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# Gendering Historiography

Beyond National Canons

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## Multiple Histories? Changing Perspectives on Modern Historiography

*Angelika Epple and Angelika Schaser*

"I like men who have a future and women who have a past."

Lord Henry Wotton in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, chapter 15  
(1891 edition – online).

When Dorian Gray expressed the wish that his recently painted portrait might grow old in his stead, he did more than merely sell his soul to the diabolical Sir Henry. From that time onward he also ceased to mature. He had tied himself to a permanent present, with neither past nor future. Oscar Wilde's protagonists question the natural order of human transience and, at the same time, also rearrange the dominant gender order of Victorian society. Men were characterized as having a future, but solely as a result of past experience. Women, in contrast, were denied a past—even in the somewhat dubious sense hinted at by Lord Henry. Of course, the former, revolutionary, aspect of Oscar Wilde's novel had its limits, but the author took up a fundamental element of both the gender order and historiography: the gendered attributes of the three tenses, past, present and future. The professionalization of historiography in Europe and the US during the past 200 years has meant ignoring the fact that women have a past. As a result, women were also long disqualified from writing so-called professional history. Those who wrote history nonetheless were left out of the traditional historiographic canon. The comparison may seem extreme, but it is apt nevertheless: the exclusion of female historians, their work and themes from the history of our discipline resembles a metaphorical death. For women, writing history was often tantamount to social suicide—the fate of Sibyl Vane and Dorian Gray.

The marginalization of female historians and their histories also deeply affected the traditional canon written by male historians, which was based on exclusionary practices and covered almost exclusively male gendered subjects (Smith 1995; Smith 1998; Puff 2003; Epple 2004; Epple 2007). These practices of exclusion make historiography part of the modern project, Regina Wecker argues. Following Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "modernity and ambivalence" (Bauman 1991), Wecker shows that only the exclusion of histo-

rical multiplicity makes of modernity a uniform, certain and determined development (Wecker 2007, 51). Gender history, in contrast, questions historical uniformity, certainty and determination. It has come to represent a real troublemaker for historiography as a whole. As a result, historiography has rarely been gendered. It is high time for a change of perspective.

The present volume brings together gender history and the history of historiography. This encounter provokes manifold concerns: It questions the traditional canon of historiography and examines its gendered basis. It writes excluded histories back into the history of historiography, thus adding new perspectives to the traditional canon. It also inquires into the structuring function of gender within academic *and* popular historiography and questions the truth strategies that officially separate these fields. Moreover, it also raises theoretical questions that take us back to the very beginnings of gender history. Since the emergence of gender history some thirty years ago (Davis 1976; Scott 1986), one of its chief tasks has been to deconstruct the master narrative of general history (Schaser 2007) as well as most of its key terms. Gender history gives women's contribution to history its full due by changing the key terms that define what "history" is (Mak 2007, 132) and—as Joan Scott already pointed out in 1988—what counts as "general history". The label "general history" caused such uneasiness because in fact it referred only to political and national history. Under the guise of studying "high" politics, international affairs, anonymous structures and social developments, it quite often centered on the history of a specific male group in society—certainly without analyzing the masculinities of its members. From the perspective of "general history", women's or gender history seemed to be far less important and at best "supplementary". Thus for gender historians, the only way out of the theoretical dilemma and misleading alternative of "general" versus "supplementary" history seemed to be the deconstruction of all master narratives that make general or universal claims.

