucratic work performed by women activists weaving progressive projects within various institutions, at both national and international levels. Research on the “women-friendly politics of communist states” also suggests revisiting the very theoretical model of “state feminism,” developed by political scientists on the sole basis of studying liberal settings and actors.

Let me now add a final personal note before finishing. The historiographic silence on the international activism of women from the “Left side of history”¹⁸—which Francisca and others have challenged—planted solid seeds of curiosity in my mind. This curiosity concerns the practical making of oblivion, and, subsequently, the situated production of discourses performing a “global feminism,” which was understood, since the early 1990s, as a form of women’s rights politics based on universalized references such as “human rights” and “gender mainstreaming.” These watchwords were recognized at the fourth and last UN-organized World Conference on Women, held in 1995 in Beijing, where participants from the former socialist countries raised their voices as women “from the Non-Region.” How exactly did the narrative of “global feminism” dismiss the idea of state-supported women’s emancipation, welfare, and gender equality? For the sociologist that I am, the answer is to be found in the thorough study of a continuum made of people and discourses that encouraged the spread of liberal versions of women’s rights into the Global South after the International Wom-

en's Year (1975), and into the former Soviet bloc after the end of the Cold War. Again, Francisca has been one of the first witnesses and readers of my work formulating some of the preliminary findings of this research, still in progress.¹⁹

I look forward to our forthcoming conversations and I wish good luck to my friend with her own work, which, I hope, will continue for many years and many books, and which will undoubtedly keep inspiring new generations of feminist scholars.

Ioana Cîrstocea

Lieve Francisca,

It is a real honor and a great pleasure for me to be invited to say a few words at this moment of transition in your life, about you and your wonderful career in international women's and gender history. I must confess that part of me is sad, as your farewell from CEU is another reminder that an era is coming to an end. But another part of me is really happy and thankful to be offered a platform to celebrate and commemorate in this illustrious company the joy and wisdom and, of course, the books and articles that you brought to our field. Of course I cannot tell the whole story, and will therefore concentrate mostly on the period in which we too, as PhDs in Rotterdam, came of age, so to speak, in women's and gender history in an ongoing process of mutual exchange and inspiration.

Is it a coincidence that I forgot about our first true encounter? That is rather strange, for it may have been me who gave such a favorable report of you to my colleague, Annette Mevis, that the consequences are still relevant today!



Image 2. From left to right: Francisca de Haan, Mineke Bosch, and Annette Mevis at the symposium "The Future of Women's History" at IISG, Amsterdam, 16 March 1990 (Private collection, reprinted with permission).

What I do remember is us sitting in the train, by the window, opposite each other, our heads bent forward, passionately discussing issues in women's and gender history. Is it the memory of a particular moment, or is it a reflection of the many voyages that we have made together from Amsterdam to Rotterdam and back? I had been a student at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, and already had some five years of work experience in the International Archives for the Women's Movement, to which I came with a self-devised project to collect women's egodocuments, and had researched and edited correspondence from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, both together with Annemarie Kloosterman. Annette Mevis continued the egodocuments project, and together we managed to ensure the foundation of an independent archives department in 1988. You had been a student at the University of Amsterdam. You were active in women's history, and in 1987 became a regular assistant in training at Erasmus University in the young department of Societal Sciences, in the Faculty of Art and Historical Sciences. Your subject was to study the gendering of office work between 1860 and 1940. Within a year you managed to convince me that I should apply for another AIO (assistant in training) position in women's history that was advertised, and that could very well be about women in higher education and the sciences.

Now, what did we so passionately talk about on our train rides? It was nothing less than Joan Scott and her revolutionary proposal to take up gender as an analytical category in a poststructuralist way of looking at history.²⁰ For both of us, this was a paradigm shift that did not come easily, and that we had to work hard for intellectually. Francisca was trained in social-economic history, in which historical realism was the beginning and the end of historical knowledge. Quantitative models and theories from the social sciences, but also speculative philosophies like Marxism, were conceived of as the structures or models of society and the past. Language was seen as an impartial mediator between the past and our stories of the past. Much of women's history was close to this historical paradigm, and was intent on throwing light into the dark chambers of history, where mostly proletarian or otherwise destitute and oppressed women earned less than a living in their homes or factories. When we had documented their own words (through oral history), we would know their experiences.

I myself, in Groningen, had earned my master's in an environment in which the internationally famous Johan Huizinga's hundredth anniversary had just been celebrated with a large and memorable conference. He was held in high esteem by many of our lecturers, and we learned that there was a clear distinction between "history" and "the past," between the *res gestae* (what happened in the past) and the *historiae rerum gestarum* (the stories about what happened in the past). In this frame, language was crucial in the process of making history. History was not so much *Abbildung* (illustration), but rather an *Umbildung* (reconstruction) of the past, which definitely entailed a form of construction that always had an aesthetic and subjective element. This emphasis on language and discourse already came close to a poststructuralist framework, though it was restricted to the epistemology of history, and did not teach anything about how power functions, or how societies change in the present and the past. I had also studied analytical philosophy with Else Barth (as one of two or three women professors at the university), who had taught me (in a course on the sexist paradigm in philosophy in 1978!) to reject essentialism and binary logics, including philosophies

based on dialectics. Both Huizinga and Barth had serious reservations about speculative philosophies, including Marxism, called for close reading and interpretation of language and culture, and taught me to suspect the grand narratives that explained history, or for that matter the history of women's oppression.

So what exactly did we talk about, so passionately? To begin with, we had to overcome Scott's dismissal of "women's history" or/as "herstory," which she diametrically opposed to gender history in her 1983 article.²¹ The binary rhetoric that she used was felt by both of us to be an instrument of power. For us the history of women's agency was important, and women's history and the history of gender as an organizing principle should not be taken as exclusive but as inclusive of each other, and could both be seen as feminist interventions in historiography. For Francisca the problem was that she had never before questioned the constructive power of language, also in the making of history, and moreover had planned to document women's direct experiences of the past on the basis of oral history interviews. That intention was not abandoned but had to be reframed and legitimated anew, which shows in her explicit discussion of "experience" in the introduction of her dissertation.²² I myself had to overcome my fear of social theory, which still provided a basis for the formerly Marxist historian Scott's gender history, now in the form of Foucauldian discourse theory. I guess that it was also through our discussions that I started to realize how gender *worked* as an ongoing, always contextual discursive construct, and a fundamental category of difference, just like class or color. And it could only be caught in the act or grabbed by the tail when analyzing and interpreting specific discourses in the historical sources. Our dissertations had similar names: *Sekse op kantoor* (Gender in the office) and *Het Geslacht van de wetenschap* (The gender of science) (and the humanities).²³ Until yesterday, when I tried to google your book for an image of the cover, I did not realize how much porn your Dutch title brought up, demonstrating the impact of algorithms and the reading abilities of search engines.

