

YEARBOOK
OF **WOMEN'S**
HISTORY
JAARBOEK
VOOR **VROUWEN-**
GESCHIEDENIS



40

LIVING CONCEPTS

40 Years of Engaging
Gender and History

YEARBOOK OF WOMEN'S HISTORY /
JAARBOEK VOOR VROUWENGESCHIEDENIS 40

Living Concepts

40 Years of Engaging Gender and History



Hilversum
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Living Concepts

Forty Years of Engaging Gender and History

MARLEEN REICHGELT, ON BEHALF OF THE EDITORIAL BOARD

There are concepts we think about, concepts we use in thinking, and concepts (usually called a priori) we think with... A concept may move (not without change) from one function to another: hence there are no unique examples of each class. But allowing for this we may say that in many contexts the concepts of energy, man, social class, and alienation are concepts we think about; the concepts of quantity, function, value, and change are concepts we use in thinking; and the concepts of time, space, identity, and causation are concepts we think with.

Louis O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*, 1987.

A philosopher, a psychoanalytic critic, a narratologist, an architectural historian, and an art historian are talking together in a seminar about 'signs and ideologies'. [...] The word 'subject' comes up and keeps recurring. With growing bewilderment, the first participant assumes the topic is the rise of individualism; the second sees it as the unconscious, the third, the narrator's voice; the fourth, the human confronted with space; and the fifth, the subject matter of a painting or, more sophisticatedly, the depicted figure. This could be just amusing, if only all five did not take their interpretation of 'subject', on the sub-reflective level of obviousness, to be the only right one. [...] Not because they are selfish, stupid, or uneducated, but because their disciplinary training has never given them the opportunity, or a reason, to consider the possibility that such a simple word as 'subject' might, in fact, be a concept.

Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts*, 2002.

‘Gender & Party!’ That was supposed to be the central theme for a festive fortieth edition of the Yearbook of Women’s History (*Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis*). Attentive followers of the Yearbook may even have seen the call for papers which was out briefly in the spring of 2019. Alas, events unfolding shortly after the release of the call gave little cause for celebration. In June 2019, our admired and esteemed editor Marjan Groot suddenly passed away. While we were still recuperating from that great loss and furthermore absorbed by the thirty-ninth edition *Gendered Empire*, the global COVID-19 pandemic hit and truly blew us off our feet. Like many academics, we were scrambling to make it to the end of the year and thoughts of partying were far from our minds.

Instead, the pandemic prompted self-reflection and introspection. As almost every facet of academia was upended, academics were forced to reconsider issues of borders and barriers, access and (dis)connections, meaningful relations and thinking with care, *slow scholarship* versus *suffering for science* – in short, nothing less than our positions as researchers and our engagement with our research fields.¹ Long-standing inequities were exposed and intensified, taking its toll on womxn scholars, and womxn facing intersecting systems of oppression in particular, who are parenting or caring while also trying to fulfil multiple academic duties (teaching, research, supervising, service).² As passionate but critical members of the academic community concerned with gender history in particular, we as Editorial Board of the Yearbook wanted to stand still and take stock. Forty years after our conception, where do we stand as a Yearbook of Women’s History? How have we developed over the years and in which directions do we want to turn next? Where – and how – do we position ourselves and in which discussions do we want to partake and with whom?

In order to ponder these and other questions, the decision was made to dedicate our fortieth issue to ‘doing’ gender history in the Low Countries in 2021. Particularly, we wanted to offer our readers an overview of the range of tools gender scholars use to understand and critique our world: concepts. Concepts frame how we interpret our sources, help identify the structures that naturalize, normalize, and discipline gender across historical and cultural contexts, and influence how we make sense of both past and present. Often dreaded by students as ‘abstract’ and ‘difficult’, we wanted to showcase how illuminating and eye-opening conceptual approaches can be. In order to do so, the Editorial Board has invited scholars of gender working in the Low Countries to write short essays about a concept which is or has been foundational in their work. Specifically, we asked our contributors not for a historiographical or theoretical exposé, but for a first-hand account of how a certain concept had inspired them, what insights it provided, and how they made it work in their research practice.

