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THE VERTIGO OF HISTORICAL ANALYSES
IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

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REVIEW ESSAYS

THE VERTIGO OF HISTORICAL ANALYSES IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

THE FANTASY OF FEMINIST HISTORY. By Joan Wallach Scott. Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2011. Pp. 200.

ABSTRACT

In this anthology, Joan Scott reconfigures her understanding of feminist history and thus contributes to a long overdue theoretical discussion on how we can write feminist history in a globalizing world. She traces both the history of gender history and the history of feminist movements. Scott's main source of inspiration is the French version of psychoanalysis following Lacan. In a further development of her pioneering 1986 article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," she points out that gender is neither a mere social construction nor a somehow biological referent (such as "sex"). Integrating the constructive criticism of her approach elaborated prominently by Judith Butler during the 1990s, Scott argues instead that gender is a historically and culturally specific attempt to resolve the dilemma of sexual difference. Sexual difference, for its part, is also far from referring simply to physically different male/female bodies. Sexual difference is, for Scott, a permanent quandary for modern subjects, a puzzle to which every society or culture finds specific answers.

My reading of her book concentrates on two main questions that run like a thread through her considerations: First, how can we bridge the gap between a subject and a group? Second, how can we overcome binary oppositions and/or fixed categories and entities—a challenge that becomes even more important every day in a rapidly globalizing world. I broadly discuss the benefits and shortcomings of the pivotal role Scott ascribes to fantasy. Although the concept of fantasy is powerful and striking, particularly with reference to the concepts of "imagined communities" and "invented traditions," coined by Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson, I find the Lacanian tone to be less convincing.

Keywords: gender, feminist theory, history-writing, psychoanalysis, narration theory, overcoming Eurocentrism, time regime

Even the title of this anthology inspires our imagination: *The Fantasy of Feminist History*. What does Scott mean? Does she promise an outline of what feminist history should look like: a wish list, so to speak, that future history-writing should satisfy? Or is it rather a history book about the past fantasies of early feminists? Or does it, generally speaking, deal with the effects of fantasy in history? Will it center on subjects and their imaginations or will it analyze historical discourses on fantasies? Will it deal with the reader's own fantasies about (feminist) history in a globalizing world? And what would they look like?

If the title provokes in the reader questions, uncertainties, self-reflection, and the desire to learn more about it, then this is no accident. It leads to the very center of what animates this book: *The Fantasy of Feminist History* deals with fantasies

bygone and their present reverberations. It is a call to reflect anew on the intricate relationship between past and present by undermining any notion of fixed identities or classifications. It is also a plea for critical reading, in other words, for the need to engage in a permanent search for meanings that always elude definition. Scott encourages her readers to accept the vertigo that ensues when the certainty of categories becomes lost. However, the author is too excellent a scholar to just leave the reader with only vagueness or half-done reflections. Instead she offers a controversial elaboration of the feminist issues that are being disputed. How do gender and sexual difference relate? How can the mutability of all categories be combined with political issues? How can feminist theory tackle global problems if there is no homogeneous feminist subject?

The impressive yield of this anthology is that it deals with supposedly familiar subjects but still succeeds in opening up a new discussion. For Scott, gender is no longer simply a social construction—as she pointed out in her famous 1986 article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.”¹ Gender no longer indicates a referent called “sex.” Gender, still at the very center of Scott’s feminist thinking, has now become a historically and culturally specific attempt to resolve the dilemma of “sexual difference” (5). As a consequence, sexual difference also no longer has a clear referent such as physically different male/female bodies. Sexual difference is instead a “permanent quandary” (6) for modern subjects, a puzzle, as it were, for which every society or culture seeks specific answers. Scott is on her way, indeed, and she invites the reader to join her on her journey. Many good reasons speak for accepting the invitation, although not without a critical reading of the intellectual turning points she takes on her route.

WHY PSYCHOANALYSIS?

The book includes five chapters from the last decade, a newly written introduction, and an epilogue. For those readers who are familiar with her work, it comes as no surprise that Scott takes psychoanalysis as her source of inspiration. However, this step does call for some explanation. In her introduction, “‘Flyers into the Unknown’: Gender, History, and Psychoanalysis,” Scott herself admits that her interest in psychoanalysis came late and after much resistance. The delayed reception holds true not only for Scott personally but also for social history as such, and that for two main reasons.