It is my conviction that on the train from Amsterdam to Rotterdam and back, we grew into soulmates who shared, as you said in your speech for my digital surprise party in the spring of 2021, the conviction: "*this* is important and *this is what we do*—as feminists, and as feminist historians in academia." We have never developed an intimate intercourse; perhaps the most intimate thing that we did together was to attend last year a wonderful concert in the Wiener Musik Verein, ending up in the bar of some hotel around the corner. We both worked hard, and lived for the most part of our working lives far apart. But whenever we met, mostly at meetings or conferences, we cared about how things were going for each other.

I have admired many of your publications, but I will mention here only a few that the international scholars may not be familiar with, as most of your publications have been in English. The first is your master's thesis, written together with Dineke Stam, "*Jonge dochters en oude vrijsters*" (Young daughters and old spinsters), on unmarried women in the city of Haarlem in the first half of the nineteenth century.²⁴ You won the Haarlem-prijs (Haarlem Prize) in 1985 for it and publication in the Haerlem Series of the Historical Association of Haarlem. The second is a contribution to a special "gender issue" of the venerable Dutch cultural journal *De Gids* (The guide) on the genderedness of family business history. In this text you convincingly argue the need to analyze



Image 3. Mineke Bosch and Francisca de Haan at Francisca’s promotion party, 15 June 1992 (Private collection, reprinted with permission).

the separation of the public and the private in business history, instead of reproducing it, and so to include women and gender in a “new cultural business history.”²⁵ This was written when you were working on a business history of the Jewish Van Gelderen family, and both give an interesting new view on how business history could look when gender is fully included.²⁶ I have also admired your international profile that you built up first through your active engagement with the International Federation of Research in Women’s History, and later by having the guts to go to Budapest. What you accomplished there in research, teaching, and managerial and administrative (in the English meaning of the word) tasks is extraordinary. I saw it in full bloom only in its final phase, January 2020, when I came to Budapest for a promotion. I shared your work with many of my students, which also shows itself in the fact that two of your books are missing from my library, still “on loan,” I hope, and so in another dedicated young researcher’s bookcase. No wonder my PhDs also knew to find you as one of the main speakers at my farewell symposium last September.

I have to stop this commemoration—it is time for celebration. According to the motto of the first Dutch woman professor, Johanna Westerdijk: “Werken en feesten scheidt schone geesten” (“Working and celebrating creates beautiful minds”). It is no coincidence that she adorned my dissertation’s cover.

I want to thank you, Francisca, for all you did for that which we both cherish so much: women’s and gender history. I wish you all the best, and look forward to continuing our conversation, and perhaps working a bit closer together in the near future.

Mineke Bosch

Hello,

First of all, thank you very much to the organizers, and for the kind invitation; it is an honor to be part of this event. I am also very happy and grateful to be here today with the CEU community. It's been ten years since I first arrived in Budapest from Tehran to be a student in MATILDA, the graduate program in women's and gender history that fortunately is still going on. Today, I would like to talk a bit about how MATILDA and MATILDA people, and specifically Francisca de Haan, shaped me as a feminist and as a historian.

I start with a little bit of context (after all, historians love the practice of contextualizing); I am from Iran, and I studied Persian Literature and Language for my undergrad. When I came to CEU in 2013, I was not a historian and I did not have much formal training in the discipline of history. I was curious, I had some questions that required contemplations beyond the present, and I knew that I did not want to study the history of great men and ideas—in fact, if in my early twenties, someone had told me that I would end up as a historian, I would have been terrified. In this sense, MATILDA was a unique and truly formative experience for me; how I got into the program is another story for another time, but the innovative and rigorous curriculum; the training in the critical study of gender as well as historical methodologies; being between the history department and the gender studies department and exposed to collaborative dynamics as well as disciplinary tensions; and finally, being part of an international network of MATILDA people, have all together fueled me up to the present day.

When I came to CEU, Francisca was the MATILDA director, and therefore, she was the primary contact person for us MATILDA students. I believe there were seven of us that year, three of us just starting the program at CEU as our home institution and the rest as exchange students. Meanwhile, in my first semester I attended two courses instructed by Francisca, one on women's and gender history, and then the famous Foundations in Gender Studies course; in my second semester I enrolled in her Gender and Communism course, and I also asked her to be my advisor, which she luckily agreed to do. I am listing these here just to make a case for plenty of exchanges in terms of meetings, emails, drafts, many many drafts in fact, feedback, and requests for recommendation letters that took place over the course of two years and beyond.

I have been in graduate school for some years now, here and there, in a couple of institutions, and I have gotten to teach and mentor myself, yet Francisca's mentorship stands out to me as a model to linger on, and I am saying that mindfully, because recently I had to write a teaching philosophy for the job market, and this task made me sit and reflect on my own history of studentship and my many teachers.

I am indebted to Francisca in various ways, but I guess the most crucial of those is that she took me seriously as a historian, before I took myself seriously in that regard. Francisca's noncasualness about things and people, and her willingness to recognize potential and possibility, still strike me.

I think Francisca's students would agree that working with her could be challenging. Challenging in the sense that she has always been uncompromising in her pursuit of historical accuracy; she encouraged us to constantly question our assumptions, to dig deeper, to see the patterns and the broader context, and to avoid essentializing our historical cases. She wanted us to think critically and write clearly in a way that made

sense. This, the necessity of things making sense, and calling out nonsense, is one of my most crucial takeaways from working with Francisca.

As an educator, Francisca could balance a focus on accuracy and precision with a broader perspective on the larger goals and objectives.

I remember, for example, that in her syllabi she had instructions on how to name an attachment file with last name and the subject of the paper, something that to many might seem so basic and obvious, but in fact was yet another part of a “hidden curriculum” that was not available to some of us new to that academic tradition. Meanwhile, she passionately moderated conversations around the most theoretical debates. She demonstrated a genuine interest in us students as individuals, taking time to get to know us and fostering a sense of community among us. In the middle of my first semester at CEU, when we were buried under loads of reflection papers, presentations, and looming deadlines for term papers—only CEU students know what I am talking about—she came to class one morning, and before anything, wrote on the board, “don’t worry!” That, that plain performance in that context, communicated a great deal of compassion and care. It was reassuring to know that this professor, with such high standards, assured us that we were doing OK, and we did not need to worry too much.