In *Living Concepts*, authors use short pieces of approximately 2000 words to discuss how a single concept is operationalized in their academic practice, thereby revealing how gender ‘lives’ in their research practice and what it means to ‘do’ gender history in 2021. Together, the essays showcase not only how historians think about these concepts in their research but more pointedly how they think *with* them. As articulated by Mieke Bal, by ‘groping to define, provisionally and partly, what a particular concept may *mean*, we gain insight into what it can *do*’.³ Each in their own way, the contribu-

tors to this Yearbook show how this process of groping has informed their thinking and their research. According to Bal, this process is inevitably a collective endeavour, and this communal element shines through in the essays. Contributors include experienced researchers who have spent years, sometimes decades, contemplating the conceptual background of their work and their own engagements with it, as well as scholars who have come to the field more recently, looking for new ways to apply existing concepts or new words to describe the world as they perceive it. Their essays all honour the interdisciplinary nature of gender studies, combining historical visions with insights from anthropology, social sciences, biology, literary and cultural studies, linguistics, law, and other disciplines. As such this Yearbook shows how certain concepts travel within academic culture across the Low Countries, revealing not so much the theoretical underpinnings of the field, but rather how these theoretical underpinnings find a home in individual research practices and may be used in surprising ways.

Authors, of course, each took up our invitation in their own way. Some entries are informative and intricate accounts of research processes, others take a more analytical, reflective, or even reflexive approach. The range and nature of concepts under discussion is just as wide. The study of gender and sexuality has developed dramatically over recent years, with a changing theoretical landscape that has seen innovative work emerge on identity, the body and embodiment, queer theory, technology, space, and the concept of gender itself.⁴ The overview provided by this Yearbook is by no means exhaustive, nor does it aspire to be. Many key concepts from the field of gender studies do not have a single entry dedicated to them, such as sex(uality), representation, patriarchy, the Other, power, to name a few. However, as all of these concepts play and have played a central role in the research presented here, they appear ‘naturally’ in the essays, situated in established or contemporary debates. In order to both honour the Yearbook’s grounding in the Dutch women’s studies field as well as make room for new voices and encourage new debates, the essays may be written in either Dutch or English. Although some contributions are in conversation with one another, address similar developments, or focus on related concepts, we have tried to arrange the essays in an order that balances both themes and styles and that will hopefully create some (intertextual) surprises for the reader along the way.

The issue kicks off with a contemplation, by Annemarie Mol, of the various ways in which researchers relate to words by trying to define them, investigate their changing meaning over time and place, or have them take on new meanings. Much in the spirit of Mol, Geertje Mak offers the reader a consideration of the Dutch/German word *geslacht*, arguing how its multilayered meaning comprises interconnections that are lost in the concept of *gender*, as it simultaneously refers to physical sex, the category of gender, and generation. At the same time, Mak herself makes room for the generational aspects of academia by citing the work of early-career researchers to show how *geslacht* might be used in practice.

Other authors trace the introduction, integration, and evolution of certain concepts to address disciplinary change over time. Marlou Schrover, in her contribution on ‘intersectionality’, shows how intersectional approaches in the study of migration poli-

tics have impacted and changed the field, while also acknowledging its precursors like 'multiculturalism'. Saskia Bonjour picks up where Schrover left off: paying homage to feminist scholarship produced by Nira Yuval-Davis and Ann Laura Stoler, Bonjour shows how politics of belonging and politics of intimacy intersect in present-day politics of migration and citizenship in Europe. Elsbeth Locher-Scholten's eloquent and coherent revisit of Edward Said's *Orientalism* not only describes how his work opened her eyes and influenced her research, but also succinctly recounts how the theory has evolved over the past forty years.

True to the essence of gender studies, some authors use concepts that allow for previously marginalized groups to emerge. Other contributions strive to approach and understand previously stigmatized behaviour from a different perspective: Gemma Blok, for example, shows how the concept of cultural capital inspired her to see past negative stereotypes of young female drug users, focussing instead on their autonomous search for alternative life styles in a restrictive period for young women. In a similar vein, Marijke Naezer describes how she developed the 'adventure approach' to better understand young people's experiences with digitally mediated sexual practices – thus far generally framed as 'risky behaviour'. Kaat Wils ponders the concept of scientific persona, wondering how we can integrate gendered bodies and bodily performances into the history of science when modern science values universal and hence disembodied knowledge above all. Her contribution also invites reflections on what it means to be an academic, and how regimes of accountability determine our own scholarly lives.

