AWSS 2014 Graduate Essay Prize

The Graduate Essay Prize Committee, composed of Adrienne Harris (Baylor University), Janet Johnson (Brooklyn College, CUNY), and Adele Lindenmeyr (Villanova University), received an exceptionally strong group of submissions this year, from ten young women scholars working in history, political science, literature and art history.

We are very pleased to announce the selection of Olga Sasunkevich of European Humanities University, Vilnius, as this year’s award recipient. Ms. Sasunkevich defended her dissertation at Greifswald University, Germany in June of 2014, and currently serves as a lecturer in the Department of Media and the executive co-director of the Center for Gender Studies at EHU. She submitted a chapter entitled “Shuttle Trade and Gender Relations: Female World in a Provincial Border Town,” from her dissertation on the history of the female shuttle trade on the Belarus-Lithuania borderland between 1990 and 2011.

Olga Sasunkevich combines the stories of individual women with a sophisticated analysis of the economic gender segregation, the female labor market, and networks of social solidarity that determine the female-dominated world of illegal or semi-legal trading in goods that vary from cigarettes to children’s toys. Employing statistical data, regulatory and legal documents, and oral history interviews with eighteen women – and an innovative essay contest --her findings challenge the stereotype of women as passive victims of a post-Soviet patriarchal system, evaluating this informal economy instead as a resource used by post-Soviet women for economic empowerment.