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Gender History

Challenges and Opportunities, Perspectives and Strategies

A Position Paper

Translated by Michael Thomas Taylor

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“Gender history is here to stay.” It has now been twenty-five years since the US historian Lynn Hunt opened her widely cited essay, “The Challenge of Gender,” with this claim. As it turns out, she was right: gender history has achieved **remarkable success**, both internationally and in the German-speaking world. Over the past few decades, the field has not only become established but also diversified in many ways. Studies in cultural and epistemic history on the discursive construction of gender have emerged alongside social histories. Women, men and masculinities have been investigated. Scholars have employed microhistorical and biographical approaches. They have pursued national and international, transregional, imperial, decolonial, or global perspectives. A large body of work has examined histories of sexuality and sexualities, posing questions about queer ways of living—about the histories of lesbian and gay movements, and of trans people—that have enriched the field in recent years. Topics stemming from gender history are being explored in every historical period, and they have long since made an impact on public history.

Today, the field is attracting particular interest among German scholars too, as anyone visiting the online platform HSozKult can see. The questions and topics articulated by scholars in gender history have become a fixture in mainstream historiography. And yet, **much remains to be done**. To cite just one example: the mostly widely read, comprehensive histories of the German Federal Republic agree that there has been massive change in gender relations. But they offer scarcely any discussion at all about how these changes came about, the role social movements played in this history, or the extent to which questions about gender relations might require us to rewrite narratives about democratization and liberalization—and this despite the fact that significant, more specialized studies have been published on all of these topics.

Gender history, in short, holds enormous potential, not least in its **relevance for current sociopolitical debates**, even as women’s and gender studies find themselves faced with ongoing hostility fomented by right-wing movements and other populist currents. Given these tensions, and in view of today’s multiple crises and their cumulative, compounding effects, it strikes us as not only worthwhile but imperative to reflect on the current state of the field. We must take stock of current questions, new topics and approaches, research lacunae, and institutional challenges.

A scoping workshop funded by the Volkswagen Foundation gave us the opportunity to do precisely this in June 2023. Given our aim, we made a conscious decision to hold our discussions in German. The choice may be unusual today, but it seemed like the right one to us: it is much easier to discuss difficult methodological, theoretical, and historiographical questions in our own scholarly language. Historiographical debates, moreover, often develop in national contexts and through engagement with specific national histories. Institutional conditions at universities vary across countries, and the reception of historical knowledge is not divorced from language. While most participants in our workshop teach in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, some came from France, Italy, the UK, and the United States. Many also have extensive international experience. We thus hope that our reflections will be of interest **beyond the German-speaking world**.

At the same time, however, we must admit that **our deliberations are bound up with the place(s) from which we speak**: we live in comparatively prosperous Western

democracies and enjoy (significantly broad) freedom in research and teaching. Our contacts extend more to neighboring countries in the West than to Eastern Europe, and we are influenced more by research in the UK and North American, and in Europe, than by the theoretical frameworks and empirical results being produced by our colleagues from the Global South. Much remains to be done.

This paper offers a snapshot of the field: it aims to facilitate orientation, present **current discussions**, and initiate **new debates**. By no means does it seek to have the last word. We hope it will spark interest, spur objections, and provoke scholars to expand the picture. So where does gender history stand today? How have its approaches changed over time? What is new in the field, and where do we see a need for further research? What has come up short over the course of its development? What becomes visible when we take different approaches? What foundations does it offer for us to build on? Before turning to these questions in the second section of our paper, where we will focus on selected areas and topics in gender history, we begin in our first section by highlighting the unique perspectives offered by the field. In the third and final section, we will address challenges provoked by the specific topics of gender history, the practical conditions of researching in the field, and the institutional conditions of university teaching and research, to then propose some strategies for finding solutions. Given the limited length of this paper, in many cases we can only touch upon the field's historical development. This is especially regrettable in that gender history would not exist in the form it does today without the personal engagement, contributions, and intellectual achievement of pioneering scholars who remain unnamed in our broad survey.

1. Why do gender history (today)?

No doubt, the meaning and purpose of historical research is a keen topic of debate. How can we avoid presentism and anachronism while helping to shape public discourse and visions for a better future? How do we do justice to the past while acknowledging how we are bound to our own historical and geographical context? Work produced by historians almost never yields immediate lessons for the present, yet engaging with history changes how we see our own contemporary life. **Historical research shows how the world we take for granted today came to be, while also allowing us to experience alterity, especially when working on earlier periods.** One consequence is that our present gender relations are revealed to be both historically contingent and malleable. Gender history in particular exposes us to the full range of human behaviors and emotions. It confronts us with phenomena that are initially difficult to understand. In ideal cases, engaging with history makes scholars, students, and readers more critical, self-reflective, thoughtful, and empathetic.

A number of **current political debates about gender and sexuality** that are raging in many societies mean gender history has a vital role to play. One need only think here, for instance, of the growing hostility toward the queer community and of masculinist tendencies, especially in supposedly liberal Western societies, or of the re-establishment of regimes enforcing rigid gender segregation and deliberately oppressing women or nonconforming gender identities, such as in Afghanistan and Iran. Gender history can reveal how past societies have understood and organized gender relations

and sexualities, and how these systems have changed throughout the process of history. It can uncover when and under what conditions this led to conflicts, which ideas, practices, and structures were predominant, the reasons for why and the specific power relations that have meant that certain formations of gender and sexuality have proved, at least in part, to be extremely long-lasting.

Gender history thus makes it possible to **better understand changes and the *longue durée* of gendered conceptions and relations in their diversity and contradictions**. It shows that it is not unusual for gender relations to change and that this generates controversies, especially in modern societies linked together through mass media. Consider, for instance, the vigorous debates around 1900, as feminists and antifeminists fiercely opposed each other, lively public discussions about sex and sexual reform took shape, and the emerging discipline of sexology demanded the decriminalization of homosexuality. We could also point to the 1970s, when women's, lesbian and gay movements, publications offering sexual advice, and the "porn wave" changed ideas about sexuality, love, and gender. But gender relations were a human concern in earlier centuries, too. The *querelle des femmes*, a legal-philosophical debate about the (in)equality of the sexes, persisted throughout the early modern period. Doctors and theologians—almost without exception men—were for their part certainly not shy in explaining what "really" constituted gender difference. Colonial explorations and expeditions, colonization, missionary work, and ethnological field work all produced Western descriptions of gender relations in African, American, and Asian societies. Thinking about gender and gender difference, or about possibilities of gender transformations (be it for a moment, on stage, or in the animal kingdom), or about nonbinary forms of gender is thus nothing new.

