
Practising Gender History

Karen Adler, Ross Balzaretti and Michele Mitchell

This issue of *Gender & History* marks the start of the journal's third decade of publication. Here, we want to reflect on the condition of the journal, and the discipline of gender history more broadly, by looking back over the past twenty years. Before the journal began in 1989, the founding editor Leonore Davidoff surprised the publisher, Sue Corbett at Blackwell – which remains the journal's publisher, now as Wiley-Blackwell – by insisting that she initiate a journal of gender, not women's history.¹ Her hunch proved successful both in terms of a continually increasing readership, and as an intellectually stimulating exercise, as the number of historians who work in the field expands and develops.

Physically, the editorship of the journal has been on the move. The UK office moved from its London base to its present home at the University of Nottingham in August 2004. For the first time, both UK editors were specialists in the history of mainland Europe rather than of Britain. Karen Adler's field is twentieth-century France and Ross Balzaretti's is early medieval Italy. This is also the first time that one of the editors has been a medievalist. At Nottingham, they join other gender historians working within the School of History and across the university who come together in a local Gender Histories Network. As editors, they rely enormously on the journal's UK collective, which indeed works collectively and holds regular meetings, as well as on the expertise of previous editors. In the USA, the journal has been based at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, since 1998 when Kathleen Canning joined Mrinalini Sinha as North American co-editor; their collaboration would push the North American Office in stunning new directions. A huge debt is owed to Grey Osterud who sustained the journal in North America before it found a more stable home at Michigan.

All the editors and both editorial collectives are extremely grateful to the University of Michigan for the intellectual and financial support given to the journal over the last ten years. Sonya Rose was instrumental in bringing *Gender & History* to Michigan and in nurturing the journal's transatlantic structure, and an array of people at Michigan provided critical service and guidance to the journal. Moreover, Kathleen Canning, Nancy Rose Hunt and Helmut Puff launched key initiatives that at once deepened the diversity of the North American collective and supported international conferences on gender history that led to path-breaking Special Issues.

However, as the income provided by Michigan has now come to an end, the journal has needed to find a new US base. We are delighted that the University of Minnesota has agreed to host the journal for the next five years, and that Regina Kunzel is now North

American co-editor. Regina is a historian of the twentieth-century United States who specialises in histories of gender and sexuality and the intertwined histories of deviance and normalcy. In addition to her new book, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2008), Regina co-edited a special issue of *Radical History Review*, 'The Queer Issue: New Visions of America's Lesbian and Gay Past', in 1995. Regina joins Michele Mitchell, whose work focuses on transnational interactions between Afro-diasporic communities and the reproduction (biological, material, discursive and cultural) of 'racial' collectivities. Michele has been North American co-editor since January 2005 and she moved from the University of Michigan to New York University in January 2007, and we acknowledge NYU's major financial commitment to the journal before it moves to its new home at Minnesota in autumn 2008. Minnesota – the venue for the 2008 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women – can, like Michigan and New York, boast an enviable collection of gender historians and we look forward to working with them over the coming years.

To be editors as the journal reaches its twentieth year is a huge privilege. When the first issue of *Gender & History* appeared in the spring of 1989, its founding editors, Leonore Davidoff and Nancy Hewitt, outlined its aims in an introduction that stands as an influential statement in the history of gender history. The intentions they set out are just as relevant to the gendered study of the past now as they were in 1989. They stressed that *Gender & History* was a feminist journal. It still is. They called for authors to engage in 'the recovery of women's past experiences in all their variety'. We absolutely still affirm that call. Indeed, we would like to reiterate these aims and encourage authors to submit articles that explore feminist issues and women's history in more depth, as these seem to have become somewhat rarer among submissions in recent years. However, we are pleased that there are several such articles in the current issue: see Angela Argent's 'Hatching Feminisms: Czech Feminist Aspirations in the 1990s', Lisa Lindquist Dorr's article on date rape and the articles by Joan W. Scott, Sarah Buck, María Teresa Fernández-Aceves and Nichole Sanders which comprise the Feature on twentieth-century Mexican women's and gender history.