The first reason is that the social history of the 1980s was influenced deeply by sociological concepts and thus rejected everything that seemed to be connected to only the individual. Scott explains in the introduction and in the first chapter, “Feminism’s History,” not only her personal move but also the discipline’s move: She herself started as a social historian who introduced the binary conceptual framework of “sex” and “gender” into the discipline. “Gender” was at the very center of her interest, because it fit into other categories inspired by sociology. At the beginning of feminist history-writing, “sex” seemed to be part of one’s individual life and thus of no interest to historians. Only a couple of years later, one

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

of the most important criticisms came from Judith Butler, who stressed convincingly that sex is not a somehow biological residue in a subject's life. In *Gender Trouble*,² she argued that gender was generated and transformed continuously by reiterated, performative acts. Scott concludes that as a result, "sex" was understood in the years that followed as an effect of gender (8) and was therefore also determined by cultural and social discourse. The sex–gender dichotomy and with it the nature–culture dichotomy were not the only problems brought about by the category of gender. Scott admits another sore point. Initially, by introducing the sex–gender distinction, her intention had been to challenge the private–public contrast from a feminist point of view. Later, she had to realize that there has always been a hidden structural similarity in the two dichotomies: The binary sex–gender concept repeated the broadly accepted private–public dichotomy on an abstract level in which "sex" marked the side of the private, whereas "gender" fit into the realm of the public (7). This was a veiled explanation for the fact that "gender" seemed to be an ideal concept for analyzing cultural norms and social structures. From there, "sex" and "sexuality," the main topic of psychoanalysis, were not just outside her personal historical interest at that time, they also seemed to be outside the play of social and historical forces. In those days, for Scott, "sex" and "sexuality" influenced only the private side of the subject. As the collected articles of the book under review show, Scott has changed her opinion completely in this respect. Through analyzing feminist psychoanalytical theorists in the school of Lacan and Freud, she realized that psychoanalysis delivers tools for bridging the gap between the subject and groups. In chapter 1, "Feminism's History," an article initially published in 2004, she recalls this development and the pros and cons of the institutionalization of women's history (26). Feminism, for Scott, "has challenged the ways in which differences of sex have been used to organize relations of power" (35). She underlines that "gender" has been a prominent tool with which to "defamiliarize" (36) the terrain, to cast doubt on beloved terms and concepts through which historians had explained the past. Scott agrees that the next wave of feminists will insist that "gender" is only one of several equally relevant axes of difference. After this recall of feminism's history, she explains in the newly written chapter 3, "Fantasy Echo: The History and the Construction of Identity," how the gap between the subject and groups could finally be closed. I shall come back to this point and then show that the main tool for this basic issue in Scott's agenda is her psychoanalytically informed concept of fantasy.

But first let me address the second reason why she did not rush to psychoanalysis earlier: The second obstacle on the path to including psychoanalysis was that the history's disciplinary assumptions were not so easy to overcome. Historiography, she derives from her readings of Michel de Certeau (3), tends to create proper places for both past and present by either contrasting the past with the present—the past thus becomes "the other" of the present—or by integrating the past into the present in a relation of continuity. The boundary between past and present is not so clear and pigeonholed as historians would like it to be. The

2. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

subject of the historian makes this relationship far more complicated. According to Scott, historiography determines the relation between the past and the present through the psychic investments historians have made in their story. Even though Scott does not say it explicitly, this argument implies that understanding the present–past relationship means analyzing historians’ psychic investments, and, most important, historians’ longing to complete the present with “its other,” in other words, historians’ desire for wholeness. It follows from this that psychoanalysis would become the central point of reference.

What does Scott make out of her point? For her, the past–present dichotomy is only one example illustrating the fact that all dichotomies lead to similar problems. If clear-cut, fixed, and allegedly homogeneous categories are to be overcome, argues Scott, psychoanalysis is the remedy. The fundamentality of this issue becomes clear when one looks at other examples in which clear-cut definitions are also no longer convincing. An obvious case in point is the category of gender. If gender is no longer understood as a social construct referring to “sex,” then beloved certainties dissolve. As we shall see, here again, fantasy plays a privileged role. According to Scott, it is fantasy that enables historians to come to terms with the vertigo caused by blurred boundaries and the commutability of categories. Overcoming binary oppositions and fixed identities is the second basic issue in Scott’s feminist theory.

