

DONNE NELLA STORIA

26

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DONNE NELLA STORIA



Quante vite, esperienze e profili di donne sono ancora nascoste nelle pieghe della storia? A questa domanda è difficile rispondere. Nonostante la quantità di documenti emersi grazie al pregevole lavoro della storiografia a partire dagli anni Settanta, ancora molto resta nascosto, implicito, non detto, in particolare quando si guarda allo straordinario archivio del vissuto femminile. La collana “Donne nella storia” si propone di dare voce alle vite disperse, recuperando profili biografici misconosciuti, seguendo i labili segni rappresentati talvolta soltanto da sparsi e frammentari indizi, di raccogliere testimonianze preziose per recuperare le tracce che le donne hanno lasciato nel loro esistere nel mondo, e infine di individuare i percorsi, faticosamente conquistati con lacrime e sangue, con straordinaria tenacia e consapevolezza. Ridare vita e colore a immagini sfocate, riportare al nitore le tinte sbiadite si pone come finalità prioritaria della collana, aperta a contributi di taglio interdisciplinare, in un arco cronologico di ampio respiro che sottolinei continuità e fratture, spinte in avanti e pericolosi regressi, successi e delusioni, in linea con le più attuali tendenze di ricerca degli *women's studies*.

Women in History

How many women's lives, experiences, and profiles are still hidden in the folds of history? It is hard to give an answer to this question. Despite the quantity of documents that have surfaces thanks to the valuable work of historians since the 1970s, much is still hidden understood, unsaid, especially when we peer into the extraordinary archive of women's lives. The series “Women in History” aims at giving a voice to these scattered lives, recovering little known biographies, following the faint signs that at times are only scattered and fragmented traces. It will gather priceless witnesses to recover the marks of women's existence in the world. Lastly, it will recover their paths, laboriously followed with tears, blood, and extraordinary perseverance and self-awareness. Giving life and color back to out-of-focus images and making faded colors clear again are main goals of the series, which is open to interdisciplinary work within a wide chronological arch, in order to underscore continuities and ruptures as well as successes and disappointments, in line with the more recent tendencies of research in *women's studies*.

¿Cuántas vidas, experiencias y perfiles de mujeres están todavía escondidos en los recovecos de la historia? A esta pregunta es difícil responder. A pesar de la cantidad de documentos que han surgido gracias al valioso trabajo de la historiografía a partir de los años setenta, todavía permanece mucho oculto, implícito, tácito, en particular cuando se toma en consideración el extraordinario archivo de las vivencias femeninas. La colección “Mujeres en la historia” se propone dar voz a vidas dispersas, recuperando perfiles biográficos ignorados, siguiendo las débiles señales representadas a veces tan sólo por indicios dispersos y fragmentarios, reunir testimonios preciosos para recuperar las huellas que las mujeres han dejado de su existencia en el mundo y, finalmente, individualar los caminos fatigosamente conquistados con lágrimas y sangre, con extraordinaria tenacidad y conciencia. Devolver vida y color a imágenes borrosas, restituir nitidez a colores desteñidos se considera la finalidad prioritaria de la colección, abierta a contribuciones de corte interdisciplinar, en un arco cronológico amplio que evidencia continuidad y fracturas, impulsos hacia delante y peligrosos retrocesos, éxitos y desilusiones, en línea con las tendencias más actuales de investigación de los *women's studies*.

Quantas vidas, quantas experiências ficaram ainda escondidas nas pregas da História? É difícil responder a tal pergunta. Não obstante a enorme quantidade de documentos descobertos graças ao valioso trabalho da historiografia a partir dos anos Setenta, ainda muito ficou escondido, implícito, não dito, especialmente quando olharmos para o extraordinário arquivo do vivido feminino. A coletânea “Mulheres na História” propõe-se de dar voz às vidas dispersas, recuperando perfis biográficos quase desconhecidos, seguindo os signos fugazes representados por vezes só por indícios espalhados e fragmentados; de recolher testemunhas preciosas para recuperar os rastros que as mulheres deixaram durante a passagem delas no mundo e finalmente de individualar os percursos conquistados com muito esforço, com lágrimas e sangue, com perseverança e consciência. Dar de novo vida e cor às imagens desfocadas, devolver o esplendor às tintas desbotadas, é o objetivo prioritário desta coletânea aberta à contributos de tipo interdisciplinar, num arco cronológico amplo e que sublinhe continuidade e fracturas, progressos e perigosos regressos, sucessos e desilusões, em linha com as mais actuais tendências de investigação no âmbito dos *women's studies*.