In June 2015, we met briefly after the graduation ceremony of my cohort. At that time, I was weighing my options and trying to figure out if I wanted to stay in academia. So, I asked her: why did she stay in academia? She said—I am just paraphrasing what she said, of course, I did not take notes—that what we were doing was important, that she was told by some, not many, that her writing meant something to them, and that she found it rewarding to see that she was making an impact. That statement touched me, and that’s why I remember it, mainly because of its honesty and humbleness; she considered her audience to be some, not too many, and still advocated for hard work and excellence. Over the last ten years, this message has stayed with me, especially when I think that what I do might be pointless; I remind myself that my work, our work, does not need to be important for everyone, but perhaps for some, or even only a few, as long as it commits to making an impact.

Professor Francisca de Haan, thank you very much for all you have done for younger people, for those who got to the party later, for not compromising with nonsense, for not discounting high standards with the assumption that “one might not be capable after all,” for your appreciation of small steps and the simple, and for providing a relatable model of what it means to be a feminist historian.

Samin Rashidbeigi

In 2017, I enrolled in the MA Gender Studies program at CEU, where I stayed for the final period of the university’s Budapest era. Now that we are honoring Francisca de Haan’s career in academia, it is my delight to speak as one of her students about what her work has meant to me, and I am sure that I also speak on behalf of many of my peers.

I first got to know Francisca when taking her course about gender and communist movements. I did not have a particular background in history, but took it because I

was interested in the topic of contemporary political movements. This course not only expanded my horizons, but deepened my understanding of history, a subject that I thought I had finished in high school. Francisca introduced us to key figures, texts, and events from across the world, and constructed a frame of reference for recent political history that is less dominant, but no less relevant.

Taking part in Francisca's lessons is special, because it becomes so clear that she is always looking to learn new things. In her classes, with students from different backgrounds, she reminded us that we all bring different knowledge to the table. I don't think I was the only gender studies student to whom the term "Judeo-Bolshevism" was new, whereas students from the history department had never heard of Simone de Beauvoir. I learned always to be ready to take in new perspectives, and importantly, I learned not to be afraid of not knowing something, because that fear can be paralyzing and stand in the way of development.

When my first year at CEU was drawing to a close, it was time to think about my master's thesis. I didn't have a solid plan about what I wanted to research, and I realized that this could be my chance to work more closely with Francisca, whose knowledge had impressed me greatly. I went to her office and asked which topic I would have to write about in order for her to supervise my thesis. Not very independent-minded of me, but I don't regret it. I should remark that Francisca laughed at my request and said that she was open to any topic, but since I asked, she suggested that (because I am Norwegian myself) I look into the Norwegian branch of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).

As we know, Francisca has been researching this peace and women's organization for around twenty-five years. Since the WIDF had member organizations from many different countries, we rely on an equally international effort to properly map and research its history.

I did as Francisca proposed, I looked up the earliest participation of Norwegian women, and I ended up writing my MA thesis about Kirsten Hansteen, the leader of the Norwegian delegation at the WIDF's founding congress in 1945 in Paris.

Kirsten Hansteen was born in the north of Norway in 1903. When her father died during an epidemic, her mother brought her and her four siblings to the capital of Norway, now called Oslo. There, Kirsten received an education and entered university. She was soon overtaken by her political interests, and in 1928 she became the only woman in the leadership of *Mot Dag* (Toward Dawn), an influential Marxist-Leninist organization. She spent the interwar period writing and organizing in favor of the labor movement, even at one point establishing a labor union for women. All this time she stayed out of party politics, gravitating more toward a clique of radical authors, painters, poets, and actors promoting debate through art.

During the German occupation of Norway in World War II, Hansteen joined the communist resistance movement, working with other women to spread resistance propaganda and smuggle large amounts of money to support the families of those imprisoned or killed by the occupation regime.

When Norway was liberated in 1945 and the country installed a social democratic prime minister, Hansteen became the first woman in a Norwegian government, in which she represented the Communist Party. It was at this time that she traveled to

Paris to join the WIDF. She later went on to found a political women's magazine entitled *Kvinnen og tiden* (Woman and times) and to head the Norwegian chapter of the World Peace Council, among other things.

I did not know half of this when I started my thesis project in 2018, not because I hadn't read up on the history, but because it had not been written yet. Despite the fact that Hansteen was the first female minister in Norway, research about her was scarce, limited to a couple of encyclopedia entries. When historians have mentioned her role in the government, they have more often than not also suggested that she was chosen under a form of gender quota, and as a stand-in for her late husband, a communist labor unionist who was executed during the war.

This lack of information about a woman who was clearly a central political actor in her time made me even more interested. I started my research, and wrote a thesis about Hansteen's role in the Norwegian left-feminist movement in the 1940s. This I did under the guidance of Francisca, and with the support of three students in my year, one of whom, Kiera Wilkins, is the author of an entry in Francisca de Haan's *Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women*. The four of us were co-supervised by Francisca, following what I think is one of her main principles: that any work is done better if performed in a group. We listened to each other's questions and conundrums, discussed each other's material, and heard Francisca's reflections, which were without exception relevant to all of us.

As a supervisor, Francisca never gave us any answers, and I remember finding this a bit surprising at first. I would come to her office, head filled with blanks and questions marks, and instead of answering them, she would ask different questions in return. She is a true Socratic teacher, helping her students develop knowledge in our own minds. To many of us students' frustration—and this is where Francisca de Haan the editor comes out—she also put great emphasis on writing in clear and correct language. She would return papers and drafts full of red marks, and I know I wasn't the only one, telling us to work on our grammar and choice of words. She did this not to enforce an elitist standard of English—quite the opposite. Clear and understandable language is a prerequisite for a text to be accessible. I have seen this in Francisca's own writing. Her sentences are clear and to the point, never a superfluous archaism or loanword in sight. As I have come to understand, this clarity is crucial to transnational historical research, where we draw on sources in many different languages, and rely on each other's interpretations.

By the time I handed in my thesis and graduated from CEU, I was completely fascinated by my own research on Kirsten Hansteen, so I continued on a small scale. And as research often does, it grew into a book project, a biography that I am currently working on. In the politest way possible, I am holding Francisca responsible for this.

