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gendered perspective

Opening up Narrow Boundaries: Memory Culture, Historiography and Excluded Histories from a Gendered Perspective

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Gendering historiography encompasses at least a threefold perspective: first, it concerns the attempt to integrate the category of gender and the themes of women's and gender history into the canon of general history and/or historical sub-disciplines. A crucial issue in gendering historiography is that of inclusion and exclusion—be it the presence of women's and gender history in general histories or the mention of female historians in the history of historiography, to name but two examples. In direct relation to this, gendering historiography refers, secondly, to the meta-level—i.e., to the gendering of the history of historiography. As Bonnie Smith shows in her pathbreaking book (Smith 1998), the categories of gender and gender relations have structured and influenced modern historiography. Academic historiography and its subjects are (still) determined by a perspective that is constructed as male on the level of the symbolic order. In this respect, making female historians visible and writing them (back) into the history of historiography is an important undertaking. There is also a third aspect, however: Academic historiography is influenced by memory culture, which reflects the political use of history (*Geschichtspolitik*) and the gender relations prevailing at a given point in time. Thus, gendering historiography makes it necessary for us to look at memory culture or historical culture (*Geschichtskultur*) as well. All three aspects—writing women and gender into history, gendering the history of historiography and memory culture—are interrelated. However, on a heuristic level, it is important that we keep in mind that we are dealing with separate issues.

In this short essay, I will begin by examining memory culture and its relationship to historiography from a gendered perspective. Next, I would like briefly to address the issue of excluded histories on both sides of the traditional and the feminist historical canon. Then, I will turn to the question of how female historians and gender could be written into a history of historiography. I will also refer to the articles in this section by Ulrike Gleixner, Ruth Barzilai-Lombroso, and Krista Cowman.

1. Gender, Memory Culture, and Historiography

Historiography is deeply influenced by the relationship between gender and memory culture. The marginalization of women in memory culture and the specific ways in which women have been represented since the nineteenth century also shape historiography, which at the same time functions to reinforce these representations.

The term memory culture is a complex one, which refers to the contents and representations of historical remembrance as well as to the social functions of memory (Erl 2005, 7). According to Maurice Halbwachs (1980, 1992), who began research on this subject in the 1920s, memory and a group-specific relationship to the past are central to shaping identity. Individual recollection is socially embedded and memory is essential to the identity construction of any given social group. This, of course, also applies to the identity construction of the modern nation-state.

Halbwachs' theory was advanced by Jan and Aleida Assmann, who introduced the concept of cultural and communicative memory along with the distinction between storage memory (*Speichergedächtnis*) and functional memory (*Funktionsgedächtnis*). Functional memory refers to the public use of history and to a history that is utilized and (rendered) *useful* for the construction of national, political or social identities. Storage memory is the reservoir of texts and rituals that were in the past, or will become in the future, important for the historical legitimation of a community, eventually probably changing to functional memory (Assmann, A. 1999). Both storage memory and functional memory are part of cultural memory. Cultural memory is organized and institutionalized, tied to objects and rituals. Academic historiography is just one component of cultural memory, with others comprising a broad spectrum of representations of history—on the book market, in museums, schools, in form of monuments, remembrance days or historical sites. Cultural memory includes that body of “reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity” (Assmann, J. 1995, 132).

Recent work on memory culture emphasizes the continuous re-interpretation of historical remembrance in the context of social debates, as well as the fact that memory is a process, and a politically contested one. This leads to the co-existence of multiple and differing, hegemonic and marginal, cul-

tures of memory (Winter 2006, 1–13). Memory cultures legitimize and—since they are not monolithic constructs, but conflicting and fluid—negotiate contemporary organizations of power, politics, and gender issues. They also play an important role in constructing the identities of social groups and nations.

Historically speaking, cultures of memory are closely associated with the development of the nation-state and the shaping of national identities during the nineteenth century. As such, (national) memory culture mirrors the bourgeois gender model and implies a male bias, despite its claims to universality and inclusiveness. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century (national) memory cultures, women and their spheres of action were decisively under-represented. Yet, memory and gender are multiply intertwined: gender is a product of cultural recollection; it is called up by memory and social practices and constantly re-inscribed into collective memory. Moreover, memories are gendered. We have to ask who remembers what, how, why, and for whom (Penkwitt 2006, 1). Thus, the question of gender in memory culture addresses the issue of representational power and access. In actual fact, theoretical works on the culture of memory have occasionally cited gender as a pivotal category of collective recollection. In general, though, they have failed thus far to elaborate on this question systematically. Only a rather limited number of historical studies exist on the subject (Leydesdorff and Passerini 1996; Grever 1997; Smith 1998; Eschebach et al. 2002; Schraut and Paletschek 2006; Paletschek and Schraut 2008, Gleixner and Hebeisen 2008). My brief reflections here can only highlight aspects of the work done thus far by concentrating on the representation of women in memory culture (for the following, see also Paletschek and Schraut 2008).