It might be a simplification of my reading, but my take on Scott’s theory is that all the important issues that she tackles so intensely can be traced back to these two basic assumptions. I believe it is fair to say that, inspired by psychoanalysis, Scott tackles basically two questions: First, how can we bridge the gap between a subject and a group? Second, how can we overcome binary oppositions and/or fixed categories and entities? These form the basis from which she derives further questions, such as what is historians’ relationship to their past?

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE SUBJECT AND A GROUP

In the introduction, Scott takes up a popular feminist discussion: If “gender” and “sex” are both unstable categories, if both differ throughout time and space, and if they are only effects of social and cultural discourses, how can we then meaningfully speak of “women’s history”? If there is “no essence of womanhood (or of manhood) to provide a stable subject for our histories” (11), if we deny a known referent of “gender,” or “women,” or “men,” or “sex,” does it still make sense to stick to the term “feminist theory”?

Scott responds to this indirectly by answering an even more complex puzzle, the puzzle of identity. She elaborates this problem in the above-mentioned chapter that is simultaneously one of the most interesting chapters in the book: “Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity.” It starts with a striking observation: Social historians use the category of groups without bothering about what it may mean. But, if we take a closer look at this practice, what are historians doing when they categorize a number of subjects as a group? If historians refer to a group, they establish an “illusionary sameness” (46) to a category of persons—be they African Americans, workers, or any other group. This effect of

“illusionary sameness” has not escaped theorizing. Scott goes on to argue that it was easy for historians to adapt Eric Hobsbawm’s idea of “invented traditions” or Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities”³ when it came to nation-building or other group-oriented common activities. In a later chapter, “French Seduction Theory,” Joan Scott returns to Hobsbawm and Anderson. She explains that “imagined communities” manufacture “histories that produce naturalized lineages as conclusive proof of the existence of a long-established national family” (119). Group-building has thus been easy to connect to “imagination” and “invention,” and therefore to psychological activities. Interestingly enough, this has been largely ignored in women’s history. The category of “women” seemed to be harder to understand as an effect of psychological activity. But if we admit that there is no essence of womanhood, then we need to find explanations that are open to historical change. The punch line of her argumentation passes through three steps: First, there is no commonality among women that would preexist its invocation. Second, neither the history of feminism nor the history of women is continuous. They are instead characterized through discontinuity. Third, the common ground among women “is secured by fantasies that enable them to transcend history and difference” (49). Generally speaking, according to Scott, it is fantasy that helps to answer the “impossible question of identity, to the subject’s quest for wholeness and coherence, by merging them into a group” (19). Fantasy thus bridges the gap between the subject and group membership.

Gender plays a pivotal role when it comes to analyzing these fantasies. Scott stresses that individual psyches do not work independently. Normative categories bring the subject’s fantasies into line with cultural myth and social organization. Normative categories are themselves products of culturally specific discursive orders. What makes gender such a basic category for history is the fact that the given understanding of gender gives a specific answer to the riddle posed by sexual difference. It is worth quoting Scott’s central conclusion at some length: “Gender, then, is the study of the relationship between the normative and the psychic. Gender consists of the historically specific and finally uncontrollable articulations that aim to settle the confusions associated with sexual difference by directing fantasy to some political or social end: group mobilization, nation building, support for a specific family structure” (20). This, then, is how fantasy bridges the gap between the subject and social groups.

What I like in the argument is the way it seeks to escape from the overwhelming essence reproach. In respect to global challenges, the concept of fantasy bridges differences and thus makes it possible to integrate the analyses of individual or local affairs into the analyses of groups and global affairs. In chapter 3, “Feminist Reverberations,” Scott illustrates the power of her concept with a contemporary example, the “Women in Black” (WIB) movement. Women in Black is a worldwide network of women who organize local actions against injustice, war, militarism, and other forms of violence. The actions are the same all over the world: Women in black clothing stand silently in a public place with

3. *The Invention of Traditions*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

regular frequency. Depending on the political context, the action differs, however, in its locally defined, concrete aims. What ties these groups together is not the somehow peaceful nature of women or other misleading stereotypes but their “imagined solidarities—fantasies that bridge differences, that find shared desire in different settings” (88). These solidarities have to do with echoes and what Scott calls “reverberations” of earlier feminist politics.