Gender history shows that **changes in gender relations can be traced to many causes**. Economic factors, wars, occupations and colonizations, social movements, and ideologies have all played an important part. Hence any historical transformation of gender relations cannot be told as a linear story of progress, as changes have not necessarily led to more justice and social participation, but have also produced new exclusions, constraints, and dependencies. Justifications for European colonialism, for instance, have included the alleged superiority of Western gender relations. When beer brewing became commercialized and professionalized in the late Middle Ages, this did not improve the earning opportunities of the women who had frequently brewed beer themselves, but instead led to their exclusion from what was now an increasingly profitable business. Welfare states took care of those in need and thereby solidified conceptions of women's vulnerability. When (White) bourgeois feminists successfully asserted their interests, it often came at the expenses of working-class women, Black women, or women from the Global South. Hegemonic masculinities distanced themselves from other concepts of masculinity that were understood as inferior, and even putative minorities reproduced male hegemony. Racism existed in women's movement and queer contexts, too. Gender history uncovers and more clearly articulates such paradoxical developments, challenging master narratives and critically engaging with the demarcation of historical periods. Its insistence on nonsimultaneities hinders any simplistic view of the past and the present.

In addition to investigating transformations in gendered conceptions and regimes, gender history also examines their **longevity**. It asks which **structures, institutions, and**

discourses, which strategies and political interests, reinforced gender inequality. It shows how the sense or feeling that gender difference is something natural—that “boys will be boys,” as is often said—has in fact been produced by language, practices, and institutions and is acquired by individuals in the process of socialization. The field examines which formations of knowledge (in religion, medicine, or the natural sciences) have been particularly effective in this regard. Since its beginnings, gender history has thus contributed to the historicization of ostensibly straightforward concepts such as kinship, family, sexuality, love, work, politics, or the public sphere. It empirically investigates how such concepts were understood and employed by individuals in different moments of history, and which normative expectations were conveyed in the process. Masculinity, for example, has not always been necessarily associated with militancy, or femininity with motherhood or motherliness. Gender history thus examines past societies from a perspective that is critical of power.

Gender history is an endeavor that **transcends classical boundaries between historical periods.** It can focus attention on any society and does not necessarily assume that gender has functioned as the most important category of social distinction, but rather that gender has always been one of several axes of social inequality. It also asks which social distinctions were or have been justified and maintained, constructed, and experienced in each historically specific context, and how they have interacted and mutually constituted each other.

Gender history is characterized by **methodological diversity** and thus enriches the study of history as a whole. Historians pursue different approaches depending on the questions they pose, asking about the history of discourse or of everyday experience, analyzing visual cultures or economic factors, employing concepts from political history (be it in newer forms, or as traditional “event history”), or from histories of emotions. Older controversies have now become less explosive. The dispute between supposedly essentialist and constructivist positions, for instance, has given way to more nuanced perspectives. Scholars are now more interested in mutually constitutive relationships—in how discourse shapes experience without determining it, in investigating which experiences come to play a role in producing socially meaningful bodies of knowledge, and the specific power relations underpinning this production. Such questions allow for a plurality of approaches to discourse and experience: “practices,” “techniques of the body,” and “subjectivities” are terms that have proven useful in exploring the interplay of social structures and individual ways of living.

Studies in gender history have been particularly important for the reception and dissemination of cultural-historical approaches in historical scholarship. Such work shows that **language and terminology matter:** in analyzing historical material, gender history reconstruct how concepts have directed the gaze of the public, of politicians, and of scholars—opening up or foreclosing avenues of thought and inquiry, constructing specific groups of people (“migrants,” “feminists,” “historians”) and identities (“German,” “homosexual”), and thereby defining and producing reality. Questions and studies from gender history foster critical thinking, not least in schools, empowering individuals to question political discourses, media reports, and their own points of view.

Since the emergence of women’s studies in history, gender historians have wrestled with the many gaps existing in the historical record and the ways in which

historical sources are bound to a specific place and time. The archive of history is shot through with unequal power relations and stamped by ruling forces; it was never designed to capture the perspectives, experiences, and voices of marginalized individuals. Gender historians have thus found themselves compelled to develop a variety of methods of source criticism and source analysis. And for the same reasons, gender history is also particularly well suited for teaching in schools and at the university that aims to instill a **critical approach to the historical archive**. Those with the power to inflict violence have used the archive as a tool, with historiography often complicit, as slavery and colonialism illustrate all too clearly. In response, scholars—especially in the English-speaking world, where new currents in research have often charted the course of gender studies—are increasingly showing an interest in transcending the limits of the historical record by exploring methods of writing inspired by literary techniques.

And even though writing history always means, most fundamentally, making it possible to imagine the past in its difference to the present, gender history like other forms of historiography offers **possibilities for identification** in showing, for example, how individuals have mobilized in solidarity and fought for common goals. Gender history has added new stories to the biographies of “great men” and depictions of “important events”—starting with those of important women, but then expanding to include narratives drawn from the lesbian and gay movement or the struggle for women’s rights, or that focus on the agency and suffering of marginalized and oppressed historical actors.

Expertise in gender history is also necessary for the ethical issues that arise in attempts to **work through or come to terms with the past**—questions of (historical) accountability or responsibility, of acknowledging culpability for crimes or harms, and of making reparations or fostering reconciliation. This applies, for example, for attempts to force a reckoning with sexualized violence against children in churches, associations, and schools, or the inhumane treatment of single mothers and their children. It is also crucial for discussions about compensation for victims of forced sterilization, forced prostitution and rape, or persecution for homosexuality, as well as racist violence and colonial exploitation.

And like any discipline of knowledge production, gender history is constantly changing. **New impulses** are emerging from changing research possibilities—from the increasing digitization of historical sources, for instance, or from changes in the field of historical studies as a whole. In recent years, to give one example, approaches focused on global histories have become increasingly important across the board, with gender history no exception. Other developments owe a great deal to interdisciplinary and international influences. Here, national particularities become apparent, produced by the respective traditions of national history and by current political and social dynamics, as well as the very different working conditions within university systems. There is no question that the use of English as a lingua franca disadvantages nonnative speakers and burdens them with the intellectual work of “translating” concepts, terms, and historical facts. Terms originating in the anglophone world—“gender,” “agency,” “intersectionality,” “race,” etc.—have become indispensable in gender studies. Nevertheless, it remains important to consider their conceptual genealogies, how they influenced later research, and the extent to which they can be applied to other historical phenomena (especially in older historical periods). Queer and transgender histories are prompting new historical questions. At stake here is not simply adding a new field of inquiry to

gender history—one focused on the stories of “queer” individuals or “queer” ways of being in the world. Rather, these histories push us to repeatedly examine the terms and concepts of gender history by interrogating how apt, fitting, or useful they might be (a question always to be decided in terms of historical context and the objects to which they are applied), or what unintended effects they might bring: Are they suitable for analyzing fluid forms of gender performance? Do they overfocus our historical attention on discourses and institutions that enforce binary forms of gender, and thus perhaps fail to see diversity in everyday experience, or in (bold or precarious) practices that challenge and transgress binary structures?