Gender historians have been in good company. Since the linguistic turn of the late 1960s and 1970s, historians sensitive to developments in theory have increasingly criticized master narratives of all kinds. A generation later, the linguistic turn with its central focus on "culture as discourse" has been broadly absorbed and altered. Currently, we are witnessing a new shift in focus from "culture as discourse" to "culture as practice." It is from this observation that Gabrielle Spiegel derives a recuperation of the historical actor as an intentional (if not wholly self-conscious) agent (Spiegel 2007, 3–4). And it is also proceeding from this observation that Joan Scott inveighed

against the latest attempts to insist "that human subjects act in full command of their intentions, that words literally mean what they say, and that 'nature' or 'experience' are transparent categories outside the reach of politics, philosophy or theory" (Scott 2007, 22). Be it "culture as discourse" or "culture as practice"—the role played by gender history is also at stake here. In recent years different approaches such as postcolonial or subaltern studies, global history, transnational history, cultural history and the "new political" history as well as gender history have tried to overcome the conventional postulates of positivist history. They questioned the inscribed hierarchy of center and margin. But do the new approaches really resolve the dubious alternative of supplementary and general history? Do they actually do more than simply add on to national history? How are we to overcome more than one hundred years of national historiography?

Despite the impressive contributions of the postmodern plurality of historical approaches to historiography, the effects on "general" national and political historiography with their strong orientation towards state action in the fields of politics, the economy and society have not exactly been overwhelming. This also applies to the gender hierarchy implicit in this historiography, which even borrowings from cultural history and gender history have failed to change (Hagemann and Quataert 2007; Opitz 2008). Through its choice of subjects and methods, historical research in general has contributed discreetly thus far to stabilizing the gender order and the narrative patterns of national history. Many historians have shown that even in the countries where women's and gender history has gained a foothold in institutions, "we still face the historiographical inheritance which is afflicted by the idea of gender-neutral and universal truth" (Grever 1997, 399).

In order to dismantle these powerful premises, Karin Hausen recommended the non-unity of history as a program, and called for a critical discussion of what the fiction of a unitary history has accomplished and what it has distorted (Hausen 1998). Other historians such as Lynn Hunt (1998) and Claudia Opitz (2008) have called for a complete reconstruction of history in order to escape the gender order of historiography, which is constantly stabilizing itself and trying to reestablish equilibrium. In their view, gender history offers the best preconditions for this, since it has consistently historicized the category of "gender". In so doing, it has not only clearly emancipated itself from the older women's history, but also created the prerequisites for a new form of master-narrative.

But aren't new master narratives likely to fall back into the same errors as "general history"? Wouldn't they tend to take one particular perspective as a universal point of view? On the other hand, is there a theoretically convincing alternative to a master narrative? The question mark in the title of the present volume stresses this difficult problem. The book includes both articles that favor new master narratives and those that avoid them.

Whatever the master narrative, coming to terms with the relationship between the general and the particular is one of the main challenges for historiography. Thus at first sight the very foundations of gender history are always already entangled with theoretical questions and the practical problems of how to write history.

It is quite astonishing, indeed, that the history of historiography, while experiencing an exciting revival, still seems virtually untouched by gender history. Let us take a closer look at the history of this relationship.

## 1. Gender History and the History of Historiography – Two Young and Casual Friends

If what history textbooks, historical commemorations and the dominant collective memory have in common is a canon of modern national history (Grever and Stuurman 2007, 3), it is now a commonplace to state that women's writings have been largely excluded from the canon of historiography. It has also become commonplace to recall that women have always written history. With the emergence of women's history in the 1970s, some of these forgotten female historians were rediscovered. Kathryn Kish Sklar, for instance, addressed "American Female Historians between 1770 and 1930" in the third volume of *Feminist Studies*—one of the first feminist history journals in the world (Sklar 1975). Writing their names back into public memory is an ongoing enterprise (Davis 1980; Goggin 1992; Lerner 1993; Kaarninen and Kinnunen 2004, Davies 2005). Since the 1980s, the works of Jean Quataert, Patricia Labalme, Gianna Pomata, Gisela Bock, Karen Offen, Billie Melman, Devoney Looser, and many others have broadened the scope and inspired profound studies of women historians in Europe and the US. Multiple histories beyond the canon have been discovered since then, and the first reference books have already appeared or are forthcoming (Sponberg et al. 2005; Kümper 2009).