Twenty years ago there was much less work on historical masculinity than there is now. Unsurprisingly, in 1989 the editors actively sought articles which analysed masculinity in a gendered way and the first issue, although without a full-scale article on men's history, did publish a thematic review by David Morgan on 'Men Made Manifest: Histories and Masculinities'. Since 2004–05, when we took over as editors, we have noticed an explosion of submissions on masculinity. There are three full articles in this issue, by Stephen Garton, Anne O'Brien and Marc Baer, which deal with men as gendered beings, and there has been no shortage of discussion of men's history in the journal pages during the last few years. There is more in the pipeline too. Whereas the substance of much of the work we receive is quite revealing and analytically incisive, and while we are proud to publish articles on masculinity that offer vital historiographical interventions, we are nonetheless left wondering what it means that so many recent submissions centre around men, manhood and masculinities.

Perhaps the time has come to move on to other areas or at least remember earlier debates about what it meant to do gender history. Taking our lead from Toby Ditz's article in volume 16, 'The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Power', we would like to see more work which gets to grips with men's gendered power

over women rather than dealing once again with differentiation among men. We sense that others feel this too. In her recent book, *Gender History in Practice*, Kathleen Canning pointedly observes that with the advent of gender history, ‘masculinity became for some the most compelling and least understood facet of gender history, while feminists cautioned that men’s history or masculinity studies were merely fashionable refigurings of a very familiar male-dominated history’. If, as Canning rightly asserts, ‘gender history has not so much left women behind as it has redefined the terms of the inquiry, the lens of analysis’, we share Canning’s and Ditz’s sense that it is nothing less than imperative not to lose sight of the feminist foundations of gender history.² We would therefore encourage submissions that engage with the future of masculinity as a subject of historical study by reading masculinity in a resolutely gendered and feminist fashion.

In 1989, the editors also expressed concern about the marginality of gender history within the academy: ‘the position is tenuous and might be lost’. In North America and Britain today, gender history is a flourishing subject, which is firmly established within undergraduate curricula and in doctoral research. The continued success of this journal – in part based on publishing the best doctoral work – is indicative of a relatively healthy position within the academy. The expansion of the discipline can be traced by looking at the history of the journal’s production. In 1989, the editorial collective comprised thirteen historians in the UK and six in the USA. In 2008, there are twenty-four historians on the UK collective and thirty-five on the US collective, a significant expansion. In ‘Gender on the Edge’, the editorial written by Shani D’Cruze, Nancy Rose Hunt, Kathleen Canning and Clare Midgley for volume 14 (2002), the editors described the ongoing process of deterritorialising the two editorial collectives. This too has made great strides since, as both collectives, especially the UK one, now have editorial representatives in other countries, including Australia, Brazil, France, Greece, India, Italy and South Africa. While we find it of the utmost importance to maintain two editorial offices in the US and the UK, we are getting closer to the single global collective envisaged in 2002. This very considerable expansion reflects the development of the field across the world and the truly global reach of *Gender & History*. However, we believe that continuity of personnel is also vital. One person, Keith McClelland, had been a member of the UK collective since the beginning, providing a much-needed sense of the journal’s own past. On the North American side, Susan Porter Benson was also a collective member from the beginning. She helped to forge vital links between the journal and scholarly organisations such as the Berkshire Conference, and served on the editorial collective and advisory board from 1989 until her untimely death in 2005.

In the inaugural issue of the journal, the editors stated their intention to ‘encourage contributions from scholars whatever their nationality or language’. This very much remains the case. In the past few issues we have published a range of work by scholars whose mother tongue is not English. In 2006, the Special Issue on ‘Translating Feminisms in China’ (edited by Dorothy Ko and Wang Zheng) carried several such articles, and volume 19 (2007) continued that trend. We would like to expand further the publication of articles in the journal written by non-Anglophone authors, using the translation budget provided by Blackwell and the facilities they offer to assist with English-language editing, as we regard this as a crucial part of the journal’s commitment to transnational and global perspectives.

Gender & History editors have long sought to translate articles and publish work that is accessible on multiple levels. Such a commitment to accessibility, international scholarship and publishing work irrespective of a scholar's primary language has not been without its challenges. For one, editors based in Britain and North America can have intellectual preoccupations that are not necessarily shared by scholars elsewhere. And, if the very process of translating requires keen sensitivity to an author's original intent, 'translation' additionally involves format, technologies and hegemony. We are very much aware that Anglo-American academic journals generally hew to particular stylistic conventions – conventions that some of our contributors have found both restrictive and frustrating – that differ from those found in other linguistic and hemispheric settings. Indeed, even practices such as copyright resist easy translation across academic cultures and national contexts.