I remember a conversation we had with Francisca in our thesis group about the value of biographies. Biographical research allows us to discover connections and networks that would otherwise not have been discovered, to come across details that may have been overlooked. I think this is especially important in women's history, because women have not necessarily frequented well-known organizations and institutions. I see it so clearly in my own research about Hansteen, who went from the labor movement to the resistance movement to the women's movement to the peace movement,

and was still grossly ignored by historians. Biographical research is exploratory, plowing ground for new knowledge to grow, and I commend Francisca for her massive work with *Rosa Manus (1881–1942): The International Life and Legacy of a Jewish Dutch Feminist* (2017); *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries* (2006); and now *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World*.

Francisca has worked with rigor and dedication for decades, and as I have experienced firsthand, time has let her develop somewhat of a historical instinct. When I was in the early stages of my book project, I asked Francisca for advice. She gave me some tips, but notably, she cautioned me to make sure that I kept my independence. For example, she said, let's say that you discover in your research that Kirsten Hansteen had a lesbian relationship. You need to make sure that if you do, you are free to write about it without legal or financial repercussions. What happened next? A stack of letters was discovered in an old desk in a mansion in Sweden—this was in 2018, and the letters became available to the public in late 2020. Among them I discovered over fifty letters from Hansteen to a Swedish lesbian noblewoman, written in the 1950s, and revealing a strong and personal relationship between the two. I won't go more into it now, but let me just say that I am very grateful for Francisca's advice, and I will be writing about this in my book.

Thank you, Francisca de Haan, for your work, for your knowledge, and for your thoughtfulness. We cannot wait to see what you will do next.

Lauritz Guldal Einarsen

My name is Isidora Grubački, and I will contribute today to the discussion as Francisca's current student. Francisca was the second reader for my MA thesis in 2016/2017, and since 2017 she has been co-supervising my PhD dissertation with Balázs Trencsényi, professor at the CEU History Department.

I hope you will not hold it against me if I first reach back a little further into the past. As a student of comparative literature and literary theory at the University of Belgrade in the early 2010s, I heard many wonderful stories about Central European University—then of course still in Budapest—and began to dream of studying there. I was interested in feminist journals from the interwar period and the ideological background of the discourses on rural women in those journals. I was not sure where my planned topic would fit better, so I applied to both the History and Gender Studies departments. I eventually enrolled in the History program, but fortunately there was still room to combine my two interests; Francisca was among several professors who helped bridge the gap between the two research areas and between the two departments.

When I came to the CEU History Department in 2016 for a one-year MA program, I thought it would only be for a year. But soon after classes started, I realized that this was the place where I would be happy and honored to continue my studies. Francisca was one of the reasons for this decision. I would now like to share some of the reasons that this was so, in the hope that this will bring to light her immense influence not only on me, but on many students at this university.

I remember arriving in Budapest at the beginning of my MA studies, thrilled but at the same time horrified. I was not a historian, I worried; I knew nothing about various approaches to writing history, I panicked. I was particularly frightened about the archives, and I remember explaining over and over to my fellow students that I knew nothing about the archives. As someone who came from a literary studies background, I was unsure of what was expected of me and how I could approach this new challenge of writing a thesis about women's history.

This is where Francisca's input and encouragement were essential. Thorough and precise, strict yet open and friendly, Francisca held courses that provided the much-needed grounding for many of the students who came from diverse backgrounds. The two courses I had the pleasure of taking were "Women's and Gender History: An Introduction to Theory, Methodology, and Archives" and "Communism and Gender: Historical and Global Perspectives." These two courses represented for me an interdisciplinary space where students of history and gender studies could learn from each other. The course assignments were carefully crafted to provide students with the necessary academic writing skills. And the syllabus offered indispensable knowledge for the work we were about to engage in.

I will give two examples, which were the most important for me.

The first point concerns the issue of archives. In the "Women's and Gender History" course, we started from the very beginning and discussed what it means to write history and to write women's history, and the course provided us with the key concepts for these reflections. We discussed, of course, whether and how gender is a useful category of historical analysis. We talked about the archives, about the sources that do not "speak for themselves," about finding women in the archives, and about the way we can think of archival sources as building blocks of a larger story. This is where the issue of the narrativity of history came forward, which put me more at ease with my new discipline. Going back to one of my biggest fears at the beginning of my studies, you will not be surprised to hear that at the end of the course, when we talked about how it might have been useful to us, I said: I am not afraid of the archives anymore!

The second example is closely entangled with the first. Francisca made sure that we came out of her courses with the following thought: "half of history is historiography." She would begin her "Communism and Gender" course with an overview of the existing historiography. What is particularly worthy of mention is that she would not only start with a survey of the literature on communism and gender, but would bring actual books into the class, take them up one by one, and show us; for instance, I remember *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, and then her simply saying: "Communism and Women, Chapter 28(!)." In this way, Francisca brought the abstract notion of historiography down to its material aspect, and literally showed us how little space was devoted to women in the histories of communism.

As part of the course, we first discussed the ideas of Bebel, Zetkin, Engels, and Kollontai, and then we went on a trip around the globe in search of communist women's activism, from early-Cold War Yugoslavia to revolutionary Cuba, from Black women's communism in the United States to the New Woman in Uzbekistan. By discussing the history of communism from a gendered perspective, the course helped us rethink concepts, approaches, and periodization in the history of communism, making it an-

other case study for how a gendered approach can change the existing historiographical narrative. Importantly, the course has changed over the years as scholarship on the topic has advanced—and again importantly, this was because of Francisca’s own work, but also, I would add, because of the course itself. With the solid theoretical and historiographical foundation that the course offered, sometimes just Francisca’s question “and where were *women* in your story?” could be a good enough inspiration for a whole new article or research perspective. So, while one of the things we learned in the course was that “half of history is historiography,” I think Francisca’s approach to historiography significantly influenced its expansion as well.

To this point about historiography, I would like to add a small side remark. The relationship with historiography is also reflected in Francisca’s writing and editing, especially in the case of the volumes she has meticulously (co)edited, and the introductions to these volumes provide a guiding light on how to think about history-writing; they offer comprehensive historiographical overviews and put forward key historiographical questions, valuable both to those approaching a given topic for the first time and to scholars who have been studying the subject for years.

