

Gender (and Intersectionality)

Research Area E focuses specifically on asymmetrical power relationships as reflected in gender relations and gender orders. As Joan Wallach Scott wrote in her groundbreaking 1988 article, “Gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott 1988: 167). The question of gender asymmetries (in an open or latent form) ultimately arises in connection with any kind of social dependency or power asymmetry. Even more importantly, we are convinced that the gender perspective has the potential of challenging a whole series of mainstream assumptions.

Susan Stuard, for example, argues against the common theory established by Marc Bloch and others that ancient slavery was replaced by a system of serfdom during the early Middle Ages. Instead, she claims that slavery for women continued (Stuard 1995 against Bloch 1961). In a similar way, David Herlihy illustrates that women’s textile work was “domesticated” in the Central Middle Ages, shifting from the female-slave workshop of the Carolingian period to the artisan family, while women themselves effectively remained barrack-slaves (Herlihy 1990: 161).

The empirical collection of linguistic and material findings on social dependency (Research Areas A and B) and the reconstructions of the institutional framework of social dependency and labor-related mobilization/immobilization processes (Research Areas C and D) are thus supplemented by a further research field that draws upon the four other focus areas and promises to yield important insights for social history as a whole. The ‘gendering of the history of asymmetrical dependencies’ makes it possible to discern differences and complementary structures in the experience of bonded and oppressed men and women, as well as of gender-conforming and -nonconforming individuals.

Goals

To quote Natalie Z. Davis, our goal is therefore “to explain why sex roles were [...] sometimes markedly asymmetrical and sometimes more even” (Davis 1976: 90). In this sense, this research area can provide new insights for women’s, gender and masculinity studies as well as for dependency studies and social history. In order to achieve that goal, the fifth research area also needs to delve into recent debates on intersectionality (e.g. Bühmann 2009; Griesebner/Hehenberger 2010; Hess 2011; Eisen/Standhartinger 2013; Klein/Schnicke 2014; Bereswill 2015).

Originally developed by scholars studying gender (Walgenbach 2012), intersectionality has since been productively applied to various forms of social hierarchization, discrimination, discreditation and stigmatization (Kallenberg 2013; Bähr/Kühnel 2018). The approach focuses on intersections between structure and agency to analyze the combination of various markers of social difference, including gender as well as age, class, origin, ethnicity, religion, skin color, sexual orientation, and physical stigmata, mutilations or disabilities, all of which determine the web of asymmetrical dependencies that inform people’s lives.

Intersectionality states that factors such as gender, sexual orientation and race do not exist in isolation, but are linked by complex and interconnected relationships. Intersectional approaches are aware that paying attention to these relationships is essential for understanding the human condition. When systems of justice or other entities attempt to separate and isolate one of these factors, misconceptions are bound to occur and essential aspects of the human condition may be lost. Intersectionality argues in favour of thinking about all factors informing the identity and the social position of a person as inextricably linked with all other factors.

This framework allows us to understand systemic injustice and social inequality in new ways. Racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and religious or other belief-based bigotry and persecution do not occur independently of each other. Instead, these forms of oppression typically interact, creating a system of asymmetrical dependencies that reflects the 'intersection' of multiple forms of discrimination. Starting from this hypothesis, it becomes apparent that identities are usually not addressed in social discourses and often come with their own forms of oppression, domination and discrimination. Laws and policies generally only address one form of marginalized identity.

The overlapping of multiple oppressed identities often goes unnoticed. Intersectionality, by contrast, proposes that all aspects of one's identity must be viewed as simultaneously interacting with one another and affecting one's privilege (or lack thereof) and perception in society. Intersectionality does not only necessitate a rethinking of personal identity, but allows for an overarching analysis of asymmetrical dependencies present within identities. The framework of intersectionality also provides insight into how multiple systems of oppression are interrelated and interactive. Intersectionality is not a static field, but dynamic and constantly developing in response to formations of complex social inequalities.