Although Natalie Zemon Davis was already writing about "gender and genre" in 1980 (Davis 1980), the history of historiography generally failed to rise to her challenge. This ignorance changed only very slowly. One important step in this direction was Bonnie Smith's study of the gendered conditions of the development of scholarly practices in nineteenth-century historiography (Smith 1995). Strictly speaking, the loose friendship began when gender history began to analyze not only the exclusion of female historians and the gendered conditions prevailing in the genre of historiography as such, but also the construction of masculinities defined and fixed by and through historical writing. Soon it became obvious that the concentration on national history and the professionalization of historiography in the nineteenth century were tightly linked and deeply gendered at the time. Mary O'Dowd and Ilaria Porciani took up this topic as follows in their anthology *History Women*: "[W]e need a new perspective that will enable us to understand the importance of gender both in the construction of the historical profession and in the writing of historiography" (O'Dowd and Porciani 2004, 4).

Even though these ideas were widely accepted, a parallel development can also be observed. As already mentioned above, the history of historiography has been experiencing an exciting revival since the mid-1990s. On the one hand, biographies of great historians in particular have been enjoying increasing popularity. On the other, autobiographical publications by female historians have typically revealed the difficulties and discrimination faced by women at the universities (Kuhn 2003; Awerbuch 2007; Klüger 2008; Leskelä-Kärki 2008). These publications were generally ignored, however, and the countless studies in this field remained largely untouched by gender issues (Scott 2004; Wecker 2007, 29). This is a significant coincidence. Since the last decade, feminists have been observing the rise of a new "hegemonic masculinity" in the context of global restructuring (Marchand and Runyan 2000, 24). This rise, one might suggest, did not leave the historical academic discipline untouched. At first sight, the history of masculinity did not have the success gender historians had hoped it might. One might conclude that the male-dominated history of historiography written by white male historians proceeded to do business as usual, paying no attention whatsoever to the challenges of gender history. On second thought, however, this insistence is reminiscent of a final rear-guard battle. The term "hegemonic masculinity" stresses the point that multiple femininities and multiple masculinities exist

beyond the categories of excluded femininity and included masculinity.<sup>1</sup> Neither masculinities nor femininities were constants (Martschukat and Stieglitz 2005, 56; Dinges 2005; Lücke 2008, 32ff.). And, most importantly, the limits of inclusion and exclusion were subject to negotiation in multiple histories. The present volume seeks to show that masculinities and femininities are dynamic, changing, and hybrid sides of human beings.

Thus, the change of perspectives on modern historiography cannot be overlooked (Grever and Stuurman 2007). This is also reflected in academic politics. The European Science Foundation (ESF) program “Representations of the Past: the Writing of National Histories in Europe” mentioned, as one aim among others, “to analyse the national master narratives in relation to narratives of ethnicity/race, class, religion and gender” (Berger 2007a, 2). The first comparative publications to cross national borders and include feminist historiography have been written (Hagemann and Fernández-Aceves 2007). Of course, as always, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and one can only be anxious to read the forthcoming results of the transnational project. Nevertheless, we feel that although the change may only be moderate, it is here to stay. The friendship between gender history and the history of historiography has been strengthened, if not by biographies of great old white men, then by the emergence of a new field of research: popular historiography. The importance and influence of so-called non-professional historiography nowadays is overwhelming. Amateur historiography has gained the power to define public interpretations of the past (Paletschek and Tanner 2008, 1–6). Think, for example, of the growing influence of WIKIPEDIA, of museum and exhibition websites, of television history channels and so on. One reason for this development is that nowadays, most so-called amateur historians have university degrees in history. Some of them began conventional academic careers and wrote dissertations, sometimes even post-doctoral *Habilitation* theses, before leaving the university and making a living from selling history. Academic history is acting under pressure. The power of the historical imagination outside the academy is growing continuously; meanwhile, the Western academic discipline still aims for acceptance in a global community of professional historians (Burke 2002). It is a kind of historical irony: At the very moment when Western academic history has achieved worldwide hegemony, when its standards of practice have become the basis

<sup>1</sup> In 1995 Connell still reserved the plural only for “masculinity” (Connell 1995/2005). In the meantime, Connell and Messerschmidt also speak of “femininities” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 840).

of professional historians worldwide, the media and other institutions are challenging the hegemony of the university as the producer of research and knowledge (Rüsen 2002, 7; Chakrabarty 2006, 109).