These two aspects, concerning archives and historiography, have been critical for my training as a historian. They are also the aspects with which I still struggle the most, and which have sometimes been a bone of contention, so to speak, between me and Francisca. (Not so dramatic, of course, but I am adding this here for the effect!) Not because we disagree, but because achieving this high level of writing is truly the most difficult aspect of the work we do. Yet, as hard as it is sometimes to cope with Francisca’s comments on drafts, comments that mostly bring you back to the foundations I discussed earlier, funnily enough, these are the very things I highlight when I give feedback to others. In this sense, her approach has been invaluable to me as a scholar in more than one way.

With all this in mind, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Francisca for her guidance during these long seven years, years of writing and research, but also years of anxieties, disruptions, and relocations. Thank you for being there, in Budapest, Vienna, and Amsterdam, thank you for caring, thank you for the good people you’ve been gathering around you, and thank you for the foundations.

Isidora Grubački

For Francisca de Haan, a Women’s Historian, a Colleague, and a Friend

Many aspects of the work of Francisca de Haan have been addressed here, and there are many more that we can talk about. Speaking as the last one this morning, and knowing Francisca since she came to CEU, I would like to talk combining several of my possible roles: as someone who has worked with her all throughout the many years she spent at the Department of Gender Studies; as a colleague who has co-created and co-taught courses with her; as an author who collaborated with Francisca in her role as an editor; and, very importantly, as her friend who has shared with her so much, including important topics related to our work, our lives, books, films, travels . . . By the way, did you know that she loves detective novels? In particular feminist ones.

Francisca joined the department in 2002, at the time when Susan Zimmermann was the Head, and the former Program in Gender and Culture was transformed into a full-fledged Department of Gender Studies. During the last twenty years the department has continually grown. With more faculty on board, more programs were created, and Francisca played an important role in these processes. For instance, she was the inaugural Director of Doctoral Studies when the PhD program started in September 2002, remaining in this position for six years and profoundly shaping the program's development.

Her first years at CEU were also the time during which the department continued to build its international recognition more intensely. Known for its strong support to women's studies and gender studies programs and feminist scholarship in the Central and Eastern European region since its foundation, the department also began building its first consortia in the early 2000s. There were several projects of sharing programs and curricula, offering lectures and receiving scholars and PhD students from regional universities, like the University of Tbilisi and the European Humanities University from Minsk (later relocated to Vilnius), where Francisca also participated.

She also contributed to building international and intercontinental ties with academics in the field by helping to establish an International Consortium in Graduate Women's and Gender Studies with the participation of scholars from eight countries (the USA, Korea, China, Uganda, South Africa, Jamaica, Israel, and Hungary), led by the University of Maryland and CEU. The consortium was initiated by Susan Zimmermann as Head of Department, with Francisca's strong support in realizing the program.

Recognizing the significance of wider academic cooperation, in 2006 Francisca strongly supported the creation of the Erasmus Mundus GEMMA MA in Women's and Gender Studies, a consortium that brings together seven European universities. Since then GEMMA has become the most successful EU-supported gender studies program. Soon after that, in 2008, together with Susan Zimmermann, Francisca created the MATILDA European Master's in Women's and Gender History, also a part of the EU's Erasmus program, run by a consortium of six universities.

Francisca's dedication to MATILDA is just one of the manifestations of her passionate dedication to women's history. For her it is not only a matter of a job or a field of research: it is a life calling in which her personal and professional interests meet and her feminism gets its lasting, profound articulation. This is why Francisca's courses in women's history have always been particularly loved and appreciated by her students.

Looking back, I would also like to mention the significant role Francisca took on in the Eighth European Feminist Research Conference, held in Budapest in May 2012, organized by the Department of Gender Studies. The whole department was behind the conference, but as a person who was in charge, I can say that without Francisca's huge involvement as a member of both the Conference Committee and the Organizing Committee, the event could not have been so successful.

As you can tell, there are many things to be remembered from the last two decades. Together with Francisca's career, the careers of her colleagues developed as well, and through these interrelated processes the Department of Gender Studies became an important academic community both within CEU and beyond. During her

last years at CEU, Francisca led the department as its Head through three difficult and challenging years, from August 2019 until August 2022. It was a particularly sensitive period of time, with the university moving from Budapest to Vienna and acquiring its Austrian accreditation, followed by COVID-19, with all its consequences. Throughout these difficult times, as department leader Francisca always stood strongly for its faculty, its staff, and its students.

When it comes to her research, I have closely witnessed the deep commitment and devotion she has put into all her projects. At the time when she was working on *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*, there were weeks and months when she was literally not accessible, fully immersed in her work, deeply involved in exploring the worlds of Central and Eastern Europe. Another of her pioneering contributions to the field is the founding of *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* in 2007, of which she was the editor in chief for its first decade. *Aspasia* became a platform for the promotion of scholarship on the region, but also of scholars from the region.

Francisca has always been passionate about recognizing invisible women's histories, as well as marginalized women historians whose work remained neglected because they worked in smaller languages or less exposed universities. In that sense, long before the decolonization of the curriculum became a policy of CEU, she had been applying its principles in her work both as a professor and as a researcher. We have collaborated in *Aspasia* on a couple of occasions; thus I have seen myself how carefully and meticulously Francisca went through every text, engaging with them much more than her role of editor required, looking at all aspects, from arguments to facts, from style of writing to correctness of data.

Francisca was also very much open to learning from the place and the region she was living in, and from the people she was working with, including her students. In the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, experiences from socialist times were addressed focusing predominantly on the failures of the system; Francisca took a different approach in her work, focusing on women's experiences during state socialism and the diversity of socialist systems. Both in her research and her teaching she aimed at shedding light on and doing justice to the hugely important role of women in complex, yet untold histories that remained too often obscured by later gender-blind narratives.

Finally, I want to say something very personal. My close collaboration with Francisca started as soon as she came to the department. Already during the first academic year of our newly introduced PhD program, Francisca and I taught a course together, entitled "History, Literature, and Narrativity." It was this shared course, altogether an extraordinary experience, that really brought us together as colleagues and friends. For this course we created a syllabus that we both liked very much, but it did not prevent us from having extended debates in class, with Francisca speaking from the perspective of a historian, and I from a perspective of a literary critic. To this day I think that it is a particularly important aspect of co-teaching to allow students to see that their professors are willing to enter into a debate when they have different opinions on some topics, and that they are able to discuss these with academic arguments and mutual appreciation. I also consider that it is just as important to invite our students

to be a part of such debates, as we did during that course. Furthermore, through these debates with Francisca I learned how to appreciate precision in expressing myself, and why it is important to contextualize my interpretations clearly and support them with data.