Women and Knowledge

From the Challenges of the Past to Empowerment for the Future

edited by

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Alicia González-Pérez

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Gioacchino Onorati editore S.r.l. – unipersonale

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via Vittorio Veneto, 20
00020 Canterano, Rome
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ISBN 978-88-255-1084-3

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I edition: March 2018

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Acknowledgments

This book is a result of a three days' summer course which took place in the University of Extremadura in the summer of 2015 about women, knowledge, higher education and professionalisation. We had the pleasure to discuss these issues with Josefina Cuesta, Consuelo Flecha and Antonella Cagnolati who all contributed to this book. We would like to especially thank Josefina Cuesta for inspiring us to study, reflect and publish about these issues and for supporting both the course and the book. We are also grateful to the University of Extremadura for including the course in its 2015 summer courses program.

As this book brings the stories of women who took part in the long struggle to overcome the barriers which prevented women from participating actively in the public sphere we would also like to express how grateful we are to all the women out there who combine professional careers and domestic responsibilities and illuminate the way for future generations of women. D.C. has accompanied the long process of editing this book and we are grateful for it.

This book is supported by the project *Mujer y Saber. El acceso femenino a la sociedad del conocimiento en España* grant agreement number HAR2014–58342–R (Spanish Government) and the Project *Diccionario biográfico de mujeres universitarias en las universidades de Salamanca, Valladolid, Madrid y Sevilla. Análisis y difusión de resultados mediante las TICs* grant number SA233U14 (Junta de Castilla y León) and the Centro de la Mujer de la Universidad de Salamanca.

Introduction

Reflections on the Past and the Future of Gendered Knowledge

TAMAR GROVES, ALICIA GONZÁLEZ-PÉREZ

It was only in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century when women finally obtained the official permission to enter higher education across Europe. This achievement, uneven across national contexts, permitted women to become professionals in their own right, as well as fully recognised citizens. Since then, the number of women students has increased steadily and in the mid–1980s, they became the majority among university graduates in Europe. However, the European Union is still struggling to eliminate market labour gender segregation. One of the important fields of action is education. Capacitating women in the fast changing knowledge society is a contemporary task that involves the development of Information and Communication Technology skills. Overcoming the digital gap and empowering women through networking 2.0 are important and innovative ways for reaching professional equality.

This book brings together a series of essays on crucial moments in this long and continuous struggle for gender equality in Europe. It wishes to illuminate the gigantic advances of women since the first cries for education and professionalization articulated in the 17th century, and at the same time, to offer educational actions to overcome the overwhelming challenges which still hamper women's opportunities in the labour market today. The book is divided into two parts. The first, titled: *from the challenges of the past*, includes three chapters that look at the historical struggle of women to gain equal educational and professional rights. The second, titled: *to empowerment for the future*, has two chapters that look at the current situation of women and information technologies and proposes future possible actions aimed at guaranteeing their equal position in society.

1. From the challenges of the past

In the 17th century when new ways for acquiring knowledge emerged, singular women were demanding the right of their own sex to participate in these developments. Fierce and harsh clashes accompanied the consolidation of inductive methods and empirical research as the legitimate means to obtain new knowledge. There were great differences among European countries in the adaptation of this new relationship to knowledge and the scientific revolution took on different paths in each one of them¹. Nevertheless, at the origin of this new way of knowing the world, stood the rejection of traditional modes of thought which implied an essential break with the past. With the emergence of this new concept, extended the idea that science progresses by radical revolutions such as the ones described by political and social theories².

Some women found in this revolutionary notion the basis to reclaim their role in producing and disseminating knowledge³. However, they were severely blocked as the scientific revolution divided the world between masculine, mind, reason, power and superiority on the one hand and feminine, body, instinct, nature and inferiority on the other hand. These notions had of course ancient origins but the impetus of the scientific revolution gave them a scientific reliability which was difficult to oppose⁴. As women were habitually excluded from education, their ignorance was assumed to be natural and not socially constructed. They had thus no social legitimacy to take part in the public sphere and were doomed to silence.

1. We are aware that the concept of scientific revolution has been relativized in recent decades, but we use it here as it is usually employed. For critical versions see: CUNNINGHAM, WILLIAMS A., WILLIAMS P., *De-centring the "big picture": The origins of modern science and the modern origins of science*, «The British journal for the history of science» 26, no. 04 (1993): 407–432; TURNBULL D., *Reframing science and other local knowledge traditions*, «Futures» 29, no. 6 (1997): 551–562.