How women are remembered is closely linked to the social developments of the nineteenth century, to nation-building, nineteenth-century gender roles and women's scope of action at the time (Blom, Hagemann and Hall 2000). Until the early twentieth century, women were remembered on a broader scale only as members of dynasties or rulers, for their charitable or religious activities, or because of their emotional bonds to the nation. The representation of women in the national culture of memory cemented the status quo of the prevailing gender order. Alternatively, emancipatory interpretations of national monuments dedicated to female figures were only part of minority discourses, or were valid only in times of crisis.

The national public remembrance of women began relatively late. Monuments to bourgeois men were already being erected in the nineteenth centu-

ry. The first *national* monuments to *bourgeois* women, however, were not built until the early twentieth century. Here, the First World War played an important role, because such monuments were part of the nation-states' efforts to mobilize women for war. This may also have resulted from the pressures for modernization that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and led to women's conquest of the public sphere. At the same time, European feminist movements strove to establish feminist memory cultures (Grever 1997).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the remembrance of women was dominated by their *maternal* achievements. This kind of systematic reference employed by memory politics was based on pre-modern Christian and middle-class gender concepts and resulted in paradoxes. Referring to women's maternal contributions to the nation and the community limited women's scope of action and options. At the same time, however, motherliness was a successful tool for inserting women into the culture of memory and according them national and social significance. "Social motherliness" could be associated with pacifism, internationalism, and democracy, but also with nationalism and fascism. The concept made it possible to refer to *all* women, regardless of class, ethnicity, denomination, political views, nationality, age or marital status. This is the strength of motherliness as a figure of memory. However, the figure also removes women from history and transfers them to the realm of anthropological constants. Not just the memory figure of the mother, but also the national female allegories remembered in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century very often embody timeless values and thus represent *non-history* or the unchanging, constant dimension in history rather than concrete historical actions. This component of the concept of femininity in various societies and in memory culture is an additional reason for women's marginalization in memory culture (Paletschek and Schraut 2008). Female allegories symbolize cyclical time, the recurring circle of life, and the future as well as emotional values such as caring, understanding, solace, and mourning. Men stand for history, change, and linear time, for achievements, but also for guilt and responsibility. Whether historical role models, references to historical events, and a common history had the same political importance for women as for men remains to be examined (Swenson 2008).

In the twentieth century, the remembrance of women came into view primarily in situations of enforced historical and political change. These were periods in which the sovereignty over interpretation was challenged not only

in politics, but also in memory culture. Memories of women's historical achievements can be brought to light when political and social changes make for favorable conditions. As Ruth Barzilai-Lumbroso's article shows, this was the case in Turkey in the 1950s — a time of unique openness and liberalism in politics and the public sphere, which made it possible to reconsider Kemalist politics and incorporate the long-neglected Ottoman tradition into Turkish nationalism. The then-flourishing popular historiographies of the Ottoman Empire were centered around women and showed the image of strong and cultivated Ottoman women in the harem, a new role model that contrasted with or supplemented the image of the secular western Anatolian woman, which was an important part of Kemalist ideology. In their popular historiographies of the 1950s, Turkish men and historians incorporated images of Ottoman women primarily in the service of the changing national discourse, which now also included the Muslim-Ottoman tradition.

As the above example indicates, it is only the "politically correct" remembrance of women, i.e., that which can be used to support the dominant (in this case, national) interest or the actual political goals of a political movement, that finds its way into the respective cultural memory shaped by the *custodians of memory*. However, the same holds true for feminist memory culture. In this respect, the instance of the British suffragettes is a good case in point. As Krista Cowman shows, second-wave feminism at first marginalized and overlooked the suffragettes, their history, and their historiography. At that point in time, second-wave feminism was mainly interested in writing a history that could be utilized by future feminist politics. In this respect, the militant foremothers did not fit into second-wave feminism's political concept at that time because they were too upper class, too anti-socialist, autocratic, and nationalistic.