Co-teaching with her, I have also understood how deeply and passionately Francisca cares for her students. She has always devoted special time and effort to getting to know all of them more closely, to knowing their educational backgrounds and research interests, and to understanding and supporting their real potential. Being strict in her requirements when it came to papers and presentations, she was at the same time endlessly supportive when it came to students' needs; her willingness to understand them and offer help and support were never exhausted. And the same passionate care for students that I experienced in that first course we taught together twenty years ago was still there in the course "Feminism and Community," which we co-taught last academic year—it never ceased to inspire her work as an educator. Students have always recognized that and rewarded her as a teacher and as an educator with an equal measure of heartfelt respect and sincere devotion.

It was an honor and a privilege for me to perform in all these roles throughout the years that I have shared with Francisca de Haan at the Department of Gender Studies, and I sincerely hope to remain in at least some of these roles during the years to come. We will not teach together anymore—I am also slowing down in that respect—but there are many more occasions ahead of us to share, both as colleagues and as friends.

Jasmina Lukić

Long march toward final victory: How and why to write about communist women today?

by Agnieszka Mrozik, Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences

"Real biographies of Communists will never be written" noted Czesław Miłosz, the Polish Nobel Prize winner in literature, in his autobiography *A Year of the Hunter*.²⁷ He wrote these words with Jerzy Borejsza (1905–1952) in mind: a Polish pre- and post-World War II communist activist and politician, founder of the "Czytelnik" Publishing Cooperative (the first media and publishing company in post-war Poland), and organizer of the World Congress of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace in Wrocław in 1948. This remark by Miłosz, however, seems particularly pertinent when we think of communist women, many of whom we do not know, do not remember, or do not perceive through the prism of popular, often anti-communist and/or anti-feminist clichés. In the case of many communist women—politicians, social activists, cultural practitioners—we do not know, for example, that they were deeply involved in the project of women's emancipation and that they saw it as an important part of a modernizing vision of the world.

The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World,²⁸ the volume we are discussing today, is an attempt to recount the lives and achievements of twenty-five women activists, politicians, and intellectuals who, in the twentieth century (and some as early as the nineteenth century), advocated for women's rights in

the ranks of the communist left in different regions of the world. The chapter authors work in two ways. First, they bring out of the silence, which in itself is an old feminist gesture, the communist women activists who fought for women's and workers' rights, but also against racism and antisemitism and, with time, against the rise of fascism. What is immediately striking is the multiplicity of activities of the volume's protagonists, the multiplicity of struggles they waged in various fields, including within the Communist Party (after all, their demand for equal rights for men and women in every sphere of life did not always find understanding in Party circles, among male comrades). The struggle for women's rights in which they became engaged could not be isolated from other struggles.

Approached seriously and respectfully—and not treated in the patronizing manner we so often encounter in stories about women, active agents of history—the protagonists of the volume are portrayed as flesh-and-blood people in whose lives the political and the personal were constantly intersecting. Following Ludwik Fleck, a Polish-Jewish and Israeli biologist and philosopher, I would say that they constituted a kind of “thought collective,”²⁹ that is, a formation forged in a specific social and cultural context, united by a common diagnosis of the problem (of social inequality and exploitation, especially of women) and a vision of its solution (through a radical remodeling of society). In turn, following Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish, researchers of social movements, I would say that they were characterized by a “radical imagination,” that is, “the ability to imagine the world, life and social institutions not as they are but as they might otherwise be. It is the courage and the intelligence to recognize that the world can and should be changed. But the radical imagination is not just about dreaming of different futures. It's about bringing those possible futures ‘back’ to work on the present, to inspire action and new forms of solidarity today.”³⁰

These two concepts—the “radical imagination” and the “thought collective”—make it possible (more precisely than the seemingly obvious, yet problematic in the humanities and social sciences, the category of “generation”³¹) to grasp the specificity and commonality, and at the same time the diversity, of women who shared similar agendas and strategies of action, although the context in which they operated was often different, as were their personal, professional, social, and political backgrounds. The volume draws a rich, multifaceted, and complex picture of the lives and endeavors of left feminists operating in many different corners of the globe, without, however, creating a homogenizing story of the community they built.

What I find particularly valuable is that the volume reveals the inter- and transnational history of twentieth-century communist women. It gives an insight into the multiplicity of links between the protagonists: political, but also personal. These links formed a kind of network that entwined the whole world. We can see how this network was built, but also how difficult it was to build, how it sometimes ripped, requiring intervention, patching the holes that inevitably appeared in this sprawling structure that was the communist movement and left feminism at the same time. This transnational aspect is extremely important because it enables us to move beyond a kind of “methodological nationalism” in our thinking about and researching communist women, which, according to memory scholars Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, fosters “the production of new narratives in the interstices between nation-states and in the trans-

national arena, [and this] gradually giv[es] rise to new modes of remembrance that are not just historicist but also forward-looking."³² The volume enables us to look at communist women from a broader perspective that transcends nation-states, so that the project in which they were involved emerges as a meaningful alternative to capitalism and not, as argued today, a marginal initiative doomed to failure from the start.

Second, the volume engages in reflection on a meta-level, as it shows how left feminists functioned and continue to function in public debate, including its feminist variety, primarily at the level of nation-states. The analysis of mythologizing practices—the emergence and functioning of the myths of individual communist women—is accompanied by analyses of their demonizing representations in culture, including the gendered roles and characteristics attributed to the protagonists, such as “caring/deviant mothers,” “good/bad wives,” and “helping hands” of men more important than themselves.

What I appreciated are the attempts by the authors of the individual chapters to reach out to the voices of their protagonists: speeches, articles, letters, memoirs. Thus, communist women—their lives and activities, evolving over time and space—emerge from this work not only as objects of analysis, targets of researchers’ insights, but also, and perhaps above all, as agents of history acting through words, through their texts, sometimes difficult to access, sought out with great effort by the authors. For reaching these texts is not always easy. The volume shows that the history of communist women is also the history of knowledge about them: a history of incomplete archives, scattered sources, omissions and silences in their own texts, but also in the works of their former biographers. At times the authors have to navigate through a wealth of information—they have to deal with a peculiar abundance, a multiplicity of sources: journalistic, literary, auto/biographical, film, etc.—while at other times they have to struggle with a lack of material. However, the publication reveals the importance not only of the archives themselves, but also of the way in which they are approached: curiosity, but also suspicion of the material found in the archives, constantly guides those writing about communist women. But it is the passion of the authors, their desire to tell the stories of communist women, the aforementioned bringing them out of the silence, that is undoubtedly what primarily captures the attention of those reading this volume.