Finally, gender history has long since begun a **process of self-reflexive engagement** with its own emergence and, by association, with the history of feminism and movements for queer liberation. Topics of inquiry here include dynamics internal to the field that have had exclusionary effects of their own, following approaches that accentuate the importance of Black women historians to the discipline’s development. This process—and the debates it requires about questions of terminology, the silences imposed by the archive, and a necessary decolonization of historical scholarship as a whole—is far from complete. For European gender history, this also necessitates a specific emphasis on Southern and Southeastern European, socialist, and postsocialist perspectives.

2 Research fields and debates

Feminism and antifeminism in historical perspective

Since its beginnings, gender history has explored historical debates and conflicts surrounding questions of gender. Some of these were purely intellectual, as found for instance in philosophical texts, ethnographic descriptions, and fictional literature. As historians quickly showed, however, it is not only texts justifying patriarchal relations that have a long history but feminist and protofeminist ideas, too. The history of the women’s movements and of the movement for sexual liberation is much shorter, though both can be traced back to the nineteenth century.

Studies on feminism and antifeminism are good illustrations of the methodological diversity found within gender history. Work employing discourse analysis exists alongside studies investigating the organization of social movements, and political struggle as lived practice. Approaches focusing on the history of emotions, images, media, and even biographies have proven fruitful. Since feminism and women’s, lesbian, and gay movements emerged through international networks with specific, local dynamics, many scholars have taken comparative and transnational approaches. While studies first tended to focus on movements in Europe, the UK, and North America, they also quickly showed that feminism is a global phenomenon. The only way, then, to adequately grasp the many varieties of feminist thought and action is to abandon Eurocentric preconceptions about what feminism “actually” is.

The history of feminisms is one of internal struggles over the meaning of the movement and its key terms, and over power relations. Recently, critiques by Black feminists in particular have led to change in the field. Historical studies have demonstrated and problematized the influence of superbly networked and professionalized US feminists on international development and population policies in the postwar decades. They have also shown that feminist movements have been characterized by internal hierarchies and exclusions—of lesbian and/or migrant women, for example. In retrospect, important political initiatives launched by the women’s movement—such as the fiercely fought struggle in its early days against reproductive medicine—are revealed to have been largely disinterested in the reproductive rights of Black women or in the interests of women who desire to have children. Feminist beliefs were no safeguard against racist feelings of superiority. Quite the contrary: even as modern feminism took shape, imperialism found justification in the supposed need to protect “brown women from brown men.”

And as historians have quite clearly shown, far from all women were committed to feminist issues in the broadest sense. Women, too, have played a part in fights against emancipation or in right-wing political movements; women, like men, have supported colonial and fascist projects. Moreover, arguments based in feminism or movements for liberation can be misappropriated in various ways. Today, for instance, right-wing parties are mobilizing homonationalist arguments to stir up sentiment against (allegedly homophobic) migrants. So-called antigenderism asserts the supposedly “natural” destiny of women while proclaiming the importance of the “natural” family. Political ideals and convictions, such as an emphasis on self-determination, diversity, or choice, are widely used for advertising purposes, often linking feminist slogans to neoliberal principles.

Both the current rise of right-wing parties in many countries, and the simultaneous strengthening of feminist movements, along with the many everyday struggles for recognition waged by queer, trans, and nonbinary individuals and their organizations, call for increased historical research. And this research often relies on the collecting efforts of nongovernmental archives. Not least in view of the close connection between the women’s movement of the late twentieth century and the emergence of women’s and gender studies, here too we find an opportunity to critically reflect on the contexts and the bodies of knowledge out of which gender history emerged.

Perspectives from queer and transgender history

The clash in feminism between forces inclusive and exclusive of transgender women points to the challenges posed by current debates about gender diversity beyond the binary of female and male. How radically should the dichotomy of sex or gender (and of the structuring categories of homo and hetero) be questioned in light of the variabilities and liminal spaces associated with queer, trans, intersex, fluid, or nonbinary conceptions and experiences of gender? Perspectives from queer and transgender history have developed their own impulses within the broad field of gender history and the history of sexualities, and in posing such questions about gender binaries and gender fluidity,

they are taking up the fundamental concerns of gender history and sharpening them in a new way.

Scholars have begun to explore the political struggles, social and embodied experiences, subcultures, and relations of care from within the histories of trans people in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Turning to earlier eras, too, when medically assisted gender transitions were not yet possible, they have also worked to reconstruct the histories of castrato singers, female husbands, and other possibly similar phenomena, with attention to social and economic history and to histories of violence. This work is producing knowledge that allows us to find orientation in the present: there have always been individuals who lived their lives at the edges or in-between spaces of the gender binary. Nonbinarity cannot be dismissed as a current fad.

At the same time, approaches from queer and transgender history show that gender nonbinaries from the past are emblematic of historical phenomena, in that they are not to be understood as immediate predecessors of today's concepts, but as expressions of historical alterity in comparison to the present. Eunuchs and hermaphrodites from earlier periods must be situated in historical contexts. The same is true for Indian hijra and North American, Indigenous two-spirit individuals. How did these historical actors understand themselves? How did others in their social surroundings react? How did cultures of knowledge gender individuals, and how did power structures segregate "deviant" bodies? Where do we see and how do we interpret practices that challenged or transgressed gender boundaries, without assuming certain identities? Such questions help prevent us from appropriating complex pasts as patterns of the present, but they also create connections across historical periods that do not presuppose dichotomies and fixed, identitarian positions, but instead operate with spectrums and shifts producing differentiations. In this way, analyses from queer and transgender history promote a well-founded approach to multilayered complexity, while also reducing the toxicity of current debates about gender diversity. They question binaries without naturalizing contemporary categories or appropriating non-European models. The problem posed by appropriation also means that research that has until now predominantly been conducted by cis scholars cannot credibly integrate such perspectives without opening up to include LGBTQI+ people.