The opportunity to inscribe female experience(s) into the culture of memory is closely linked to women's status in politics and academia. Inscribing women into cultural memory remains quite difficult even today, since both the family and society do not—or are only slowly beginning to—acknowledge women as authorities in interpreting history. As (oral history) interviews with women concerning their experiences in the Second World War have demonstrated, many women do not assert the right to interpret history, or think that they have nothing to say that is worth remembering (Bjerregaard, Bjerg and Lenz 2006, 45–65). However, women have the opportunity subversively to reinterpret the male-dominated historical discourse. By partially identifying with the power of a group or its representatives, it is possi-

ble, within limits, to adopt fragments of mainstream memory to construct a resistant female subjectivity. As the example of the feminist historiography of first- and second-wave feminism shows, women have also constructed a feminist memory culture, albeit an admittedly marginal one. Often, this feminist memory work—whether in families or social movements—is lost because it is not, or not firmly, institutionalized. In this respect, we must keep in mind that it was only in the last quarter of the twentieth century that (feminist) women gained broader access to institutions such as universities, museums or archives, which are the traditional repositories of memory on a broader scale. This is one reason why institutionalized forms of memory work—and this also holds true for historiography—are the most hostile to the remembrance of women's historical experiences.

In its development since the late eighteenth century, modern academic historiography has had to meet the scientific and social standards of the academic community and comply with claims to objectivity and pure research. At the same time—like any production of knowledge—it is socially constructed, influenced by political circumstances and memory culture. Academic historiography is part of cultural memory and in no way the most important means of shaping public historical culture. While Halbwachs (still) saw historiography as something separate and separable from memory, this position has been replaced in the meantime by a view of scientific historiography as part and parcel of the broad ensemble of our social and cultural practices for ascribing meaning to the past. In this respect, several studies have highlighted the interrelationships between the rise of modern academic historiography, the nation-state (Berger 2007) and bourgeois male virtues (Smith 1998). Thus, academic historiography reflects and even reinforces the gender bias of memory culture.

A good example of this reinforced exclusion of the remembrance of women is the shift in gendered memories within Pietism from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, which also illustrates the interactions between memory culture, institutionalization, and academia. The turn of Pietism to established Protestantism in the early nineteenth century, its growing influence and the partial integration of Pietist denominations into the official Protestant church, the new role of male biographies, as well as the professionalization and academization of the Pietist clergy and the rise of the bourgeois concept of polarized gender roles marginalized women's active role in Pietism, rendering their theological input invisible and modeling female religious practice along the lines of prevailing gender roles. Ulrike Gleixner

shows very convincingly how the shift in early nineteenth-century memory culture, which excluded women from the Pietist tradition, was reinforced by academic historical writing on this subject into the 1980s.

2. Exclusions on Both Sides: Traditional and Feminist Historical Canons

Academic historiography, especially on the history of such institutions as the church, the state or the university, enhanced the process of marginalizing women and making them invisible. The fact that the modern historiography of the early nineteenth century was practiced primarily as a history of institutions (state, military, church), of *great men* and *great ideas*, made it difficult to integrate women as historical subjects (Smith 1998), so that this occurred only at the margins of the discipline, for example in early cultural history or popular historiography. The case of church history, for example, shows that a narrow focus on institutions and *greatness* is problematic for the project of including women in history. Broadening the scope to encompass not just hegemonic and established religious institutions and elites but also religious practices, different denominations, non-hegemonic religious groups, and non-academic theology makes it far easier to discover and acknowledge women in history.

However, to criticize the neglect of women and gender issues in traditional political or church history, for example, is to tell only part of the story. If we are to develop a critical perspective on modern women's and gender history that has emerged since the 1970s, we must also recognize the blind spots in this body of historical writing. For example, during the early decades, in the 1970s und 1980s, issues of religion and the church were marginal in the women's history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the driving force behind the emergence of the new women's and gender history was second-wave feminism, with its characteristically secular, emancipated worldview, the history of religious women and/or the church was a particular blind spot in feminist writing on modern history. At first, attention focused mainly on women's movements, women's work, the body, gender role concepts, female education, and the like. Arguably, this meant that less pressure was placed on *traditional* historical subdisciplines such as church history compared to social and cultural history, as a primary field of investi-

gation for women's and gender history (and a field with more frequent personal connections or networks between social historians and historians on women's and gender history). For a long time, the same applied to the history of historiography.