2. COHEN, I.B. *The Eighteenth-Century Origins of the Concept of Scientific Revolution*, «Journal of the History of Ideas» 37, no. 2 (1976): 257–88. doi:10.2307/2708824.

3. Some authors highlight their contribution to the epistemological transformation brought about by the scientific revolution. See: Ray, Meredith K. *Daughters of Alchemy*. Harvard University Press, 2015.

4. WATTS R., *Whose Knowledge? * 1 Gender, Education, Science and History*, «History of education» 36, no. 3 (2007): 283–302.

In the first chapter of this book Cagnolati traces women's efforts to raise their voices and engage with the public sphere from the renaissance to the 17th century. She looks at the strategies women employed to justify their rebellion against imposed limitations. She highlights how few renaissance women thinkers, such as Christine de Pizan, were challenging common perceptions of the natural inferiority of women claiming that it was the lack of education that marginalised them from "the republic of words" monopolised by men, and not their innate condition. These cultured women set a precedence, but as the author shows they had to confront a rising opposition by leading male thinkers who insisted on restricting women to their old traditional role.

At the beginning of the 17th century, we see how the renaissance debate about the appropriate education for women acquires a new stimulus with the emergence of a generation of exceptional women from well off families who received the basic education which enabled them to participate in a more efficient way in the debate about feminine abilities and restrictions. In the first chapter, Cagnolati also presents the case of Bathsua Makin, considered one of the first proto-feminists. Makin declared openly that women were intentionally maintained in a state of cultural ignorance, as it made it easier for men to subjugate them to their will. The other prominent example the author brings is that of Anna Maria van Schurman. In her writings, she constructed a solid relationship between education, morality and human dignity, irrespective of gender, thus establishing the right of women to be educated according to a much wider curriculum than the habitual in the 17th century including logic, languages and rhetoric. And lastly, Cagnolati presents the ideas of Marie Le Jars de Gournay who not only claimed that women were deprived from tools to understand the world and as a result to overcome their own oppression, but that this also impeded them from developing a collective understanding of this situation. Of course, this collective conscious would erupt fiercely with the feminist movements of the late 19th century, but as the authors show it was already present in the writing of these pioneering women.

The second chapter of this book deals with the expanding engagement of women with higher education and the forging of a collective understanding about its importance for their struggle to gain access to the public sphere. The authors, Groves and Flecha

revise briefly the scant presence of women in higher education during the renaissance highlighting the unique characteristics of the women who achieved this kind of elite masculine education despite social and institutional barriers. Focusing on the first women, who entered through the gates of higher education institutions in the second half of the 19th century, they show that the fact that some universities were more inclined to accept the presence of women provoked a wave of geographical mobility of women who could not attend university in their own countries and thus moved to others.

The second chapter also discusses how obtaining a university degree was the first necessary step of becoming a professional in a growing number of fields. The authors bring the stories of some women who against a hostile social backdrop consolidated professional careers and left their mark on their professions and communities. The stories of the women who failed are naturally much more difficult to trace, still the chapter also deals with some of them, highlighting the pitfalls which stood in their way. Discussing the entrance of women in various European regions such as Scandinavia, southern Europe and German speaking countries the authors show that most of the first women studied medicine and tried to establish themselves as medics. Among the last countries to allow this were Germany and Austria.

After this first generation of women the number of female university students grew steadily and the gap between male students and female students became smaller, albeit in a different rate in European countries. Between 1975 and 1990 this trend reached a new stage as women became the majority among university students all over Europe⁵. If in the late 19th century women were struggling to get permission to attend university, a hundred years later, in general terms, they have become the majority in higher education classrooms. Nevertheless, women still confront barriers consolidating academic careers and reaching leadership positions in higher education⁶. In fact women are more underrepresented among researchers than among any other highly qualified professionals. Women, hence, still suffer not only from vertical segregation, that is reaching top level

5. COMISIÓN EUROPEA, *Las cifras clave de la educación en la Unión Europea—1995*, Luxemburgo: Oficina de Publicaciones Oficiales de las Comunidades Europeas, 1997, p. 62.

6. FIGURES S. *Gender in research and innovation*, «Statistics and indicators, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg», 2013.

positions, but also from horizontal segregation, finding it difficult to establish careers in professions identified with men⁷.

The third chapter of this book, written by Josefina Cuesta, deals with this bitter-sweet situation woman confront today. It looks at how transnational organizations, specifically the European Union and the UNESCO attempt to promote an agenda that assigns particular importance to higher education on the one hand, and to the role of women in contemporary society on the other hand. It shows how both organizations have taken upon themselves to reinforce higher education as part of their struggle for economic development and the extension of human rights. The chapter shows that gender equality is central to this coordinated effort.

