■ Gendering Historiography

Angelika Epple/Angelika Schaser (Hg.), Gendering Historiography. Beyond National Canons. Frankfurt/New York (Campus Verlag) 2009, 244 S., 34,90 €

»I am not a lady. I am a professor«: Martina Kessel, quoting the British historian Helen Cam, introduces the paradoxes analyzed in the volume under review. The book summarizes the state of the art in three interrelated but independent research fields: gendering the historical canon by integrating gender and women's history, the ways in which academic historiography has been changed by the presence of women as historians, and the influence of these phenomena on the culture of memory. These three subthemes inform the essays which make up the four sections of the book.

In the first section: »Historiography in flux« Bonnie Smith deals with the United States while Western Europe is handled by Maria Grever. The second section entitled »Gendering the National Canons of Historiography« contains contributions by Claudia Kraft and Irma Sulkunnen who offer case studies of Poland and Finland. Part III »Dividing Lines between the Traditional Canon and Excluded Histories« focuses on a mix of subjects: the Lutheran Pietist movement (Ulrike Gleixner), Ottoman women's history (Ruth Barzilai-Lumbroso), British suffrage historiography (Krista Cowman) and cultures of memory (Sylvia Paletschek). The last section looks at Finnish and German historians of women researched by Tiina Kinnunen and Heike Anke Berger. This section also features an eloquent postscript to the volume by Martina Kessel, who highlights problems of gendering historiography and demonstrates that the analytical concept of »double helix« used by Higonnet in 1987 is still useful when speaking about women's position in historiography.

The project of the book is laudable though it sets itself a herculean task. The editors describe the aim of the book as that of providing »insights into the establishment and cultivation of gendered power relations in different societies« as well as of outlining »the devastating effects that exclusionary practices can have on each national canon«. The volume is an overview of problems and controversies around gender history and merits to be assigned as reading for courses on gender history and historiography in general. The bibliography is impressive, up to date and will be useful when planning gender history courses at the university.

It is impossible in the space of a short review to do justice to each of the individual contributions to the book; I have therefore chosen instead to focus on one issue the essays address: those challenges faced by historians of gender who wish to write beyond national canons.

The first challenge arises when using a national frame as a unit of analysis for history writing. The introduction to the volume by Angelika Epple and Angelika Schaser makes it apparent that these prominent scholars of gender history, who have spent decades researching and thinking of their projects, were summarizing their research

results for the major conference which provided the impulse for the volume. The contributing scholars, who are well-established canon-makers themselves, are the products of »Western« (meaning Rankean) professional training as historians and they are aware of this particular challenge which Irma Sulkunen refers to as »choices on ethical grounds«. It is obvious that historians are still trained (and employed in the academic labor market) in the national framework. Gender history is no exception. Very few appointments are made in comparative or transnational history. It is a major mistake to believe that gender history is comparative and transnational from the start. By way of a solution the volume combines thematic articles with national reports on case studies of how in specific times and places gender complicated national narratives. The highlights of the volume are the thematic articles such as that by Sylvia Paletschek, who helps to think of issues through lenses other than the national.

As a result, the second challenge which becomes apparent is how to deal with inclusion and exclusion, which is a constitutive part of writing history. We should take a look at the principles on which decisions of exclusion and inclusion are made to achieve the goal of the book: to get beyond national canon. Authors of this volume, especially Bonnie Smith, are aware of the challenges and possibilities that global history offers for gender history. More should have been said about »history« as a colonial project which informs these processes of exclusion. The interesting contribution of Ruth Barzilai-Lumbroso addresses the very complex ways in which Ottoman women's history was integrated into the national canon in the 1950s.

Thirdly, it is clear from this book that in the long run the methods and theory of gender history should be revisited as Epple and Schaser underline in their introduction. Reading this excellent summary and reflection on what has been written in the past 30 years of gendered historiographical canon such as the contribution by Ulrike Gleixner on church history, we see that such revisiting is a necessity not independent of the political agenda of transforming history writing, which scholars of gender had set up for themselves as early as the beginning of the last century.

The articles in the volume focus primarily on the first two challenges mentioned above, but the contribution by Kessel touches upon future directions which comprise the third challenge. Definitely the way forward (and towards a wider outreach) of gender history is to make connections with other history writing traditions – such as post-colonial or labor history – which question the concept of a national canon and its exclusionary logic. Such a path has a potential to define gender as a travelling concept as well as to build up strategic alliances to be able to think through global history from outside the »Western« intellectual tradition. An intersectional approach would not only change the perspectives of doing gender history, introducing besides the classic triad of class, race, gender other differences, but would also question that which qualifies as »source« and »history«. Maybe it is high time to think of historians in a different way. Claire Colebrook wrote in her article in *Australian Feminist Studies*: »Rehearsing feminism's past is, then, not merely a sanctimonious exercise of self-congratulation for having overcome the blindness of a past; it is also an awareness that the past may harbor potentials to which we are not yet attuned«. This volume warns us that maybe we have not fully utilized this potential yet.

Andrea Pető (Budapest)