There is a particularly large gap in the field of unfree labor in terms of gender aspects. While gender historians have deconstructed outdated narratives in many fields over the last decades (Trepp/Medick 1998; Conrad/Wunder 2005; Canning 2006; Quataert/Hagemann 2008), the gender perspective has rarely been combined with a focus on coerced labor relations (see, however, Schmieder 2003, 2013; Campbell/Elbourne 2014). While the new history of labor, for example, has turned gender asymmetries into a central category of analysis by examining productive and reproductive work, gainful and unpaid work, and work outside as well as within the household, this question is still a rather marginal issue in debates on coerced labor.

The fifth research area takes this gap as its starting point and argues for a combination of 'feminist labor history' research with slavery and dependency studies. In terms of its methodology, it builds upon a core idea of gender history put forward by Immanuel Wallerstein, who suggested that the household (rather than a single individual) should be the smallest analytical unit in the study of labor and dependency relations (Smith/Wallerstein/Evers 1984; Smith/Wallerstein 1992; van der Linden 1993; Feldman 2007). In addition, we suggest that the dependent slaves, serfs, bonded laborers, peasants and servants must be examined not only with regard to their position within the economy of their family of origin, but also as part of the household, family, business or manor in which they served and worked (Zeuske 2018). They must be regarded as mediators and agents between two economic units and two economic spaces.

Approach

As a first step, we will collect accounts of life cycles, life histories and (if available) ego-narratives of oppressed persons (Gardner 2009; Zeuske 2016) with a special focus on gender-specific 'real-life' particularities. In reconstructing micro-biographies in their respective historical-social contexts and reflecting on personal dependency structures based on individual cases, we will pay special attention to the fact that almost all extant textual remains from 'pre-modern' periods were written by men.

The dominance of the male perspective must therefore not only be taken into account in analyzing written and material remains (Research Areas A + B), and the interplay of institutions, norms and practices (Research Areas C) or of forced migrancy and labor relations (Research Area D), but even more so when we try to reconstruct the biographies of the dominated (Research Area E). The life stories, however, are those of adult men, women and individuals outside the gender binary; of male, female and other-gendered children; of what we would today identify as heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual individuals (who may not have identified in those terms at all); of people living monogamously or polygamously.

Building on these micro-historical case studies, this research area also aims to record gender orders and their socio-economic dynamics in the various societies and cultures of earlier periods. The examination of "pre-modern" and non-European gender asymmetries is particularly well-suited for a historization of the hetero-normative, patrilineal gender system of Western modernity, thus contributing to the cluster's overall endeavor from yet another perspective. Studies on dependency structures in matrilineal societies (Augustine 2007; Kasprzycki 2013; Trenkwalder Schönenberger 1991), on the social consequences of bilateral marriage patterns and partible inheritance (Goody 1983; Duby 1978) or the medieval concept of biological and spiritual kinship (Lynch 1986; Johnson et al. 2015), on the social construction of a third gender (Kunt 1983; Peled 2016) or on differing concepts of masculinity (Späth 1994; Höfert/Mesley/Tolino 2017) all demonstrate the great variety of conceptions and practical implementations of gender orders at different times and in different spaces. The so-called "pre-modern" era is revealed to have been a far more pluralistic and heterogeneous time period than modernity, which has been dominated by the modern/Western matrix, and thus offers opportunities for an empirical extension of the current field of gender studies (Harich-Schwarzbauer/Späth 2005). The social site of the hermaphrodite, the eunuch, the nun, the female saint or the virgin female body is as much of interest here as that of the *devşirme* military slave or the underage temple prostitute. A particularly fruitful approach would be the analysis of fictional texts as well as spiritual writings, as this literature allows for playing with social norms and offers a glimpse into the intimate histories of individual lives, sometimes making their ordering categories more clearly visible than a chronicle, a report or a letter could.

Thirdly, gender orders are especially well-suited for testing the possibilities of a transcultural, diachronic comparison that are opened up by the interdisciplinary cooperation within the cluster. While theoretical and conceptual presuppositions on how to compare empirical findings across time and space will be discussed within the cluster (Kaelble 1999, 2003; Drews/Höfert 2010), the question of gender asymmetries will serve as a *tertium comparationis*, a basis for developing and systematically demonstrating good practice of transcultural, diachronic comparison (for possible models, see Goody 1976).