The emerging academic women's and gender history of the 1970s and 1980s focused on demographic and family history, women in politics, and feminist movements as well as on women's labor (for an overview, see Offen, Roach Pierson and Rendall 1991, xvii-xxxvii; Habermas 2002, 231-245). Thus, feminist academic writing placed far more emphasis on groups of women and women's organizations than, for instance, famous female individuals or central issues of general history such as state-building, modernization, etc. One major reason for this was that early writing on women's history was strongly influenced by social history and neo-Marxist approaches. Thus another unexplored area was the history of the *woman worthy*, which was rather neglected by women's and gender history in the 1970s. The same practice applies to the first professional female historians in the early twentieth century (Smith 1998, 201), because these professional women had sought to distance themselves from the female amateurs who often wrote biographies of famous women.

This avoidance of traditional biographies of *great women* may have hindered the inclusion of women's history in the canon, since biographies of *great women* may be easier to integrate into the traditional canon than histories dealing with *ordinary* women or so-called marginal fields of *general* history, such as the body, the emotions or everyday life, especially when also done on a regional or transnational level, which does not fit into the dominant national or (nowadays) global discourses. This is not a plea to focus solely on "women as great thinkers, academics and scientists" or "women in state politics" or *major* themes such as "women and modernization." But perhaps we need to undermine the traditional canon from two positions, with regard to the representation of women and the inclusion of the category of gender (and gender relations): on the one hand, from the inside and on its own terms, and on the other from the outside, and by a deliberate politics of subversion. Thus one of our current tasks might be to include women worthies in politics, social life, and culture by means of academic work on historical figures such as Queen Victoria or Marie Curie, examining them not just from a political or intellectual perspective, but also from a gender perspective. At the same time, however, neglected historical fields traditionally coded as female should also be brought into the canon. These include

everyday life, religion, the body, and regional/transnational perspectives. The work on women's and gender history has proven difficult to integrate into the canon in a twofold way: the issue of gender and the fields under consideration are still marked as *not truly worthy* and *not important* in dominant discourse, even though they are now partially included in textbooks and curricula.

3. Writing Female Historians into History and Opening Up the Narrow Boundaries of the Traditional History of Historiography

My final concern is primarily how we can write female historians and women's and gender issues into the history of historiography (see also O'Dowd and Porciani 2004; Paletschek 2007). In order to do so, it is necessary not only to search thoroughly for professional women historians in the academic fields, but also to expand the field of the history of historiography to encompass popular historical writings (see, for example, Smith 1998, 37–69; Eppe 2003). Furthermore, it is important to look at the conditions of production underlying historiography and to analyze how the academic community of historians functions. The following four aspects should be central:

First, we need to open up the agenda and consider popular presentations of history in different media rather than concentrating exclusively on books written by professional male and female academics. This would probably enable us to include more female historians, since in the nineteenth century, for example, many women wrote popular histories. Whether popular historical writing was or is more open to integrating women's and gender history is also an open question, and one deserving of further investigation. As Ruth Barzilai-Lumbroso shows in her article, Turkish popular historiography of the 1950s provided a surprising amount of scope for the presentation of women's history. Moreover, historical sources written by women were of central importance as evidence in this popular form of historical writing. If we look at the current history boom and popular presentations of history today—for example in historical novels or films—we often find female protagonists and a perspective on everyday life that allows (and sometimes even calls) for a representation of women's historical experiences.

The interactions between *popular* and *academic* treatments of history and the respective social and political functions of the historical images they produce should also be investigated further. It might take some time to break ground for a scholarly analysis of popular histories as part of the history of historiography, but this could turn out to be a very fruitful endeavor. Thus, historians of memory culture such as Jay Winter argue that we should be analyzing popular historical presentations and *trashy* historical products such as re-enactments, historical films or docu-fictions, which has rarely been done thus far (Winter 2006, 201–222). As research on the production of scientific knowledge tells us, there is no fundamental difference between popular and academic knowledge. The difference is, rather, merely one of degree. In the research on the popularization of science, the interactionist model also suggests an interdependence and mutual interference between academic knowledge producers, popularizers, and audiences (Shinn and Whitley 1985, vii–ix).

This interaction between popular and academic/scientific knowledge production also sheds new light on the conflict between academic and non-academic feminist historiography. Since at least the late 1980s and 1990s in Western Europe and the United States, there has been a growing differentiation between academic historians writing women's and gender history and feminist historiography done outside academia. This differentiation (which also implies a dissociation) stems from the professionalization and integration of (female) historians working on women's history into the academic community. Academic success as measured by positions within the discipline and presence in academic journals was achieved by diminishing the links between feminist history within and feminist politics outside of academia (Scott 2004, 10–29; Bennett 2006). In her study of the historiography on British suffragettes, Krista Cowman shows the blind spots in academic historiography, which marginalizes histories written by activists, focusing on their biases rather than acknowledging the innovative potential of these works. She asks whether this setting of boundaries will prove advantageous for feminist history in the long run, and reminds us of how relatively recent the challenges to the gendering of historiography and the historical academic community are.