Gender history gained major attention by taking a detour via amateur historiography. Since then, impressive work has been done (O’Dowd and Porciani 2004; Hagemann and Quataert 2007; Paletschek and Schraut 2008). A comparison between the significance of gender history in studies on amateur historiography and its neglect in studies on the traditional canon of historiography or in biographies of great white historians suggests that the “double helix” is still at work—a suggestion Martina Kessel picks up again in her contribution to this book.

## 2. Gendering Historiography: New Questions

If we call for a change of perspective on modern historiography, what would be the main concerns of such a change? The ultimate objective of gendering historiography is to dissolve “general” history as it has been conceived thus far into multiple histories without relinquishing the idea of a new master narrative.

A brief look at the emergence of modernity sheds some light on the importance of this concern. Since the Enlightenment, history has become increasingly central to the discourse of European self-description: history marks the boundary that divides modern from pre-modern times, and, at the time, so-called modern from so-called pre-modern people. Since then, European historians have attributed a history to civilized peoples and denied a history to so-called “traditional” peoples (Fabian 1983, 23). This is only part of the story, however. Many studies have shown not only that having a history or not marks the difference between modern and pre-modern or so-called traditional societies, but also that this distinction is deeply gendered—a sense reflected in Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* at the end of the nineteenth century. By around 1800, in most so-called civilized societies femininity had become associated with a continuous present and masculinity with development over time (Kessel 1995, 9–30; Kessel 2001, 80; Epple 2003). Femininity thus appeared as the negation of history, and masculinity seemed to be exclusively tied to history. During the nineteenth century, the development of historiography was closely connected with the triumphal

march of the national state as a male-designed configuration. Still, generally speaking, most national historiographies of most industrialized countries, written by white male historians, helped to tighten these strings by adding a historical dimension. Nineteenth-century historians built the historiographic canon that defined the boundaries between pre-modern and modern societies and subjects. From this follows another important issue addressed in this volume. We would like to provide insight into the construction of so-called *modern* historiography. By choosing the title *multiple histories*, we intend to challenge not just the problematic perspective of modern and “general” history, but also our understanding of modernity. “Multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt 2000), as it were, imply “multiple histories”. Gendering historiography thus means going back to the making of so-called modern historiography.

In respect to gender issues, the development of historiography in Europe and the US during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seems to have more similarities than differences. All countries experienced the professionalization and nationalization of historiography at nearly the same time. In all countries, women were excluded from professional training and in most cases also from visibility as the objects of historiography. Women were admitted to academic training in different countries at different paces, but everywhere were denied higher positions. This has only begun to change in the past thirty years (Offen, Pierson and Rendall 1991; Alberti 2002; Downs 2004; Paletschek 2007; Vogt 2007). If we take our pluralist approach seriously, we are forced to admit that these obvious similarities also conceal striking differences. The boundaries between amateur and professional historiography were negotiated differently in different countries. Only comparison between different national historiographies allows insight into the specific workings of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, only a closer look at those histories that have been excluded allows us to dissolve the master narrative of modern historiography in societies that claim to be modern themselves.

Of course, a comparison between the different histories of different paths to modernity should be a first step only. A second step needs to live up to the challenge of the new global history and also investigate traveling concepts and transnational developments. When making the leap from national historiography to global historiography, we should try to avoid taking the structural failings of national historiography along with us. Whether attempts to write “transnational history” will do more to stabilize national historiography than to diversify it remains to be seen. When we study “relationships

and constellations that transcend national boundaries” (Conrad and Osterhammel 2004, 14), it doubtless expands our perspective and knowledge beyond our own nation-states. This shift of viewpoint might help us to discover new trans-border developments and relationships and to seek out international interconnections. But the relocation of the national undertaken here could also lead to the firmer establishment of national history with a transnational dimension. Before sketching the basic outlines of a global history, we need first to devote careful study to the preconditions for and gaps in national historiography, or in the history of different world regions (Meade and Wiesner-Hanks 2004/2006, 2; Schaser 2007, 56) in order to take the appropriate measures for creating a new historiography.