Fantasy seems to be an elegant way out of the problem of labeling global phenomena without neglecting their inherent heterogeneity. But I cannot desist from some criticism. At first glance, the role of fantasy in Scott’s argumentation seems to be equivalent to the role of narration in narrativist theories such as that of Paul Ricoeur.⁴ Fantasy weaves together the seemingly incoherent, thus making it in some way coherent. Scott derives this initially from Freud and the psychoanalytical practice that aims to revise the forgotten, the repressed, and the displaced. Then, when it comes to explaining the diversities of feminism, she builds on Julia Kristeva and other French feminists such as Hélène Cixous or Luce Irigaray. In chapter 5, “French Seduction Theory,” she even broadens her theoretical ground. With Mona Ozouf and her understanding of “seduction,” she sheds new light on the meaning of inequality. However, in this chapter, the costs of psychoanalytical wording become apparent. Ozouf, for instance, worries about the future of feminism, because she sees the danger that differences between the sexes will be denied (130). If the negation of sexual difference is dangerous, then, concludes Ozouf, homosexuality cannot be a “plausible psychic position” (130). This sounds odd, indeed, and I balk at accepting that there is only a systematic logic behind this vocabulary. Moreover, Scott’s conclusions from her reading of Ozouf are difficult to digest, namely that “the French culture remains ‘loyal’ to the organization of sexuality around the phallus” (132–133). Is there, one might ask, such a thing as “the French culture”? How does such a conclusion fit in with the vertigo of historical analysis?

Nonetheless, Scott delivers interesting discussions over many theoretical concepts, and her diagnosis, with the help of psychoanalysis, of the discipline’s shortcomings is striking. One of the main problems in recent years is how can we speak about differences in a language that tends to simplify (for example, “French culture”). But there are other remedies than psychoanalysis. Narrativist considerations gain entrance into the book only in one or two short passages and via Slavoj Žižek. That is a pity, because Ricoeur, for instance, also delivers revealing results on the puzzle over how differences can be transformed into a synthesizing whole without denying inherent breaks. In contrast to Ozouf, Habib, and also Scott, Ricoeur does not have to carry the somewhat unwieldy wording of psychoanalysis in his baggage. For him, it is narration that transforms fundamental antagonisms (“heterogeneity”) into a temporal order (“synthesis of the heterogeneous”) and thus explains why things happened this or that way. “Narrative identity” is a concept that is always in flux, because every new event calls for a rewriting of the whole story and thus the production of endless reverberations. Like fantasies, narrations are also able to bridge the gap between the individual

4. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–88).

and the cultural and social discourse. But in contrast to fantasies, the concept of narration includes its own historicization.

To put this argument straight: I buy the idea of “imagined communities,” also when it comes to defining sexual difference; I buy the role fantasy plays in this respect by bridging the gap between the subject and groups. But I have difficulties with Lacan’s concept of “an imagined loss of wholeness” (113), or, in other words, his understanding of castration. I feel it is bound to a specific historical situation of white, middle-class, family structures in some Western societies. Scott herself locates Lacan’s concept in “modernity’s history” (114). The whole “Seduction” chapter shows that Lacan’s psychoanalysis helps Scott to ask basic questions. However, these questions can also be dealt with (though not answered finally) without Lacan’s theorizing. The productivity of Scott’s approach, nevertheless, is obvious when we take a look at the other main subject of her anthology.