We remain keenly alert to the fact that resistance to gendered interpretations of the past persists in many history departments beyond the Anglophone world, and that practitioners can at times find it so difficult for their work to be taken seriously that their research might prejudice their chances of employment. As editors of a feminist journal, we therefore assume a developmental, as well as responsive, role. Certainly we do and will continue to publish papers that are submitted to the journal, though we do not commission work. On the other hand, we also provide funding to enable graduate students and other scholars to attend important conferences that in some way come under the auspices of *Gender & History*, particularly individuals coming from outside Britain and the US to designated conferences in other countries.³ This year we also hope to launch the *Gender & History* Anniversary Scholarship. As we go to press, details are still being decided, but the intention is to provide financial support for a doctoral student outside Britain or the US to work on new aspects of gender history.

The journal's policy of producing regular Special Issues and Forums allows for regular discussion of issues of wide importance to gender history, and the editors always welcome suggestions for possible Forums, which usually comprise three shorter articles with an Introduction and sometimes a Response. This year's twentieth anniversary Special Issue (20.3) is a fitting reflection on the past two decades and an introduction to the next. The issue, edited by Alexandra Shepard and Garthine Walker from the UK collective, will address the fundamental ways that gender history has influenced the historical discipline as a whole and promises to be a landmark issue. The cover image for volume 20, 'The Life and Age of Woman' (Artemas Alden, published in Barre, Massachusetts, 1835), has been selected to complement the special issue themes of transformation over time. While it stresses woman's moral virtue, it is noteworthy for showing women at various stages in their life cycle without visual reference to men – as fathers, grooms or sons, or servants, slaves or employers. The Special Issue for 21.3 (2009), 'Homes and Homecomings' (edited by Karen Adler and Carrie Hamilton), will revisit questions that concerned gender and feminist historians three decades ago, about homes and women's place in them, while using all the new research tools and theoretical thinking that have emerged since then. The Call for Papers produced an unprecedented response and we are looking forward to a very exciting volume. We should also like to mention here the long-running occasional series, Foremothers, introduced by Leonore Davidoff, of which the most recent was an essay by Ida Blom in 19.3. This series has indicated the longevity and reach of women's history in an international context that

has spanned five centuries and four continents. It underpins the importance of what we continue to do as gender historians, and reminds us that historically, we are also part of a long-lasting trend.

This retrospective has necessarily focused on the past and current practices of *Gender & History* in the last twenty years. It seems to us that the aims of the journal as set out in the very first issue have been substantially achieved and that, in that sense, the last two decades have been a great success. In its first year, *Gender & History* published eleven full-length articles and a Forum. By 1994, the editors recorded that the journal 'publishes only fifteen full-length articles a year'. In 2007 we published twenty-five full-length pieces, due to the continued enthusiasm and encouragement of our publishers and the health of the field. The journal's format expanded physically in 2006 allowing the editors more space and therefore a more rapid turnover of articles. The publishers have generously allowed us also to print many more images than in the past. For example, the Special Issue on 'Visual Genders, Visual Histories' (edited by Patricia Hayes in 2005) contained sixty-five images, and the multi-authored article on the 'Modern Girl around the World' (by Tani Barlow, Madeleine Yue Dong, Uta Poiger, Priti Ramamurthy, Lynn Thomas and Alys Eve Weinbaum also published in 2005) reproduced fifty advertisements. While the abundant quantity of illustrations in these pieces was unusual, we encourage authors to interpret visual as well as verbal sources and we are grateful that technological change has enabled us to offer twenty-first-century contributors opportunities that twentieth-century ones would have envied.

The ability to publish significantly more research in *Gender & History* is very exciting, but we would not like to appear complacent. We are conscious of very significant gaps in what we publish. As we said at the outset, and in the Light of Special Issues such as 'Jemisms and Internationalism' (10.3), we would like to see more submissions dealing with feminism and with women's history. We would certainly like to be in a position to publish more on sexuality. Although, in the first issue in 1989, there were articles on Afro-American women's history and on women's history in Yugoslavia, there has been less in the last twenty years than we would have liked on the history of the world beyond western Europe and north America. There is little on eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia (with the important exception of India where we have published a notable amount). African history has featured prominently at certain junctures in the journal's history. 'Gendered Colonialisms in African History' (8.3), which was edited by Nancy Rose Hunt, Tessie P. Liu and Jean Quataert, was the first Special Issue published in the *Gender & History* book series and has sold more copies as a book than any other Special Issue. Still, if 'Dialogues of Dispersal', the Special Issue edited by Sandra Gunning, Tera W. Hunter and Michele Mitchell in 2003 (15.3) explored gender and sexuality within African diasporas, and an Africanist edited 'Visual Genders', the journal has not consistently featured work on Africa. Before the Special Issue on Chinese Feminisms appeared in 2006 (18.3), *Gender & History* had published little on Chinese history, and we would still like more on Japan and Korea. Until recently, the journal also contained relatively little work on Latin America and we remain eager to publish more. Beyond the history of individual nations, we publish too little comparative history, although this gap will be filled to a significant degree by the Special Issue of volume 20. We rarely review books in languages other than English and plans are under way to remedy this anomaly.