I would also like to say a few words about the authors of this publication—some of them I have the pleasure and honor to know personally, others I know only from their works. It is clear from their biographical notes, but above all from reading their chapters, that they are not only experts on the subject and specialists in the field, but also often passionate educators, some of them activists who in various ways combine academic work with other forms of engagement in public life. Their chapters demonstrate not only scientific competence, but also the aforementioned commitment and passion in their approach to the protagonists of their work. These can be seen above all in the way they narrate the stories of communist women, which does not aim, to paraphrase Joan Wallach Scott, “to add [communist] women to an existing body of stories, [but] to change the way these stories would be told.” And further paraphrasing Scott: “it’s new stories that [the authors] yearn to tell, new memories that [they] seek to reveal. [Their] passion for [communist] women’s history [proves to be] a desire to know and

think what had hitherto been unthinkable. Passion, after all, thrives on the pursuit of the not-yet-known."³³ According to Scott, the key to the feminist shift in storytelling is interdisciplinarity, which is strongly evident in the publication we are discussing. Indeed, I would argue that a story about communist women who crossed all possible boundaries in their lives and activities, as I wrote about the Polish communist Wanda Wasilewska and as Victor Strazzeri wrote about Italian communist women,³⁴ would be difficult, if not impossible, to articulate within just one discipline. The tools of many different disciplines—anthropology, literary studies, cultural studies, political studies, gender and women's studies and, of course, historiography—are necessary to tell this complex, multifaceted story of communist women, but also the story of their mythologization and, on other occasions, their demonization.

But it is also noteworthy that the authors of the volume, like its protagonists, form something of a "thought collective": they are united by a certain vision and working method. They are also driven by an ethos of cooperation, not at all obvious in science, which nowadays mainly rewards competition and individual achievement: some of the chapters are the result of joint work, often international, which I see as another example of the "bond" between contemporary researchers and the protagonists of their work. In this context, it is impossible not to mention the *spiritus movens* of the whole project, Professor Francisca de Haan: without her initiative, commitment, and effort, we would still be waiting a long time for a publication of this kind.

Finally, I would like to mention what this volume is or can become for readers, including myself. For scholars and activists dispersed all over the world (though of course not only for them), isolated in their work on the history of communist women, as well as in their public activism, this publication is not only a source of knowledge, but also a kind of link to the protagonists of a history that Francis Fukuyama wrote about as being "over,"³⁵ and to other researchers, activists, or simply people who are united by a certain vision of the world and action (or at least a willingness to take action) to achieve it. Around books like this one, a kind of reading collective is formed: a virtual and sometimes quite real transnational community of researchers and practitioners who, thanks to reading, do not feel so isolated and helpless in their everyday life. When I was working on a book about Polish communist women, post-World War II left feminists,³⁶ I realized, based on reading their memoirs, how many of them came to the communist movement precisely through books: the works of Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, August Bebel, Clara Zetkin, and many others proved to be a platform for meeting other comrades, a tool for building consensus on goals and strategies for common struggle. It seems to me that this kind of connection is still relevant today. Stories of other people's lives and activities still have the power to thrill, to inspire, to awaken dreams of a better world, and the desire to make these dreams a reality, no longer alone, but collectively.

The volume, as its title suggests, is a kind of handbook: it teaches that emancipation and equality are not given once and for all, and that the struggle to preserve them must go on. This struggle is hardly over and cannot be over, even if it is more often marked by failures than successes (which, for us living in a world where success is so important, and especially success that comes quickly, without too much waiting, is difficult to understand and accept). The lives and activities of the protagonists of this

volume show that it is necessary to have patience, not to lose heart, because the history of change and the struggle for it is a long process, spread over years, and losing battles does not mean final defeat. Rosa Luxemburg wrote about this in her last article: “The whole road of socialism—so far as revolutionary struggles are concerned—is paved with nothing but thunderous defeats. Yet, at the same time, history marches inexorably, step by step, toward final victory! Where would we be today without those ‘defeats,’ from which we draw historical experience, understanding, power and idealism? Today, as we advance into the final battle of the proletarian class war, we stand on the foundation of those very defeats; and we cannot do without any of them, because each one contributes to our strength and understanding.”³⁷ Processes that were unfinished or even failed in the past can and should be continued in the future.

Finally, the volume encourages further work on the topic and collaboration: we often learn about the stories of our protagonists thanks to other researchers working on similar topics in other parts of the world (for example, thanks to Francisca de Haan’s studies on the history of the Women’s International Democratic Federation and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, I was able to obtain the names of Polish post-war communists committed to women’s activism—Zofia Dembińska and Fryderyka Kalinowska—which either do not appear at all in research conducted in Poland, or appear in other contexts, such as activities for children, but not for women). The volume reveals how many women acted for women in the ranks of the communist left and how much the map of their names needs additions. The biographies of twenty-five communist women provide an excellent starting point for these additions, or rather—the beginning of a whole new story that is “interesting not only from a historical point of view, [but] empower[s] us to better act upon the world as it currently exists.”³⁸

◆ About the Authors

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◆ Notes

1. Francisca de Haan, ed., *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

2. Francisca de Haan and Myriam Everard, eds., *Rosa Manus (1881–1942): The International Life and Legacy of a Jewish Dutch Feminist* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loutfi, eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006); Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010), 547–573.

3. Although we also worked together on MATILDA, the first European joint degree in Women's and Gender History, as other colleagues will talk about her teaching, I will focus on her scholarship.

4. To my knowledge, Francisca is the first feminist historian who applied the paradigm of entangled history to women's movements and feminisms. I have in mind her chapter "Writing Inter/Transnational History: The Case of Women's Movements and Feminisms" in the impressive volume *Internationale Geschichte in Theorie und Praxis/International History in Theory and*

Practice, ed. Barbara Haider-Wilson, William D. Godsey, and Wolfgang Mueller (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017), 501–537.

5. Krassimira Daskalova, “Entangled Histories of Women’s Movements and Feminisms: An Interview with Francisca de Haan,” *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 4, no. 2 (2020), 30, <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/8518>.

6. “Aims & Scope,” *Aspasia*, https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/aspasia/aspasia-overview.xml?tab_body=about (accessed 22 May 2023).