Scholars of women’s and gender history have long called on us to analyze the “effects of the process of inclusion and exclusion” (Hausen 1998, 46) instead of simply perpetuating them without thinking. Some historians strictly demand an emphasis on feminist perspectives on history (Arni 2007). Transnational or global history should not, however, deal only with anonymous structures and processes that again claim to be “general” and gender neutral. Nor should it look for anthropological constants under the guise of “gender in world history”. From the very beginning, it should show the significance of gender. Transnational gender history should not involve only men’s and women’s roles and definitions, as for instance Peter N. Stearns puts it (Stearns 2000). It should also involve maleness, femaleness and transgender aspects in the conceptions of state, social and economic institutions, organizations, networks, transnational interactions. Most importantly for historiography, transnational history should also include the domains, agency, and experiences of human beings as men, women or transgender individuals—not in order to revive a defunct concept, but rather to historicize the categories of experience and agency itself (Canning 2006, 118). Transnational history, the history of transfer or global history that emphasizes the structuring power of gender and other historical categories seems to offer a promising challenge.

Thus, in manifold ways our title “Multiple Histories” implies a pluralistic view: Deconstructing the traditional canon and its notion of being the unique and central path of historiography. The pluralistic view provides insights into both excluded and included histories. It also illustrates the structuring function of gender within academic and popular historiography. If there could be such a thing as a new master narrative, it should be based on the idea of multiple histories and dismantle national history. The history of

historiography should then identify how national historiography operated as a mythology of the modern nation-state and analyze its function within a given society. Instead of adopting the dividing lines between amateur and professional historiography, it should show the hidden interests behind these boundaries, and who implemented them. As professional historians we should certainly not neglect the differences between histories that conform to current academic standards and those that do not. On the contrary, we are demanding new standards that live up to the current standards of our discipline, *including* the claims of gender history. Thus, the history of historiography should study how varying histories gain validity differently, how diverse recipients demand different truth strategies or concepts of validity, and for what purpose and by whom these dividing lines were implemented, changed, rejected or enhanced. It should also deal with the gendering of historiography in a global perspective and tear down national boundaries. The concept of multiple modernities relies on a concept of modernity, and we feel confident that the concept of multiple histories rests on the concept of history.

Thus we are hopeful that our book will encourage a discussion of how the different branches of traditional, “general” history and gender history, in conjunction with other approaches, can become more integrated into a pluralist narrative. Such an agreement could form the basis for a new “master narrative”.

### 3. Structuring the Volume

This outline takes us to the four sections of the volume. The first two contributions present a historiography in flux from a US American and a European perspective. At the moment, “European history”, “global history”, and “transnational history” are popular slogans in historical scholarship that express uneasiness with traditional national historiography more than they promote new forms of historical writing. A “global history” worthy of the name, which could treat different countries or different continents with anything approaching balance, will not be achieved easily in the near future. It is not enough to integrate questions and approaches from cultural and gender history, because this does nothing to deconstruct the old master narratives. Therefore the time now has come to integrate the findings of gender

studies on an equal footing into a newly conceptualized global history. Bonnie Smith tackles the risks and opportunities offered by these approaches in her contribution. The essay by Maria Grever that follows pushes forward the difficult challenge of pluralistic perspectives.