Queer histories also raise questions of memory politics: how should the Nazi persecution of trans people, for instance, be remembered? Analogous to debates about how the persecution of lesbian women under National Socialism should be commemorated, a look at trans histories shows that it is not enough to follow Nazi logics of persecution in seeking to find the men with pink triangles when we attempt to reconstruct how Nazis persecuted those to whom they ascribed gender or sexual "deviance." Such considerations can furthermore open up a historical dimension to current alliances and conflicts between feminist, queer, and trans movements. Hence we should no more ignore problematic aspects of class and race in the transvestite movement of the 1920s than we should transphobia in homosexual and women's movements. As a provocative intervention, perspectives from queer and transgender history allow gender history to maintain a self-reflectively critical stance.

Perspectives from the history of science and medicine

Since antiquity, medical and natural philosophical texts have engaged with the meaning of gender, gender difference, and gender binarity. With the Enlightenment, this European discourse became hegemonic, defining biological categories primarily through a hierarchically conceived gender binary. “Nature,” as the object of scientific investigation, became the decisive justification for social differences between the sexes. The production of knowledge in natural history and the natural sciences took place in contexts that were permeated by power relations, and from which women were increasingly excluded. At the same time, however, women increasingly became the object of misogynistic theories that biologized human beings: gynecology, for example, became a “special anthropology” and consolidated the axiom of men as “general” and women as “special.” The categories of race, class, and gender are closely intertwined with this history, as bodies of people from lower social classes and non-European cultures were also considered to deviate from the norm. European expansion was accompanied by a concentration of the new knowledge generated by these disciplines in Western metropolises. To this day, the public museums in these cities document the historical dispossession of Indigenous populations labeled as “inferior” based on racializing notions of difference. Biological-medical research legitimized racist and (proto)eugenic projects, broadly implementing their ideas in society with the help of institutionalized procedures of expert assessment, segregation, and sterilization, some of which continued through the end of the twentieth century.

By reconstructing and deconstructing systems of scientific thought and their associated categories and classifications, and viewing these histories through a rigorously intersectional lens, gender history not only articulates the ways in which sciences that ostensibly strove to be objective were in fact bound to specific places and times; it also reveals the power they have possessed to impose norms and essentialize their objects and terms of investigation, with the effect of stabilizing systems of social order and, ultimately, threatening the lives and even survival of marginalized people. Gender history asks about the (competing) notions of gender circulating in a given time and how they were appropriated by individuals and groups. It examines how such ideas have been applied, as well as challenged and modified, in contexts such as legislation and social policy, criminal procedures, and medical practice.

In addition to studies on discourse analysis in the strict sense, a significant body of work has emerged in recent years that is more interested in practices of knowledge generation and circulation, and in processes of negotiation and appropriation. This work has further elaborated the agency of patients and the importance of patient organizations—in scientific research, for instance, or in the fight against AIDS. A number of confrontational stereotypes about oppressive authorities, complemented by victimization discourses, that developed in the context of the women’s movement and struggles for women’s health and in close connection with the emergence of women’s and gender studies focused on histories of medicine and science, have given way to more nuanced, rigorously historicizing approaches. This work in particular has demonstrated the signal importance of the women’s movement in contemporary history for the formation of new concepts and practices of the body.

Working out the social construction of dis/ability, fatness, intersexuality, transness, etc., while also taking into account the materiality of bodies and the significance of somatic experiences for everyday life and identity formation, is an enormous challenge, especially in a historical perspective. To take one example: how can we write a history of pregnancy and childbirth that reconstructs medical knowledge of a certain historical moment, its various practices of medical examination and child delivery, and the meanings ascribed to pregnant women without equating these historical phenomena with the somatic experience of individual women during their pregnancies? From a perspective of gender history, the extensive research that has been done on the history of sexualities is to be emphasized here as groundbreaking. This work has revealed the seminal importance of the sexual sciences that emerged in the late nineteenth century for twentieth-century conceptions of sexuality and individual human sexual experience—without, however, dismissing earlier and other forms of intimacy as historically irrelevant.

As with areas of research in gender history, histories of medicine and science also benefit from a diversity of approaches and from considering different eras. Dwelling on periods before the advent of Western modernity, or non-European cultures, can help us to understand just how difficult it is to describe as “natural,” rather than historically developed and socially constructed, ideas about “nature” and of gender difference that often seem so self-evident.

Welfare, caregiving, and care

Since its beginnings, women’s history and gender history have been keenly concerned with how labor is divided along lines of gender or sex and with the reproduction of living conditions. This has required establishing practices of care and of providing material and emotional necessities and support as historical objects in the first place. Emotional worlds had to be historicized, and the paid and unpaid work of women performed in families and households made visible as subject to historical change. It was also necessary to deconstruct and historicize the myth that women do this work “out of love” and are destined for it “by nature” or because of a divine order. After all, reference to an innate “motherly instinct” possessed by all women was used by those active in first-wave feminism in order to be heard politically, and to develop and claim for women new professions such as kindergarten teacher or social welfare worker.

Both the discursive construction of needing assistance or care—as applied to adolescents, to the elderly, to those living with disabilities, etc.—and the institutional structuring of caregiving have been studied in-depth. Often, the aim has additionally been to emphasize the experiences and agency of those treated as the object of care and subjected to gender-specific regimes of caregiving. A look at history shows how closely caregiving and discipline, caring and ruling have been intertwined. Medieval and early modern convents and beguinages offered physical protection to unmarried women, providing a space where they could pray and work not only for their own spiritual salvation, but for that of their family members, as well. They were engaged, one might say, in spirituality as a form of care. Complex relational structures characterized monastic same-sex communities both within the communities themselves and—thanks to the many ways in which monastery walls proved permeable, as scholars have

repeatedly shown—in their relationships to the outside world. Such communities offered women an opportunity to develop special devotional practices, to take on social roles as teachers or apothecaries, but not all who lived within them had voluntarily chosen to do so. The ambivalence within the overlap of charity work and social control can also be found in late medieval and early modern institutions of care, which both limited and complemented familial responsibilities, and in which treatment depended heavily on gender, such as in orphanages, hospitals, penitentiaries, and poorhouses. Only in the absence of family support did (predominantly unmarried) women seek out maternity hospitals in the eighteenth century to give birth, as the price to pay in return was to serve as test subjects for the training of medical students and midwives. Preindustrial armies would not have been operational at all without the cross-gender and cross-generational provisioning provided by the trailing camp of noncombatants, the original baggage or supply trains.