7. Apart from her other publications, Francisca organized and edited three important discussion forums in *Aspasia*: Francisca de Haan, ed., “Is ‘Communist Feminism’ a *Contradictio in Terminis*?” *Aspasia* 1 (2007), 197–246; Francisca de Haan, ed., “Gendering the Cold War in the Region,” *Aspasia* 8 (2014), 162–190; and Francisca de Haan, ed., “Ten Years After: Communism and Feminism Revisited,” *Aspasia* 10 (2016), 102–168.

8. “Office-Holders and Board Members, 1990–2015,” *International Federation for Research in Women’s History*, <https://www.ifrwh.com/former-office-holders-and-board-members> (accessed 7 May 2023).

9. On the membership of the IFRWH in the ICHS, see “International Organisations,” *ICHS*, <https://www.cish.org/index.php/en/members/international-organisations/> (accessed 7 May 2023).

10. Krassimira Daskalova, Mary O’Dowd, and Daniela Koleva, eds., “Gender and the Cultural Production of Knowledge,” special issue, *Women’s History Review* 20, no. 4 (2011).

11. Francisca de Haan, Margaret Allen, June Purvis, and Krassimira Daskalova, eds., *Women’s Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2013).

12. Robert Darnton, “‘What is the History of Books?’ Revisited,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 3 (2007), 495–508. Most mainstream historians working in the field of the history of the book and the history of reading, however, are gender-blind. Recently a number of scholars have started to pay attention to the gendered aspects of book history. See for example: Michelle Levy, Kate Ozment, and Andrew O. Winckles, “Beyond Authorship: Reconstructing Women’s Literary Labor,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Spring 2021), 123–124, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hlq.2021.0013>; Michelle Levy, “Women and the Book in Britain’s Long Eighteenth Century,” *Literature Compass* 17, no. 9 (2020), 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12581>; Michelle Levy, “A New Republic of Women’s Letters,” *Studies in Romanticism* 59, no. 4 (Winter 2020), 519–533, <https://doi.org/10.1353/srm.2020.0026>.

13. Literary scholar Wolfgang Iser, the creator of reader-response theory, speaks about “implied,” “ideal,” and “real” readers of texts. Historians of the book are interested in “the real” readers throughout history. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* [The act of reading: The theory of aesthetic effect] (Stuttgart: Uni-Taschenbücher, 1994).

14. Elisabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

15. Ioana Cîrstocea, *Learning Gender after the Cold War: Contentious Feminisms* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

16. De Haan, *Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World*.

17. De Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women’s Organizations.”

18. In reference to Kristen Ghodsee, *The Left Side of History: World War II and the Unfulfilled Promise of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

19. Ioana Cîrstocea, “Studying ‘Global Feminism’ as a Transnational Assemblage: Geopolitics of Women’s Rights in the (Post)Cold War (1975–1995),” in *Cross-Border Solidarities in Twenty-*

First Century Contexts: Feminist Perspectives and Activist Practices, ed. Janet Conway, Pascale Du-four, and Dominique Masson (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 3–28; Ioana Cîrstocea and Françoise Thébaud, eds., “Le genre de la guerre froide” [Gender and the Cold War], special issue, *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* [Clio: Women, gender, history] 57, no. 1 (June 2023): 7–22.

20. Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986), 1053–1075.

21. Joan W. Scott, “Women’s History: The Modern Period,” *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies* 101 (1983), 141–157. In the year I started my dissertation, Scott’s *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) came out. I studied that book from cover to cover.

22. Francisca de Haan, *Sekse op kantoor: Over vrouwelijkheid, mannelijkheid en macht, Nederland 1860–1940* [Gender in the office: On femininity, masculinity, and power, Netherlands, 1860–1940] (Hilversum: Verloren, 1992).

23. Mineke Bosch, *Het geslacht van de wetenschap: Vrouwen en hoger onderwijs in Nederland, 1878–1948* [The gender of science: Women and higher education in the Netherlands, 1878–1948] (Amsterdam: SUA, 1994).

24. Francisca de Haan and Dineke Stam, “Jonge dochters en oude vrijsters: Ongehuwde vrouwen in Haarlem in de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw” [Young daughters and old spinsters: Unmarried women in Haarlem in the first half of the nineteenth century], *Haerlemreeks* [Haerlem series], 4 (n.p., 1986).

25. Francisca de Haan, “De laatste lege planken: Vrouwen en gender in de bedrijfsgeschiedenis” [The last empty shelves: Women and gender in business history], *De Gids* [The guide] 163, no. 9 (September 2000), 703–708.

26. Francisca de Haan, *Een eigen patroon: Geschiedenis van een joodse familie en haar bedrijven, ca. 1800–1964* [Their own pattern: History of a Jewish family and its companies, 1800–1964] (Amsterdam: Verloren, 2002).

27. Czeslaw Milosz, *A Year of the Hunter*, trans. Madeline G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1994), 130.

28. *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World*, ed. and introduction Francisca de Haan (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

29. Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, trans. from the German 1935 edition by Frederick Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn, ed. Thaddeus J. Trenn and Robert K. Merton, foreword Thomas S. Kuhn (Chicago and London: The Chicago of University Press, 1979).

30. Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish, *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 10–11.

31. See, for example, *Gender, Generations, and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond*, ed. Anna Artwińska and Agnieszka Mroziak (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

32. Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, “Introduction,” in *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, ed. Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 1–25, here 21.

33. Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 24, 40.

34. See Agnieszka Mroziak, “Crossing Boundaries: The Case of Wanda Wasilewska and Polish Communism,” *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women’s and Gender History* 11 (2017): 19–53; Victor Strazzeri, “Beyond the Double Blind Spot: Relocating Communist Women as Transgressive Subjects in Contemporary Historiography,” *Gender & History* (December 1, 2022): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12675>.

35. Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18.

36. See Agnieszka Mroziak, *Architektki PRL-u. Komunistki, literatura i emancypacja kobiet w powojennej Polsce* [Female architects of the Polish People's Republic: Communist women, literature, and women's emancipation in postwar Poland] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2022).

37. Rosa Luxemburg, "Order Prevails in Berlin" (1919), in *Socialism or Barbarism: The Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Helen C. Scott and Paul Le Blanc (London: Pluto, 2010), 261–268, here 267.

38. Vincent Bevins and Loren Balhorn, "The Cold War Was Never about Democracy," Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 27 March 2023, <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/50192?fbclid=IwAR3qK7cR9fes-b3c7xplbnO15zm5OVQkikfwHaV8uVy3gxbsOK4EBhNHedE> (accessed 30 March 2023).