At the same time, the chapter highlights that while on the discursive level, equal access to higher education and gender equality objectives complement each other, statistical data shows that there are still many problems in their implementation. On the part of the UNESCO there is growing awareness to the fact that there are huge regional differences related to higher education access and opportunities for women. The European institutions on their part, are concerned about the underrepresentation of women in specific scientific and professional fields and in high positions across most areas of knowledge.

2. To empowerment for the future

Women have thus overcome some of the challenges they confronted up to the beginning of the 20th century and are capable today, at least in Europe, to obtain university degrees and establish professional careers according to their wishes and aspirations. However, society has changed radically and at the beginning of the 21st century we confront the emergence of the knowledge-based society and its technological and globalizing dimensions⁸. This process has transformed the role of universities in the context of a much wider revolution of

7. CAPRILE M. (COORD.) *Meta-analysis of gender and science research*, European Commission, Brussels, 2012.

8. RAVIO, K. *University reform – a prerequisite for success of knowledge-based economy?* (Foreword), 2008; MAZZA C., QUATTRONE P., RICCABONI A.(eds). *European universities in transition: issues, models and cases.*, Edward Elgar Pub.: Cheltenham, UK. xiii–xviii; BARNETT, R. (2012). *The Future University: Ideas and Possibilities*, Routledge.

knowledge. In this new context, women find themselves again in a risky position as previous challenges have not been fully overcome.

There is a vast body of research that shows that although the gender gap is decreasing there are still clear differences between how men and women employ the internet. According to Hilbert the discrimination women face in many aspects of social life is being reproduced with regard to ICT usage⁹. Early research found that men use the web more than women and that they are more passionate about it. In addition, women expressed more IT anxiety and felt less self-efficient using the web¹⁰. Later research shows that while the disparities in internet access have been significantly reduced, the differences in use and perceptions are still significant.

The fourth chapter of this book, authored by Rodríguez looks at the digital divide from a gender perspective. After a brief presentation of the literature about the current situation, the author looks at the different explanations of the fact that women use the internet less and in a more limited way than men. It is interesting to note, that Rodríguez presents in her chapter a contemporary debate concerning the relationship between women and ICT which is very similar to the discussions about the ability of women to acquire higher education dealt with in the first and second chapters of this book. On the one hand some authors claim that gender-related inequalities are the reason for the differences between men and women. On the other hand, there are claims that women are “naturally technophobic”. This second assertion echoes the prejudices women had to confront in order to be accepted to higher education studies in the 19th century.

Rodríguez uses Spain as a case study and shows that while in the past there was a clear gender gap, now, similarly to other European countries, there are more generational variations than gender differences, when it comes to the frequency of internet usage. Nevertheless, in the Spanish case, again, like in other developed countries, men use the Internet for entertainment and with a higher level of sophistication (creating web pages or banking) than women. As being

9. HILBERT M., *Digital Gender Divide or Technologically Empowered Women in Developing Countries? A Typical Case of Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics*, «Women's Studies International Forum», 34, (6), 2011, December, pp. 479–489.

10. One of the most cited articles on this issue is: Jackson L.A., Ervin K.S., Gardner P.D. et al. *Sex Roles* (2001) 44: 363.

part of contemporary “connected society” Rodriguez points at the importance of enhancing ICT skills among women, reducing ICT gender related stereotypes and augmenting women’s self-confidence using the Internet.

The last chapter of this book, looks, more specifically at the advantages of using the Internet for professional reasons in academic circles. Following recent literature González–Pérez points out that women are also underrepresented in research and development in European universities as well as in public and private–sector companies. The existence of a persistent gender gap in science is, thus, still obvious, considering differences among disciplines and studies.

Reflecting on the possibilities for empowerment on the personal, interpersonal, and collective levels¹¹, the author claims that technology is a powerful tool for extending and creating opportunities to innovate in higher education. She shows how Academic Social Networks Sites (SNSs) are a possible key element in creating networks in science and research areas that can contribute to women’s visibility. The author refers to the scant research on this issue showing that when it comes to SNSs in academic contexts, female researchers have less representation than men¹². In spite the fact that the internet is a “sexless” object, the socially structured gender gap differentiates between male and female usage.