Studies on contemporary history have explored violence, exploitation, and sexual abuse in postwar welfare institutions and the involvement of doctors, welfare workers, midwives, and nurses in Nazi biopolitics. A particularly dark chapter in the history of care is the placement of Indigenous children in settler families and missionary-run institutions, driven by notions of Western superiority and aiming to destroy Indigenous cultures.

Precisely the field of care—in the double sense of caring for, and caring about—illustrates the potential of interdisciplinary cooperation for gender history. How can we elaborate connections to philosophical reflections on a feminist ethics of care, to sociological research on love and consumption, on experiences of obstetric violence, on the migration of domestic servants and the resulting chains of care, or on queer relationships of care? What does literary studies tell us about new forms of fatherhood or about caring masculinities? Ecofeminist perspectives direct our attention to practices of care for the environment, nature, and other living beings. Approaches from dis/ability studies make us more aware of the need to examine historical processes that constructed categories of dependency on care in their complexity and with their exclusionary consequences.

The focus of research in gender history on care is shifting, and the personal life experiences of the historians themselves are also likely to play a role. Scholars are examining care relationships beyond traditional families. For example, studies on caring for AIDS patients show how care relationships had to be renegotiated in gay couples and other relationships without legal protections, how the welfare state responded to these situations, and how the struggle against HIV/AIDS mobilized the queer movement. Providing for children, or “mothering,” to take another example, has now been more thoroughly researched from historical perspectives as a physical and emotional practice influenced by material conditions and opinions of experts. Generally speaking, historical perspectives concerned with bodies and embodiment, and with emotions, play a significant role in understanding care as a form of work or labor that often requires the use of the caregiver’s body. How have people experienced this physical intimacy in the past? How have they coped with shame and disgust? Who had to use their body (as a wet nurse, caregiver, servant, sex worker) in order to make the lives of others comfortable or at least bearable?

Violence

The current increase of wars between states, of civil wars, and of (more or less) autonomously acting militias—which are in turn triggering ever-more massive displacements of people and movements of refugees around the globe—seems to confirm old clichés: the willingness to employ or act with violence continues to be largely associated with men or (militant) masculinity—historically as well as today, everywhere on the planet. “Women and children,” by contrast, usually figure in collectively subjective form as “victims.” This implicitly essentializes violence, thus obscuring our view of its genesis and ambivalent mechanisms, as well as ways in which we might exit or prevent it. At the same time, the focus on violence in war has increasingly crowded out attention toward everyday violence (especially violence in the family and in the workplace, or sexualized violence), which can also take forms that are not purely physical. Yet it is not possible to adequately assess violence in its past and present forms of representation and manifestation if its social and, in particular, gender-specific preconditions and effects are not identified. This has been shown, for instance, by studies on the social and legal changes in the treatment of marital rape, or by research spanning several eras into the reintegration of war veterans in postwar societies.

Gender history has been breaking down further simplifications and segmentations since the 1970s. It examines different contexts for the perpetration of violence, and in particular by women, and it addresses the role forms and norms of violence, as well as institutions prone to exercising violence, play in establishing social order. With reference to (or as a part of) histories of postcolonialism, genocide, emotions, or bodies and embodiment, it identifies patterns and modes of legitimation. Increasingly, it is moving away from a perspective centered on perpetrators and victims to ask about the preconditions of violence and specific violent practices. A central question here is the constitutive significance of how violence can sometimes be employed to establish concepts of male identity and self-reassurance. The frequent silence about violence found in archival records is countered by the various voices, rendered more or less audible by power relations, of those it affects and of bystanders. Hence studies that prove particularly illuminating here are those concerned with normative and practical strategies of legitimizing violence, often taking a perspective that cuts across period boundaries or seeks a global view. Frequently, such strategies function by effeminizing victims and simultaneously masculinizing perpetrators, whether in colonial or local contexts. This effect can be observed particularly in the case of sexualized violence committed by men against men, the consequences of which have (for the reasons noted above) hardly been researched from historical perspectives.

In asking about the history of violence, gender history thus inquires about processes and practices, attributions of roles, and continuities and discontinuities, rather than categorizations. This approach breaks down seemingly unambiguous distinctions between periods of violence (war) and nonviolence (peace), allowing us to see instead how periods before, between, and after violent conflict are connected over the long term through the intergenerational social consequences of experiencing violence.

Coloniality and decolonial approaches

The project of decolonization bears upon the topics, questions, practices, and structures of historical research: gender history reveals how colonial, gendered, and sexualized forms of power have come to interact. Moreover, it illustrates that forms of colonialism are persistently manifested in political and economic structures as well as in cultural motifs and intimate relationships. With its interest in relationality, power relations, and processes of negotiation, gender history analyzes complex dynamics that need not have solidified along the line between colonized and colonizer. The groups involved were heterogeneous within themselves, expecting or enforcing certain embodied and sexual patterns of femininity and masculinity. Access to property, income, and resources also depended on gender. Colonized and colonizer acted in a multilayered field of inequalities. A spectrum of colonialities thus becomes visible that undermines the assumption of an unchanging “White supremacy” that always and everywhere determines gender constructions and gender relations. Early modern expansions, modern empires, and postcolonial migrations each created their own forms of racial discrimination.

Historically analyzing such dynamics from the perspective of those affected by racism is difficult, as sources have survived in fragments at best. Gender historians are well aware of this problem. And allowing marginalized voices to be heard is not enough. Our methods must also be decolonized. The history of “White supremacy” shapes scientific structures that obscure non-European bodies of knowledge, that value analyses over supportive or preliminary work, scientific expertise over practical everyday experience. Since the Enlightenment and subsequent waves of professionalization, academic centers of power in the Global North have stipulated what counts as “objective” and what counts as a “subjective distortion,” what counts as “scientific” and what counts as “activist.” Even if researchers reflect on their own actions in ways that differ from political actors, this difference does not justify a privileged claim to truth on either side.

Gender-historical and decolonial approaches can be productively combined. Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color (BIPOC); migrants; and others with experiences of discrimination must not only be heard as “sources” but respected as coproducers of knowledge. Participatory research must enable collective authorship and critically reflect on distributions of power. Work of this kind needs to be adequately funded and recognized to prevent those who are doing it from being caught in precarious financial and institutional situations. Even if we cannot (yet) answer the question of whether it is even possible to thus comprehensively move beyond the coloniality of academic knowledge production, it remains all the more urgent to continue decolonizing gender history—thematically, methodologically, and structurally.

