

The Gender of Memory

Cultures of Remembrance in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe

Bearbeitet von

Rebecca Ayako Bennette, Helle Bjerg, Maria Grever, Anu Heiskanen, Tiina Kinnunen, Claudia Lenz, Sylvia Paletschek, Pinar Yelsali Parmaksiz, Andrea Petó, Helke Rausch, Kees Ribbens, Stefan Rohdewald, Sylvia Schraut, Astrid Swenson, Guido Vitiello

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Remembrance and Gender: Making Gender Visible and Inscribing Women into Memory Culture

Sylvia Schraut and Sylvia Paetschek

Nation, Memory Culture and Gender

To date, studies of the representation of women in national memory and of the role of gender in memory culture have been rare. A closer examination of the current state of research reveals the following features: European national cultures of memory are male-connoted and orientated towards the bourgeois gender-model. Women as agents are scarce, their spaces of agency and their self-images and aims are often marginalized.¹ This exclusion of women from the nation is reproduced in nineteenth-century national cultures of memory and is thus reinforced.

From a historical perspective, national cultures of memory are a relatively new phenomenon. The shaping of a national memory culture has been a significant part of nation building since the nineteenth century. A national culture of memory in the form of monuments, remembrance days or celebrations served the shaping of a national consciousness, defined in a variety of ways, often in delimitation from other nations and sometimes by way of excluding particular groups of the collective.² Although women were considered an integral part of the nation and although bourgeois women contributed to the building of the nation as members of clubs, by collecting money and by publications, they were excluded from the body politic of the nation and they were denied civil rights. The representation of the nation and its delimitation from other nations were also gendered: as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, when national movements

1 Tacke (1996); Assmann, Aleida (1999); Hutton (1999); Zemon Davis (1999); Niethammer (2000); Lundt (2004: 1–29).

2 See for example: Samuel (1989); Assmann, Aleida (1993); Berding (1994); Schmoll (1995); Dörner (1996); Ozouf (1996); Langewiesche (2000); Buschmann/Langewiesche (2004); Olick (2003).

emerged, the national community was depicted as masculine and courageous, the enemy disparaged as weak and effeminate.³

The masculine imbuelement of national cultures of memory is reflected in the prevailing concepts of research into cultural memory; it is not the subject of critical examination. This can be shown with the example of Pierre Nora's concept »lieu de mémoire«.⁴ Nora's interest is directed at historically anchored national identity. He exclusively refers to the nation and his concern is the safeguarding of national memory at present or in the future. Nora's concept runs the risk of drawing an image of history that is centered on male spheres of action. This can be demonstrated with the example of its implementation in Etienne François and Hagen Schulze's project on »German places of memory«.⁵ There have been many discussions about the concept of »lieu de mémoire« as well as about the selection of the places.⁶ Here we shall concentrate on the analysis of the implicit concept of gender in this approach.

Twenty-five of the 121 contributions of »German places of memory« deal with persons, five among them with women. Accordingly, Rosa Luxemburg and Rahel Varnhagen, the Prussian Queen Luise and Marlene Dietrich represent the female element in the German places of memory. We may further add Uta von Naumburg, even if she is listed only due to the *Bamberger Reiter* (Bamberg horseman) who appears first in the title of the essay that deals with her. That there is a certain blindness towards questions of gender can be demonstrated with examples that seem to be gender-neutral: Canossa, Nuremberg, Versailles, or Rapallo appear to be general places of memory at first sight. In fact, they are not general, as they are exclusively associated with male spheres of action. This, however, is not clearly indicated. Even symbolically charged places such as Karlsruhe, the site of the Federal Constitutional Court, or »Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch«, the German civil law code, which are not that closely linked with big (foreign) politics, undoubtedly refer to a larger extent to male law makers or law interpreters than to their male and female opponents. Meanwhile a further condensed one-volume edition of the »German places of memory«

3 Yuval-Davis (1998); Blom/Hagemann/Hall (2000); Hagemann (2000); Planert (2000a); Hagemann (2002).

4 See Nora (1984–1993; 1989; 1995; 1998).

5 François/Schulze (2001). See Ertl (2005: 25ff.) on Nora's concept.

6 See for example: Mazohl-Wallnig (2000); Carcenac-Lecomte (2000); Van Sas (2000); LeRider (2002); Ertl (2005: 23–27).

has been published which, as the preface states, especially focuses on the political-historical places of memory (François/Schulze 2005). Among the 29 examples not one single woman and no feminine-connoted place of remembrance can be found. This rough exemplary analysis illustrates the unsatisfactory nature of public memory culture and the accompanying scholarly debate from the perspective of gender.

According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory contributes to the creation of a historically grounded identity of those who share a common culture. It reflects the public categorization, evaluation and interpretation of the historical events considered relevant by which the political and cultural self-image of a community roots itself.⁷ We therefore have to ask the following questions: Which remembrances do allow women to be inscribed into a polity when they are excluded from national memory? Which remembrances enable women to establish their own individual, political and national identity?

Making Gender Visible in Memory Culture

Referring to the nation is rather an obstacle for a critical analysis of memory culture from the perspective of gender, as can be seen in the existing research literature on the subject memory and gender. There are a number of publications which try to research forgotten women and to integrate women's history into local memory culture. However, most publications and case studies deal with either non-European countries or they focus on the regional space below the nation.⁸ These rather different studies have the merit of doing research into the hitherto neglected memory of women as well as into women as bearers of memory.⁹ As a rule, however, they lack a gender-based methodological critical examination of the current concepts of memory. So far, these publications which originated in the context of feminist or civil commitment have scarcely been analyzed or synthesized with regard to their implications for memory culture. Beyond historical

7 See Assmann, Jan (1992) and, as examples of the current discussions, Gillis (1994); Straub (1998); Assmann, Aleida (1999); Kansteiner (2002).

8 See for example: Najmabadi (1998); Baumel/Cohen (2003); Des Jardins (2003).

9 Here we will only point to some German studies which focus on regions (Baden): Nellen (1996); Asche (1992); Thomas (1993); Thomas/Schraut (1995).