The second section addresses “Gendering the National Canons of Historiography”. The claim that the creation of national canons excluded women is a familiar truism. A closer look at this commonplace reveals that not only women historians, but also certain subjects, certain manners of presentation and certain patterns of narration were marginalized, devalued, or even neglected altogether. Thus, as we learn from Irma Sulkunen’s Finnish perspective, the exclusion of women historians from the traditional canon was about the elimination not just of female competition, but also of competing interpretations of the past. It was also about the exclusion of certain subjects and sources, and, just as importantly, about the identity of those who were included. The new male academic scholars of the nineteenth century not only introduced a certain curriculum from which all women were excluded, but also defined the methodological framework, in other words, the accepted standards for the practice of scientific history. These standards relied not only on the university seminar and archival research (Smith 1995), but also on predetermined means of demonstrating the truth of historical events. They defined how a professional historian should prove the objectivity of his narrative. And they also defined which subjects were worthy of scholars’ attention. In this way, they killed two birds with one stone: they restricted the number of academically trained historians and, at the same time, disqualified competing historical narratives. Not all nineteenth-century European national historiographies adhered to these divisions. As Claudia Kraft shows, Polish historiography, for example, seems to have worked differently. The concept of femininity there was not tied to the private sphere of a continuous present—the case was more complicated.

The third section on the “Dividing Lines between the Traditional Canon and Excluded Histories” emphasizes, on the one hand, the growing gap between a diverse and differentiated historiography of early modern times and the professionalized, standardized historiography of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the other hand, the articles reveal the parallel ongoing exclusion of women as subjects of history and of female writers from the field of professionalized historiography. Four authors highlight this development from a German, English and Turkish perspective. Ulrike Gleixner shows the gradual exclusion of women during the reorganization process of



the Pietist tradition in the nineteenth century. Ruth Barzilai-Lumbroso analyzes the popular historical literature on Ottoman women in Turkey during the 1950s and early 1960s and reflects on the significance of these texts within the post-Kemalist nationalist context. Krista Cowman stresses the current controversy over the ability of feminist scholars to engage with their own history. Using the case study of suffragette history, she describes the contribution of “participatory histories” to constructing the historiography of a political movement. Last but not least, Sylvia Paetschek deals—in reference to the results of the essays by Gleixner, Barzilai-Lumbroso and Cowman—with the culture of memory and its relationship to historiography, the issue of excluded histories, and the question of how female historians and gender could be written into a history of historiography.

The fourth section addresses “The Gender-coded Profession of the Historian and Alternative Professional Careers.” The gender-coded scholarly profession is a very interesting topic in the careers of historians. Sociologists have pointed to the close connections between the academic persona and masculinity according to studies by Pierre Bourdieu (Wobbe 1997; Engler 2001; Wobbe 2003). In the meantime, sociologists have begun to study social behavior and the processes used to judge originality and individuality in the world of scholarship. Historians are still more accustomed to inquiring into the special obstacles faced by women in academia (Kaarninen and Kinnunen 2004). Does exclusion somehow provoke a uniform identity? The essays in this section tell quite a different story. Alternative professional careers were as diverse as the gender-coded academic professions. Heike Berger shows that despite (and somehow due to) National Socialist discriminatory regulations against female university teachers, in the regime’s early years women had comparatively good professional opportunities in scientific fields outside the universities, so long as they were classified as “Aryan”. Initially, these women profited from their exclusion. This situation changed dramatically after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Tiina Kinnunen’s essay focuses on two outstanding figures in international feminism, the Swede Ellen Key and the Finn Alexandra Gripenberg. The central issue of her essay is the way in which they both used historical representations to discredit opponents in internal feminist schisms. The section, as well as the main part of the book, ends with Martina Kessel’s provocative essay on the question of whether the ‘double helix’—a mindset that assigns greater social status to male authors—is still at work. Analyzing the complex combination of masculinity, femininity and temporality, she offers some important suggestions for us to take with us,

which are far more challenging than merely giving women a past and men a future.

We hope that this volume will contribute to the discussion on historiography in flux among an international audience. For that reason, we decided to publish all of the articles in English. We did not harmonize the British, American, and Irish variations in the essays by contributing native speakers. All other contributions were translated into American English. Here we would like to thank our translator and editor Pamela Selwyn for her valuable assistance.

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