Intersectionality

Social inequalities are both a global and a local phenomenon that we cannot ignore. Historiography as a discipline, in all its various fields and approaches, is called upon here to analyze the emergence and development of social inequalities throughout history and thus to investigate social change. One approach that developed out of Black feminism in

the United States, legal studies, and gender studies can be helpful here—to wit, intersectionality. But how can our analyses in fact retrace the connections between categories of inequality? What might a research program look like that takes seriously the lessons learned from the theoretical approaches of Black feminism, that examines inequality as a multidimensional phenomenon while not foreclosing the question of how categories of difference changed across time?

Even though debates on intersectionality have emphasized different aspects across international and interdisciplinary horizons, the theoretical tools offered by the concept appear capacious enough to allow for exciting adaptations. Impulses from postcolonial theory, dis/ability studies, and queer studies can be integrated into this approach. From the perspective of gender history, the debate on intersectionality can and should be deepened and expanded by further historicizing the relevant categories in each case. In the German-speaking context, current discussions are centered on the extent to which this approach can be operationalized and on its political implications.

Intersectional historiography requires not only that we describe the interconnectedness of social categories, but also that we ask how individual categories are historically constituted as dependent on other categories, whether over short or long periods of time (examples include how constructions of gender depend on race and class, or how they take shape in connection with religious affiliation and social estate). In this context, describing the process of category formation is an important prerequisite for making it possible to employ intersectional analyses in historical scholarship. A central problem in operationalizing intersectionality as a method is selecting the categories to be studied—both in terms of the scope to be defined for any research project and in consideration of whether the selected categories will allow for an appropriate description of the social space in question. In each case, scholars must explain and justify the necessary choices they make in limiting the terms of analysis. The use of modern categories, moreover, which is so often necessary for comparison, requires multiple forms of translation, as this is the only way for us to see and understand both similarity and alterity without falling into the trap of exoticizing or idealizing historical phenomena. At the same time, the practice of such productive anachronism makes it possible to question the situatedness of key concepts in the modern social sciences. It is precisely in such a diachronic and cultural decentering that we find one important strength of historical intersectional analysis. Not least, this allows us to consider society from its most marginalized positions—and it is this emphasis that marks what is most likely the biggest difference to discourses of “heterogeneity” or “diversity.”

Especially in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the importance of economic differences and in class. New studies, some based on innovative methods for analyzing historical sources comprising mass data, are revisiting earlier questions about family economics or the effects of inequality on health and survival, to give two examples. That said, it remains an open question whether the fundamental shift of historical analysis from social inequality to inequity, as is sometimes called for in English-language scholarship, is truly productive for studying all historical periods. Recent proposals to carry out intersectional analyses of medieval and early modern societies argue that we should not presume an awareness of injustice in cases of unequal treatment.

Archives, power, silences

From the perspective of gender history, the archive represents an ambivalent site. Regardless of whether one works with a broad concept of the archive encompassing libraries, museums, films and images, objects, buildings, and privately owned remnants, or with a definition more limited in scope, archives are permeated by power relations and forms of authority. Archives are based on decisions about what should be recorded and preserved, kept and maintained, arranged and cataloged, and thus made available for later use and for posterity. They exercise epistemological power not only through collection criteria and practices, but also by regulating access to what they hold. The very location of an archive, for instance, often determines who can visit it and whether particular groups of people, such as women, may work there—restrictions that are especially significant for those working on global and colonial history. Systems used to catalog or otherwise register materials decide which questions and topics are comparatively easy to research and what remains undiscoverable. For the historian, museums, archives, and libraries thus often become a kind of poisoned well: they reveal and conceal; they preserve traces and house documents central to histories of gender, sexuality, bodies, and embodiment, while also reflecting existing inequality, violence, oppression, and domination. Many studies in gender history have shown that sources can be read against the grain, and yet over the last few years it has been repeatedly insisted that reading *along* the grain is necessary, too. The aim here is to examine, from the perspective of the history of science, the kind of knowledge that was produced and stored with the help of the archive at the time, as well as which collection practices were applied. Archives created for the purpose of persecution also provide insight into living conditions (such as Stasi documents on the lives of lesbians in the GDR, administrative files on eunuchs in British-colonized India, or the collections of sex researchers concerned with “deviant” bodies, etc.). For historians, these archives are a fascinating treasure trove, but we must always critically reflect upon the ways in which the histories of their creation are ethically problematic and shot through with unequal relations of power.

The rich repertoire of strategies in gender history for dealing with the archive is particularly well illustrated by the example of North Atlantic slavery. The politically and ethically urgent aim of representing individual experience encounters almost insurmountable difficulties in an archive structured from a White perspective and by racism. Often, the desire to know more about the experiences of those who were enslaved cannot be satisfied. Rather, it remains something with which we must reckon, and which we may have to bear.

Without doubt, archives are also important sites for intentional preservation of memory and identity formation. This is equally true of family archives and of archives dedicated to social movements. From the beginnings of women’s history and gender history, scholars in these fields began to collect, produce, and make accessible archives of this kind. More recently, the number of archives dedicated to LGBTQI+ movements is also growing. Oral history projects, in particular, attempt to close gaps in the historical record. And digitization is offering enormous possible benefits to gender history, especially when it comes to archival accessibility. In the future, too, care should be taken not to structurally reproduce inequalities by means of paywalls and unequal priorities in

deciding what documents are digitized. An equally crucial consideration is not to lose sight of gender equality and inclusivity in cataloging practices.

Alongside the practical and financial concerns facing existing archives and their expansion and digitization, gender history is also grappling with ethical questions that arise from archival work. This applies in a special way to the images and films in the historical archive. Here, strategies for carefully handling archival materials, and especially visual sources, must be developed in order to avoid reproducing sexist, racist, classist, and other discriminatory aspects in citing or reprinting images without sufficient reflection or critical attention.

Writing history in a different way

Gender history and postcolonial history have long been concerned with deconstructing master narratives and hegemonic discourses and finding new ways to make heterogeneous and contradictory voices heard. These disciplines not only analyze new genres and formats—they also use them to tell history in new ways. Historians in women's studies, gender studies, and postcolonial studies have elaborated diverse, previously unseen histories of actors, spaces of agency, and contexts of domination. Yet they have also repeatedly emphasized that the gaps in the historical record must not be covered up—and that the fragmentary character of any historical narrative must instead be kept visible. This expertise and awareness of gender history in dealing with questions of narrative representation opens up special skills and tools for our research field in particular, in not only analyzing but also producing widely accessible media formats such as blogs, podcasts, and exhibitions. Gender history practices a critically reflective approach to the tension between complex scholarship and polarizing or simplified popular representation, rather than seeing this as an insurmountable dichotomy.