Some authors passionately defend and make an argument for the merits and uses of certain concepts, using their own research to illustrate their applications and worth. Barbara Henkes calls attention to Michael Rothberg's 'implicated subject', using a wide range of examples from various research projects all dealing with unequal power relations. Henkes demonstrates how the implicated subjectivity not only goes beyond the perpetrator-victim dichotomy, but rather illuminates the interconnections between places, processes, and histories – confronting the historian with their own implications in difficult histories, past and present. Kirsten Kamphuis urgently reminds us to take age into account in our research as a social construct and not a biological given. Analysing the debates on girls' education in early-twentieth century Dutch East Indies, Kamphuis highlights the diverse and diverging voices and arguments, showcasing the many conceptions of age. Dorothee Sturkenboom presents us with a miniature how-to guide for the study of masculinities, while simultaneously looking back on earlier research projects and sharing precious insights such as the valuable lesson to not play down any contradictory findings but acknowledge them instead as proof of the fluidity of gender codes. Maaïke Voorhoeve shows how the juridical concept of the 'open norm' as used in Tunisian divorce practices may be used to lay bare social norms of authority, marriage, and gender relations. Marlisa den Hartog studies sexual codes of conduct for young, upper-class men and women in Renaissance Italy, demonstrating how factors such as gender, age, and social class determined whether people had to conform to codes of chastity or sexual freedom.

One surprising result was how taking a central concept to talk about research practice often became an exercise which transcended the descriptive, forging new connections between theories, sources, times, and fields. A captivating example is Ernestine Hoegen's paper, in which she grippingly describes how, as a former public prosecutor, it was her analysis of descriptions of physical suffering in diaries of male Far Eastern prisoners of war that made her realize how deeply entrenched presumptions about bodies and gender are – both in the study of life writing and in legal practice. Hoegen's work resonates with Marijke Huisman's essay, in which she describes how Joan W. Scott's call to historicize 'the evidence of experience' inspired her 2015 study on how slave narratives have been (re)interpreted over time and across three different countries. Similarly, Larissa Schulte Nordholt's contribution builds on two other contributions: she provides an illustration how Sturkenboom's masculinities may be studied by using Wils' integrated gendered body and performance in her analysis of white masculinity in African historical studies.

Many authors in their pieces recount how they responded to certain challenges and struggles – in society, in their research careers, and in their personal lives. Halleh Ghorashi compares diversity approaches, showing why diversity and inclusion strategies have remained toothless for so long, and what is needed for a strong diversity approach with a bite. In her striking essay, Sidra Shahid retraces her engagements with philosophies of difference, explaining how a deeply felt need to entwine theory with lived experience and political realities made her turn to thinkers outside the Western philosophical mainstream – Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Saidiya Hartmann – and an *attunement* to difference and mechanisms of differentiation. Rachel Spronk delves into a central tension in her education and ensuing career: the dissonance between her feminist training, centred around universal principles of power, and her grounding in anthropology, studying particularities that are not easily generalized.

Then, there is a group of academics highlighting concepts which represent their mission as a researcher to allow for new perspectives, voices, and even (academic) communities to emerge. Divya Nadkarni uses the politicality of poetry to think through present-day challenges like imagining alternative forms of social organization based on mutual responsibility, rethinking the political, and thinking the 'we' of community in a heterogenous, fluid, and inclusive sense. In a beautiful display of careful and communal thinking, Nadkarni exhibits how the practice of poetry can facilitate 'the social conditions wherein broader forms of understanding and being *with* others can become widely accessible'. Vesna Vravnik shows how a localized understanding of the concept *coming out* might help deconstruct local heteronormativity in ways in which Western mainstream discourse may not. Her analysis of queer cinema reveals alternative, local strategies for criticizing homophobia, nationalism, and religion in the Balkan context, providing a critical space for queer communities and localized *coming outs*.