As a result, the author claims that it is necessary to create new female research identities that will have an impact on academic contexts and act as role models for other women. As education empowers people and technology makes academic production visible there is a need to study the real blind spots of gender discrimination on Internet and Social Academic Networks and their implications to women’s roles in higher education.

11. AMICHAÏ–HAMBURGER Y., MCKENNA K.Y., TAL S.A., *E-empowerment: Empowerment by the Internet*, «Computers in Human Behavior», 24(5), 2008, pp. 1776–1789.

12. MIKKI S., ZYGMUNTOWSKA M., GJESDAL Ø. L., AL RUWEHY H.A., *Digital Presence of Norwegian Scholars on Academic Network Sites—Where and Who Are They?*, «PLOS one», 13, 2015, pp. 1–17.

Pioneers of Feminism in Early Modern Europe

A Historical Debate

ANTONELLA CAGNOLATI

I. Against misogyny

For investigators of feminist writing, early modern Europe is a veritable treasure trove. The trickle of women who began to find their voice and take the plunge into the complex world of the republic of letters gradually increased into a mighty flood as the decades passed. This slow but progressive conquest of the written word encompassed a wide variety of genres and registers, from diaries and spiritual journals to biographies, poetry collections, heroic poems, moral treatises and children's catechisms.

The desire to break down the unspoken barriers between the public and the private world, the daily domesticity and the intimate sphere, is evident in the writings of women who raised their voices above the almost exclusively male choir in a bid to recount their own truths, whether political, theological, philosophical or otherwise.

However, in order to have their opinions heard, to give concrete form to their thoughts and to recount the different experiences of the female universe, a clear and well-defined operation to legitimize such writings would be necessary. It would be essential to leave the reader no doubt as to the validity of the references to whom women entrusted the intentionality of the act of writing, and to overturn those mental and behavioral attitudes that had hitherto stood in their way¹.

1. Cf. SHOWALTER E. (Ed.), *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, Pantheon Books, New York 1985.

The great determination displayed by several female writers as they made the great step of “setting pen to paper”² can be seen as revolutionary behavior, a kind of vehement rebellion against the archaic prejudice of feminine silence. The word, in whichever form it was expressed, was strictly prohibited for women via a series of rules that found their *terminus a quo* not to mention their greatest legitimization, in the dramatic confrontation between Eve and the serpent³ in *Genesis* 3, 1–6. From such origins the right of women to be heard was quashed, codified, accepted and transmitted metahistorically via St. Paul’s *Letters*⁴.

The construction of a misogynist ideology⁵, to the obvious detriment and demonization of women, was also aided by classical references, which had offered a profusion of such ideas. For example, Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*⁶ traced a firm distinction between the roles and tasks reserved for men and those for women, and both Aristotle’s biological ideas in *De Generatione Animalium*⁷, and Hippocrates’ physiological theory were also used to add fuel to the fire⁸. In short, a rich and variegated collection of literary works were cited as evidence that women were inferior creatures and devoid of *logos*. If we add to this heterogeneous *corpus* the treatises of the Fathers of the Church⁹, we can discern the progressive erection of apparently

2. CLINTON E., *The Countess of Lincolnes Nurserie*, J. Lichfield and J. Short, Oxford 1622, Preface, p. 4.

3. PAGELS E.H., *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1988; DAVIES P.R., CLINES D.J.A.(Eds.), *The World of Genesis. Persons, Places, Perspectives*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1998.

4. Several passages from St. Paul’s *Letters* are set out as strict and prescriptive behavioural codes, particularly for women. See Cor 11, 3–8; 14, 34–35; Eph 5, 21; Col 3, 18; 1 Tim 2, 1114; 3, 11; Tit 2, 3–5.

5. Cf. RANKE-HEINEMANN U., *Eunuchen für Das Himmelreich. Kathilische Kirche und Sexualität*, Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, Hamburg 1988, pp. 97–131.

6. Cf. XENOPHON, *Oeconomicus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994.

7. ARISTOTLE, *De Generatione Animalium*, 763b–769b.

8. Cf. KING H., *Hippocrates’ Woman. Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece*, Routledge, London–New York 1998; DEAN-JONES L., *The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science*, in POMEROY S.B. (Ed.), *Women’s History and Ancient History*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London 1991, pp. 111–137.

9. Unforgettable is the force of the misogynist arguments in *Quaestio* 92 of *Summa Theologiae* by Thomas Aquinas, whose central theme is apparent from the title: *De productione mulieris (The creation of woman)*: «But God foresaw that the woman would be an occasion of sin to man. Therefore He should not have made woman» (1a, 92, 1, 3). Alongside