Since its emergence, gender history has opened up new approaches, new methods and theories, new fields of research, and new topics. In so doing, it has changed historical scholarship on many levels and shown how history—and a plurality of histories—can be written in many different ways. Gender history has also tended to work more in ways that cross different periods than other areas of (German) historiography, reflecting on and questioning some of the field's firmly anchored demarcations. In its own history, it has also repeatedly contributed to the self-empowerment of individuals and groups whose claim to participate in history and in the writing of history had been delegitimized. Given the enduring problem of how power relations influence historical memory, the task remains of creating and reconsidering structural conditions for historiography that will broaden democratic participation. A projection fostering collaborations, for instance, might aim to gain more visibility for memories of migrants, and thus to change national narratives. A number of questions arise here. What are the conditions that will allow hitherto excluded actors—and their stories—to participate in producing historical narratives and constructing public memories?

Must historiography be “balanced”? What level of closeness, or distance, is conducive to historical investigation? Such questions have been part of women's history and gender history since its beginnings. And more recent work has expanded the list. Who

is allowed to write about whom, that is to say, who is allowed to appropriate the historian's power to shape meaning, in order to transform marginalized groups into communities with meaningful histories. Such debates sometimes involve mechanisms of exclusion rooted in identity politics. The question of who writes history is important, but it must not result in certain persons being excluded from writing about certain topics. The strengths of gender history that we must continue to expand include an ability to problematize conflicts, blind spots, and exclusions, and to apply reflection on these dimensions of history to our own work as historians.

3 Tasks, expectations, prospects for the future

Open questions, new challenges

Gender history is hardly standing still. It is constantly engaging in disciplinary and **interdisciplinary exchange**, responding to new research questions, and contributing its expertise to current debates. Since its beginnings, it has benefited from sustained exchange with other fields, such as ethnology, literary studies, sociology, and area studies. It has taken up concepts such as “intersectionality” or “hegemonic masculinity,” while also subjecting them to critical evaluation. In recent years, however, it has become increasingly uncommon for work in gender studies to give historical perspectives the attention they deserve; currently, approaches from social sciences dominate the field. Historians should actively seek out opportunities here for exchange and contribute their expertise. They can show how seemingly self-evident concepts (“gender difference,” “motherly love,” “homosexuality”) came into being and were produced over time. This also allows them to productively criticize and refute often unquestioned assumptions about “progress” that demarcate “modernity” from an earlier period of history. With its sense for the variability of differences, historical scholarship discovers multifaceted references and transformation, as well as continuities, behind supposedly clear oppositions, helping today's societies better understand gender relations in their historically developed intricacies. Historical studies on the body and embodiment, or on forms of knowledge and science, that work with concepts such as bioculture or complex embodiment point toward an interrelation of bodies and subjectivities, practices and performances, social structures and individual traumas. Overlaps exist here with (gender-informed) medicine.

Transdisciplinary challenges and questions also arise from the debate about the **Anthropocene**. How does climate change affect the gendered division of labor in the world's most affected regions? How is this transforming concepts of the family specific to particular strata and groups? What is the role being played here by production and reproduction? Such questions can be answered with the methods of gender history without shaking the foundations of the discipline. Things become more perilous when historical approaches are combined with scientific and anthropological methods to write “more than human” histories. These narratives consider people in their connection and dependence on other living beings and things. With this approach the focus no longer lies solely on human actors; other phenomena, such as the significance that the spread of

viruses or rabbits hold for processes of colonization, draw historians' attention. These perspectives transcend the disciplinary boundaries of historiography. Just how gender history will be able to contribute to this discussion is not yet something we can tell.

Transdisciplinary efforts are also evident in the dialog with computer science: **digital history** offers rich new possibilities. It allows scholars not only to analyze large text corpora, but also to study and present data sets obtained from statistical surveys, administrative data, contracts, and similar sources. Historians might use this approach, for instance, to examine the distribution of resources at the level of society or individual families. A naïve reliance on the effortless production of results from processes that can be automated would, however, be misguided. It is crucial to carefully scrutinize the quality of source data, asking how they might reflect conditions of inequality, gender relations, or power differences. Since gender history emphasizes the situatedness of knowledge, it also questions the assumptions that go into programming. The theoretical project of queer programming, which plays with the failure of coding languages that are critical of binarity and cannot be executed, is opening up exciting perspectives here. Those who work with digital and digitized sources should seek out exchange with experts in information technology to help them better understand algorithms.

Gender history will continue to participate in the trends and shifts of the broader field of historical studies. **Global-historical questions** are being posed more and more frequently, but certainly much remains to be done in this area. It is not enough to problematize the ways in which we, as historians, are each bound to a specific time and place. We also need the necessary (language) skills to conduct research on and in non-European and non-Western societies. Time and resources need to be provided especially to undergraduate and graduate students, and to postdocs, for them to acquire these skills. Projects should also be developed in collaborative relationships with scholars from the regions being studied. In this work, it is important to critically reflect on and further develop the repertoire of methods shaped by Western scholarship through engagement with other forms of historical thought.

Changes can furthermore be expected in the field of **visual history**. A wider definition of source material to include images and films, along with the growing interest in the production and circulation of images, requires renewed reflection on gender-coded forms of representation and the particular gaze inscribed therein. Special challenges arise here in the presentation of research results. The expectation that lectures should employ images, as well as the ease with which visual sources can be made accessible to audiences, must not lead to an unreflective use of problematic historical images.

In contrast to gender history elsewhere, German-language research currently devotes little attention to **questions of economic and legal history**. Shifts in focus might develop here over the next few years; scholars may, for instance, devote more attention to reciprocal dynamics between gender relations on the one hand and state, legal, and economic structures on the other.

The field of gender history will continue to change, in new directions not yet foreseen. This paper has only been able to depict some of the current developments. More consideration could certainly have been given to older historical periods. In this respect our field is also shaped by the overall dominance of contemporary (European) history in German-language historical scholarship. The study of earlier periods, in

particular, shows the degree to which gender relations can be organized in different ways. Especially when viewed from historically longitudinal perspectives (i.e., across historical periods), continuities in relations of domination and inequality become clear. The field of gender history should therefore continue to build on an old strength: **cross-period research**.

Creating and preserving structures

Research needs resources, and this holds true for gender history, too. For it to maintain its innovative potential, continue to influence historiography and neighboring disciplines, and face up to current social challenges, gender history needs **reliable structures**. Professorships specifically dedicated to gender history are crucial here. And even though many colleagues work in gender history, there is a need for academic contexts in which approaches from the field are central and deliberately pursued. This is the only way to ensure their visibility in historical scholarship and ability to participate in international debates.