BEYOND CLASSIFICATIONS: THE VERTIGO OF HISTORICAL ANALYSIS IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

The second main issue in her feminist theory is the overcoming of clear-cut classifications by both focusing attention on the inner differences within groups and by pointing to the mechanisms that make classifications appear “natural.” Again, she starts convincingly with the idea that sexual difference cannot be understood as a natural distinction rooted in physical bodies (112). Sexual difference is rather a riddle that demands us to seek solutions. In illuminating passages, Scott derives promising insights into the genealogy of, for instance, the feminist movement (see chapter 1, “Feminism’s History”). With great persuasive power, she shows that the deconstruction of allegedly natural dichotomies and critical reading form the basis for historical analyses. They make it possible to understand how differences were constructed, how the self is related—in historically different ways—to the other. Scott concludes in chapter 1 that “there is neither a self nor a collective identity without an Other (or others); there is no inclusiveness without exclusion, no universal without a rejected particular, no neutrality that doesn’t privilege an interested point of view; and power is always at issue in the articulation of these relationships” (41).

She takes these axioms as points of departure for critical historical analysis—and who would not agree? This chapter, “Feminism’s History,” is a reprint from 2004, and, since then, these axioms have become broadly accepted. Likewise, the ways in which historians use categories of difference have become subject to criticism from different disciplinary perspectives. She correctly points to the fact that it was feminist historians who introduced the difference of time into the categories employed by cultural historians. Feminist historians, indeed, specialized in the dimension of time. They analyzed how different time regimes were connoted with masculinity or femininity. Also, in chapter 4, “Sexualism: On Secularism and Gender Equality,” Scott deals mainly with the issue of showing that we should mistrust historical or contemporaneous terms of analysis. In this chapter, Scott analyses the recent invocations of the secular and its entanglements with sex and sexuality. She deconstructs the widespread and politically abused

assumption that women's emancipation and secularism went hand in hand. Instead, she offers an outline of a "genealogy of secularism" in which it becomes clear that in France the question of "women's equality as a feature of the separation of church and state . . . came up only in the context of heated debates about the place of North African immigrants in French society" (103). And, of course, within these heated debates, the question of modernity or backwardness, in other words, history or development as a marker of global hierarchies, also played a crucial role. If, from our journeys through the last decade of Scott's interventions, we were to bring back the necessity of questioning our traditional classifications in respect to gender, race, and centrisms of different kinds, that would, indeed, already be a great deal.

So let me sum up: Scott's anthology brings together articles written over the last decade. Some of these hold interest as historical documents; others are interesting because an experienced scholar is lecturing her colleagues about the central issues in today's discipline of history. The transfer of the well-known and broadly accepted term "imagined communities" to "women" and "men" is catchy. For me the most forward-looking passages are those in which Scott muses about the problem of how to combine the universal with the partial: How can we use general concepts—such as feminism, for instance—without neglecting or covering up inherent differences. In other words, how can we combine local and global issues without putting "the" global and "the" local in a misleading dichotomy? For Scott, the term "fantasy" is a convincing answer. I would agree, as long as "fantasy" just means "imagination" or, in terms of other theoretical concepts, a "narration."

For Scott, "fantasy" has a broader meaning than it has for Anderson. It also includes the Lacanian phrase of the subject's longing for wholeness and historians' psychic investments in their stories. However, I believe it is less the "psychic investment" or historians' desire for wholeness than the pivotal role of history and time regimes that is involved in the making of identities. The desire for wholeness might be part of this—but it does not have to be. Let me elaborate briefly on this thought: Scott argues with Certeau that history tends to pigeonhole past and present in two strictly separated places. The past then most often becomes the "other." It is only if you buy this assumption that it becomes convincing to argue that the historian rounds out the present with the past. However, I believe modern Western identity is built more on a history that *combines* both the rupture with the past and continuity. This becomes obvious when we look at the Eurocentric tradition in historiography. Johannes Fabian has gained some prominence with his argument that Western nineteenth-century societies denied "coevalness" to non-European societies.⁵ This argument ties in with Dipesh Chakrabarty's well-known point that entire world regions had been put in "the waiting room of history."⁶ These descriptions are correct, indeed. So far, they match Certeau's/Scott's diagnosis. The "waiting room of history" could be understood as the

5. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

6. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

“other.” However, this is only one half of the story. Denying the “coevalness,” in other words the “othering” of non-European societies, has been only one strategy. Often, though not always, this strategy was accompanied by another temporal argument: The future of other world regions was equated with the European present. From this perspective, they had just “not yet” arrived at the European status of history. Their present status was then equated with the European past. It might sound fussy if one insists that both assumptions—the “denial of coevalness” and the equating of their present with the European past—were often at work together. It is telling, however, because this pattern shows how “othering” (denial of coevalness) was combined with “continuity” (Europe’s own past as present for non-European world regions). Only this combination opened the door for monopolizing the other by, at the time, neglecting the otherness. The denial of coevalness could thus mean different things: either “othering” or, paradoxically, neglecting otherness by incorporating the present of other world regions into Europe’s own history. Of course, in respect to “time regimes,” there have also been other strategies for dealing with non-European world regions (or with peripheries within Europe if one thinks of Spain or the Balkans, for instance). My point here is that the variety of strategies for treating non-European world regions in times of imperialism corresponds to the varieties of the relationship between past and present in European history. Continuity and rupture are only two out of many possible relationships between past and present; there exists more than one “time regime.” Interestingly enough, this variety of time regimes can also be found in the characterization of gender hierarchies in the nineteenth-century European middle classes. In this vein, femininity has been connoted with a naturally fixed, permanent present, and masculinity with a culturally specified development or change over time. Of course, this also influenced the making of the male-gendered academic discipline in nineteenth-century Europe, especially in Germany. From there, the Rankean ideal of academic history-writing has been exported all over the world. It was not only the practice of history-writing that was deeply gendered, as Bonnie Smith and other scholars such as Natalie Zemon Davis or Billie Melman have pointed out.⁷ Only men had access to universities, academic life, and archives, whereas women’s historiography was pushed into the field of amateur history. The division was simultaneously connected to specific patterns of narration and thus connected to specific time regimes.⁸ I would argue that these gendered and Eurocentric patterns of narration are more fundamental than the psychic investments of historians. I’m afraid, however, that

7. Bonnie Smith, “Gender and the Practices of Scientific History: The Seminar and Archival Research in the Nineteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (1995), 1150–1176; Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Praxis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Natalie Zemon Davis, “Gender and Genre: Women as Historical Writers, 1400–1820,” in *Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York and London: New York University Press, 1984), 153–182; Billie Melman, “Gender, History and Memory: The Invention of Women’s Past in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *History and Memory* 5, no. 1 (1993), 5–41.

8. Martina Kessel, “The ‘Whole Man’: The Longing for a Masculine World in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” *Gender & History* 15, no. 1 (2003), 1–31. Angelika Epplé, “Questioning the Canon: Popular Historiography by Women in Britain and Germany (1750–1850),” in *Popular Historiographies in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Sylvia Paetschek (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 21–33.

Scott will not accept my “resistance” to the Lacanian term “castration” or “loss of wholeness.”

One can push this objection even one step further. As to the history of the discipline, I believe there has been one telling coincidence that Scott tends to overlook: that time regimes or the premodern–modern divide play a pivotal role when it comes to defining social or cultural hierarchies was realized more or less simultaneously by historical anthropologists and gender historians. If you think of Eric R. Wolf’s *Europe and the People without History*,⁹ for instance, which appeared for the first time in 1982, the important role of time regimes is clear in the title. What I find striking is that these findings in anthropology and in gender history have hardly ever been combined. It is obvious that both point to shared phenomena and that these phenomena can be understood profoundly only when both hierarchies are analyzed jointly on a global and on a local level.

Finally, I would say that I agree more often than not with Scott’s eye-opening diagnoses when she analyzes the state of the art in academic history-writing. I also agree that the place in which historiography is produced matters, and that this fact is mostly overlooked. I also agree that boundaries should be blurred, that dichotomies should be deconstructed, and that fixed classifications should be dissolved. I’m convinced, too, that the vertigo of new uncertainties is productive. However, this vertigo is not necessarily a result of psychoanalysis. I believe critical self-reflection would suffice. Critical self-reflection helps us to realize that our (historical and conceptual) thinking is both gendered and Eurocentric (or Asia-centric or whatever-centric). This idea of a radical self-reflection is not new, though. But in an academic world in which global histories create new metanarratives, the modesty “engendered” by self-reflection could have some very beneficial effects.

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9. Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, with a new preface [1982] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).