Secondly, we also need to broaden the scope of the traditional history of historiography by analyzing the conditions of production underlying historiography and the necessary, if mostly invisible, *legwork* involved. This indispensable auxiliary work was and frequently still is done by women. Thus it

will be fruitful to look at the technologies and mechanisms of copying, finding resources and translating, but also to pay attention to the reproductive and economic framework that facilitates academic historical work. The problem of invisible work and gender hierarchy in the production of historical knowledge is not just a problem of the academic past. Nowadays, for example, women historians do the actual work on many historical projects, while the project managers and reviewers are largely men.

Thirdly, for a long time, the history of historiography concentrated on traditional intellectual history and the works of great male historians. Recent research focuses much more on the institutional framework and on issues such as the founding of chairs and departments or academic historical journals (see for example Middell, Lingelbach and Hadler 2001). Furthermore, the connection between teaching history in universities and schools and the professionalization of historiography is an important point that is often overlooked because most studies concentrate exclusively on research. There is also a tendency to attribute the development of the research imperative in the nineteenth century primarily—and uncritically—to a new idealistic model of *pure science*, which means that the *material* social and political conditions are overlooked (Paletschek 2007, 13). If we look at the rise of modern historiography, we find that it is closely associated with the founding of history departments (known in German as *Seminare*), which were first established at German universities between the 1830s and 1890s and then copied abroad. The impetus to found these departments was to improve the teaching of history at universities and to reform the education of students and schoolteachers (Pandel 2002, 34). The growing proportion of history teaching in schools during the nineteenth century also had an important impact on the expansion of history chairs at German universities. Studying the interactions between teaching and research in the field of history as part of the history of historiography does more than simply reveal the social and political aspects of the development of research imperatives. It also enables us to rediscover more female historians, since women were often more engaged in teaching and its reform, or even tried to include women's history into the curriculum in the early twentieth century.

Many of the first female professional historians were schoolteachers before beginning their university careers. One example is Lucy Salmon Maynard, who became a professor at Vassar College in 1889. She was involved in improving university teaching as well as the curriculum for teaching history in schools in the United States (Lehmann 1972). Another is Ermentrude

Bäcker von Ranke, the first woman to complete the *Habilitation* process (the German postdoctoral qualification for university professors) and the first to become a professor of history and didactics in 1926 at the college of education (*Pädagogische Hochschule*) in Kiel. Prior to her academic career she had worked as a teacher. As a professor, she conceptualized a curriculum that would integrate women into history as it was taught in the schools at various levels (Paletschek 2007, 121).

Fourthly, we need critical inquiry into the mechanisms that make a historian famous. It is time to overcome the simplistic and individualistic genius approach, which is still found all too frequently in the history of historiography as well as in the history of the sciences and the humanities in general. An examination of career strategies, networks, and the conditions of the reception of historical writing should thus be a central part of the history of historiography. The process by which individuals go down in history, or go down in the history of historiography, is not a *natural* or self-evident one. To some extent, famous historians are also *made* by the devoted former students or wives who write the first biography, edit the letters, or posthumously publish the male historian's works. Also in need of careful study is the particular position a historian holds within the academic system and community. For example, thus far, merely writing a number of allegedly good books has by no means sufficed to become an influential figure in German historiography and in the German academic community of historians. Rather, what has been, and still is, essential is to hold a (full) professorship and, best of all, an *Ordinariat* (a chair). The first female full professors in history at German universities were not appointed until 1964. Even in 2002, only 12 percent of German history professors (that is, 64 out of 541) were female, while at the same time women made up 20 percent of *Privatdozenten* (people who have completed the *Habilitation* process and are therefore qualified to apply for a professorship) and 38 percent of history Ph.D.s (Paletschek 2007, 124). Even today, most female professors in Germany do not hold an *Ordinariat*, so that women professors have had—and still have—far fewer dedicated students to see to the future remembrance of *their* university teachers.

These structural factors that affect an individual's influence and chances of being remembered in the historical profession underscore the necessity of deconstructing the process of tradition building in the history of historiography. To write women into historiography is not merely an academic project, but also a political one. If feminist historians—whether female or male—do not make this effort, who will? This article has also tried to show that gende-

ring historiography opens up the narrow perspective of the traditional history of historiography in manifold ways—ways that are interesting not only from a gender perspective, but also from a variety of innovative viewpoints and concerns.

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