A large part of the relevant research in gender history is done by doctoral and postdoctoral students, whose **precarious working conditions** have been sharply criticized over the last few years, and rightly so. Reworking or amending the German Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act in order to provide more career stability to young scholars, is long overdue.

In addition, gender history needs to become an **integral part of university curricula** and to be anchored in the strategic goals of universities. In Germany, the “Strengthening Study and Teaching” agreement signed by state and federal ministers, which offers a vision aiming to facilitate access for “underrepresented groups,” as well as the funding guidelines “Gender Aspects in View” produced by the federal Ministry of Education and Research, complemented by parallel programs in Switzerland, Austria, and elsewhere, provide valuable opportunities that projects in gender history ought to seize. For gender history to maintain independent spaces for thought and action, it also needs support in institutional structures such as the German Research Foundation (DFG) review boards. Furthermore, **nonuniversity research institutions** also need to be established.

The report on the state of gender studies in Germany presented by the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat) in the summer of 2023 comes to a very positive conclusion overall, but it fails to adequately capture the relevance of historical work in the field. The Wissenschaftsrat recommends more institutionalization and the establishment of “research nodes.” Concerted interventions are needed to ensure that these be designed or thematically oriented so that gender historians can participate in appropriate ways. **International networking** is equally important, including with colleagues from the Global South. The findings of German-language gender history need to be introduced into English- and other-language debates. This, too, requires resources.

Being able to participate in international exchanges is crucial for the field to **strengthen its profile**, which needs to emphasize internal diversity without fragmenting

along lines of conflict drawn by identity politics. This requires regular conferences, sustainable networks, and financially strong collaborative research, allowing younger scholars to benefit just as much as professors who are often overburdened with multiple tasks. The Working Group on Historical Women's and Gender Studies (Arbeitskreis Historische Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung) has been doing voluntary work for years, and the European Social Science History Conferences provide an important forum. But regular German-language conferences have until now only existed for subfields such as the early modern period or research on masculinities. And with MATILDA, we now have a European MA program in gender history. Since integrating gender as a perspective into designations for academic degrees opens up broader career opportunities for graduates, this model should be expanded. Journals such as *L'Homme.ZFG* and collections such as the Digital German Women's Archive are other valuable forums for discussion within and beyond the field and require continued support.

Scholars in gender studies are being attacked. There is thus a need for **structures to offer protection and guidance** to the targets of these attacks and to combat discrimination against women and queer people. This starts with allowing first names to be changed in university email addresses and must include strategies to combat sexual assault and more. Cooperative and participatory formats in teaching and research can also help to fundamentally challenge the power structures of academic institutions. Economic, social, and symbolic capital should not determine access to careers. Colleagues who have acquired influential positions can make the education and science system more inclusive by trying to change hiring and appointment policies and organizational culture.

This also includes **overcoming the exclusion of BIPOC researchers** from the scientific community. In these contexts, university institutions devoted to diversity, equity, and inclusion continue to play an important role. Representatives of different disciplines in gender studies and of different facets of the queer-feminist spectrum should not be played off against each other, but should fight in solidarity for common concerns.

Creating publics

We need gender history. It critiques the naturalization or ontologization of patriarchal inequalities of power in all social spheres and explores the historical dimension of contemporary conflicts and controversies on gender and sexual diversity. It is for this reason, moreover, that its perspectives need to be taught precisely in high-enrollment **degree programs with a component geared toward training future teachers and in public history**. In this way, gender history can make an important contribution to discussions about how history is fundamentally constructed, and it can do so early on, in the phase of academic professionalization of future teachers.

University and practical teacher training is already oriented, in many states, toward acquiring specific skills and competencies. The focus on cross-cutting themes and exemplary fields of learning requires that we move beyond the concept of a canon of knowledge based on a chronological sequence of historically significant events. Topics,

approaches, and methods in gender history are uniquely situated to meet this need. They allow us to show how legal and economic factors constitute society. In addition, they present society's **approach to gender and sexual diversity** from multiple perspectives and across topics and eras. Gender-historical change can moreover be studied in ways that are deliberately attentive to methodology, revealing the historicity of categories and narratives.

In public history, which is already being offered as a course of study at some universities, this can mean systematically introducing central research findings of gender history into institutional sites such as **museums, media productions, and the political work of remembrance and historical memory**. Public history needs to reflect here on the usual expectations held by its audience, which are often based on ahistorical or binary concepts of gender. Participatory research approaches, such as citizen science, can help to involve the general public and various interest groups in knowledge production and dissemination. The important historical and historical-political work of nonuniversity associations should be recognized and included, but not appropriated.

Critical scholarship in the political public sphere

Gender history sees itself as a form of **engaged scholarship** that not only influences academic teaching and research with its content, methodological approaches, and results, but also seeks to foster exchange with society. This poses a variety of challenges. Women and queer people are facing tremendous oppression in many countries. Democratic societies also face the threat of a conservative backlash. Motivated by ideology, right-wing forces are deliberately targeting critical social research, portraying gender studies as a threat to the supposedly natural family, or even to the “God-given” order.

Such attacks have at times prompted government ministries in Germany at both the federal and state level to be cautious in supporting gender studies, lest they provoke the ire of the AfD, Germany's extreme right-wing party. In France, the minister of science even threatened to launch an investigation into the “ideological infiltration” of academic research on intersectionality. In Italy, numerous politicians spoke out publicly in Verona in 2019 at the Congresso pro familia/World Congress of Families organized by radical opponents of abortion and by right-wing populists. The media has stoked the attention commanded by such efforts, and not without consequence for civil society, as parents have expressed worries about the “dangerous” **influence of supposed gender ideologies** in schools, be it in the context of debates about gender-neutral forms of language or sexual diversity. Meanwhile, the “New Right” is appropriating concepts from movements for liberation, such as “equality” or “academic freedom,” and instrumentalizing them to achieve antidemocratic objectives.

At the same time, the influence of **queer and feminist movements** is growing in many places. Violence against women—defined by the Istanbul Convention as “a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men”—and hostility to LGBTIQI+ people are being publicly called out and opposed. Historical analyses examine ideological, political, economic, cultural, and social factors in order to

explain the persistence of such structures of inequality and the conditions required for them to change.

No longer a new field of research, gender history is anything but obsolete. Despite resistance, much has been achieved in recent decades, and today we find ourselves confronted with new challenges and opportunities. Gender history is still going strong!