

IV ENIUGH Congress „Encounters, Circulations and Conflicts“: Gender

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It certainly cannot have been an easy task for the ENIUGH steering committee to identify distinct themes in order to systematize an incredibly vast number of panels. One might wonder, however, about the logic behind including „gender“ in this series of „themes“. „Gender“, after all, was never intended to be a distinct and separate field of inquiry but rather a category that was to be taken into account in many, potentially all, fields of historical research. Gender is supposed to provide perspective on a broad range of topics such as work, slavery, migration, colonialism, knowledge, travel, maritime history, and religion. Unfortunately, this relevance across topics and the great potential of gender studies for global history was scarcely reflected upon in either the structure or the contents of the ENIUGH convention. While gender did pop up in various panels, gender remained a theme of interest in Paris but did not develop into a category of analysis.

Global history has come a long way to challenge national borders and to bring connections, mobilities, transfer, and networks into focus. Researchers in this field have enjoyed questioning traditional entities and concepts; we look beyond nation, region, and state. Within all this healthy and incredibly fruitful messiness, however, gender appeared surprisingly clear-cut.

Merry Wiesner-Hanks has recently described – or rather celebrated – the similarities of global history and gender studies¹, and her point that „histories that are crossed, connected, shared, and entangled still imply borders [...] even if these are blurred, transcended, or ignored“ as well as her breathtaking enumeration of „imitation, borrowing, appropriation, re-appropriation, acculturation, transculturation, amalgamation, accommodation, negotiation, mixing [...], syncretism, hybridity, fusion, cultural translation, creolization“

might seem slightly familiar to global historians. This is because gender studies have come a long way as well, and many studies combine courageous and innovative approaches with a political agenda, scholarly curiosity, and a certain playfulness. It seems, however, that the two quite similar paths of gender studies and global history have not crossed yet, much less interlaced. Gender history in Paris was, generally speaking, either absent or focused on women who, as Siobhan Lambert-Hurley pointed out, were merely „added to the main history“. Pinches of interest in masculinity were traceable every now and then, but recent debates in queer history, which might in some ways be considered a methodological equivalent of transnational and entangled history, did not become part of the picture.

There is a lot of work to be done, but there is hope: despite my general criticism, I had the chance to attend some extraordinarily inspiring panels. Gender came up in the contexts of „Orientalism“ and „Empire“, in the analysis of life on transoceanic ships in the 18th century, or as an aspect of the development of international law. Probably one of the most exciting panels of the entire conference was „The Globalization of ‘White Slavery’? Local and Global Aspects of a Transnational Phenomenon“. It is quite telling that „gender“ did not figure in the panel’s title but turned out to be significant in its papers.

Researchers from the US, Germany, Austria, and the UK presented fascinating sources and addressed the crucial question of agency in global history. Linda Colley’s often-quoted point of an „aggressively impersonal“ global history that ignores people in general and women in particular² has obviously landed on fertile soil. Historical agency and the question of how to research and to write it formed the core aspect of both papers and discussion. White slavery, „one of the most overmythologized and underresearched topics“, in Keely Stauter-Halsted’s words, proved an intriguing field for a debate on the significance of discourse, the range of state laws, and the

¹ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Crossing Borders in Transnational Gender History*, in: *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011) 3, pp. 357–379.

² Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History*, New York 2008, p. xxxi.

power exercised by men over women – but also on the agency that we can and have to concede to the victims. Fortunately, the structure of the convention (this is the place to praise the possibility of two-part panels!) and the strict command exercised by chair Iris Schröder allowed for a detailed and lively discussion. This way, the multifaceted challenges but also the promising prospects of the field were raised. The question of available sources and our possibilities to acknowledge historical actors „not only in the same moment that the administrators, lawyers, doctors etc. do so“ (Julia Laites) was only one stimulating aspect out of many. Another topic of discussion developed from the problem of how to determine the identities of actors beyond gender (national, religious, social, sexual, and others) and to acknowledge changes and transformations – both intended and involuntary. Finally, the concept of „victims“ and hence the generalized dualism of migration and trafficking was challenged in quite fundamental ways. Individual lives do not only hold stories of suffering and pain, but rather a variety of explanations and motivations for transnational travelling. All this demonstrated the plurality of aspects encompassed in the problem of agency, including not only methodological and conceptual questions but also a political agenda and, sometimes, an ethical dilemma.

Gender studies clearly have a lot to throw into the mix of global history. Perhaps we simply have to stir better and do some serious agitating.

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