In terms of chronology, the journal has tended to concentrate on modern times, which undoubtedly reflects the balance of the discipline as a whole: more history is written on the period after 1800 than before it. Even so, the journal has not neglected earlier periods. The editors of the first issue stated that 'our definition of the historical stretches back into antiquity', and Special Issues have indeed been published on 'Presentations of the Self in Early Modern England' in 1995 (7.3 edited by Amy Louise Erickson and Ross Balzaretto), 'Gender and the Body in Mediterranean Antiquity' in 1997 (9.3 edited by Maria Wyke) and 'Gendering the Middle Ages' in 2000 (12.3 edited by Pauline Stafford and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker). In volume 19, five articles on the medieval period were published, reflecting the vibrancy of medieval gender studies at the moment.

We would like to end with some remarks about our readers, of whom there are now tens of thousands around the world. In the first issue, the editors wrote that 'we will do our best to avoid obscure expression'. We are conscious that this has perhaps not always been the case in recent years and we are committed to working with authors to help them make their work relevant to the widest possible audience. As editors, we know that English is not the first language of many *Gender & History* readers and we would like to remind potential contributors of this reality. We are also proud to have been able to maintain a very rigorous refereeing process, despite increasing workloads for editors, authors and referees alike. All our articles are anonymously refereed by a number of different expert readers. While editorial practices differ in the fine detail between the US and UK offices, all editors share an equal commitment to scholarly rigour. Thus, the majority of submissions are not published. This commitment also explains why it can sometimes take a long time for an article to move through our pipelines, but it is essential to ensure the high quality of what we publish. The journal's adoption of an online submission and refereeing system in the course of 2008 should speed things up. This fully electronic system, envisaged by the editors in volume 14, will have the added advantage of allowing authors, who of course form a very significant part of our readership, to track the progress of their articles.⁴

Our readership figures are very healthy and still growing.⁵ Almost 44,500 articles were downloaded in 2006 via the publisher's web portal, Blackwell Synergy, alone, which does not take into account all the other ways that readers can access journal articles.⁶ The number of readers registering to receive electronic updates on *Gender & History* is twice the average for a humanities journal. This reflects both the strength of the intellectual field in which we work, and the shift from print technologies to online publication. Readers throughout the world with internet access can now read the latest research in *Gender & History* which only a few years ago would have been limited to members of a few well-funded institutions in western Europe or North America, although the 'digital divide' remains an issue. These readers in turn may become authors, with the result that the dynamic relationship is upheld between journal and readers, which is so vital to its continued development. New prospects for fully searchable articles, now that every issue of *Gender & History* has been digitised, and sophisticated linking between articles, open up the possibility to historicise our own practice. These opportunities, along with the increasing global communication between scholars that is now feasible, will allow readers and writers to use the journal in as-yet unthought of creative ways.

Notes

1. See Shani D'Cruze, Keith McClelland and Clare Midgley, 'Homage to Leonore Davidoff, Retiring Founding Editor of *Gender & History*', *Gender & History* 17 (2005), pp. 1–4.
2. Toby L. Ditz, 'The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Power: Some Remedies from Early American Gender History', *Gender & History* 16 (2004), pp. 1–35; Kathleen Canning, 'Gender History: Meanings, Methods, and Metanarratives', in Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 3–62, here pp. 10, 61.
3. There is no general fund to support conference attendance. *Gender & History* will not accept any external applications along these lines.
4. To submit an article, go to <<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/gend>>.
5. We are grateful to an excellent editorial team at Wiley-Blackwell, led by Philippa Joseph, for keeping us up to date with readership figures and technological developments.
6. <<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/GEND>>.