Finally, being invited to talk about the central concept in their research often caused contributors to revisit earlier stages of their career, thereby giving personal and perceptive reflections on the field of gender studies in the Netherlands over the past decades. For example, Garjan Sterk in her poignant essay recounts how she has

experienced working in Dutch gender studies as a scholar critically engaging with the concept of 'race' in her personal life as well as in her research project. She describes a painful and traumatizing instance in which she herself was racialized, and became acutely aware of the lack of language to adequately describe, and by extension theorize, the experiences of racialized people.

So, what do we as Yearbook of Women's History 'take home' from all these captivating and perceptive reflections on our field? Many authors, being former editors and/or longstanding contributors to the YWH, directly or indirectly reflect on discussions in earlier issues of the Yearbook, and what these discussions indicate about the developments within the field of gender studies in the Netherlands. Berteke Waaldijk even compares the Yearbook to a contact zone, which proved to be a 'place that for the last forty years has brought together elements that have met, clashed, and grappled with each other: commercial publishing interests, the ideals of historians (mostly white) who wanted to renew their discipline, Dutch feminists who wanted to write history, the students who both read and challenged them, the importance of peer-reviewed publications for ambitious academics, and the demand for English and Dutch publications. As such, it is a contact zone that made exclusion and encounters both possible and necessary'.⁵ One group that is excluded from this particular Yearbook, albeit involuntarily, are men. As we were putting this edition together, we quickly came to the realization that we had not managed to include any pieces by male authors. This was not done on purpose, but is perhaps a telling sign that the project of women's history still has some strides to make. What is the place of women's history in today's historical discipline, in today's academy as a whole?

This discussion is closely related to a broader, perhaps more difficult question: does a Yearbook of Women's History still have currency in 2021? Having read, reviewed, and edited these contributions the Editorial Board was herself engaged in reflecting on both its own role within the creation of gender history as well as the history of the Yearbook itself. We discussed amongst ourselves whether the name of our periodical still captures our aim and essence. Should we not change our name to reflect how the discipline has changed? Should we become more inclusive in how we describe ourselves, and perhaps change our title to the *Yearbook of Wo/mxn's History*? Or simply the *Yearbook of Gender History*? These are not new questions, of course. As a series of mini-interviews with former editors reveals, these discussions have been held since the very beginnings of the Yearbook. In the interviews, we asked our predecessors to not only look back and reflect on their time as editors and the state of women's history, but also about their thoughts on the future of the Yearbook itself. Some encouraged us to keep the Yearbook going whereas others suggested the project of Women's history may be coming to an end. Well, we are happy to reveal here that our fortieth issue will not be our last. Armed with talented new editors who are brimming with fresh ideas and eager to contribute to these ongoing discussions, we are currently in the early phases of new theme issues on Gender & the Sea with guest editor Djoeke van Netten (Universiteit van Amsterdam) for 2022, and Gender & Animals with guest editor Sandra Swart (Stellenbosch University) in 2023.

FIG. 1 On 8 March 2016 Athena's Angels replaced the 117 portraits of men and one portrait of a woman in the Senaatskamer of Leiden University with 99 portraits of women professors.



In conclusion, even though ‘celebration’ is no longer the central theme of this year’s issue, we nonetheless feel to have compiled an issue which celebrates the rich research and creative scholars working on gender in the Low Countries. In honour of all the thinkers who have made the discipline into what it is today, our cover consists of a photograph of an anonymous statue of a female thinker, taken by philosopher Fleur Jongepier in Kanazawa, Japan.⁶ As Anna Tijsseling put it, there are still too many who do not recognize themselves in the memorial practices that are so ingrained in academic life: the endless paintings, pictures, and photographs of dead white men who once created and dominated universities. ‘We can’t walk into a building’, Tijsseling writes, ‘without being reminded of those who counted as human beings and are being honoured and remembered. Even the most sceptical of my students in the BA History Seminar *Boss of your belly? Feminism in the Twentieth Century* back in 2016 had to admit the profound impact of Athena’s Angels’ portraits project. Suddenly surrounded by women professors, despite most of them being white, had a profound impact upon him. “These images do matter”, he sighed.’⁷

Because images do indeed matter, because we want to contribute to a corpus of scientific persona in which many people can recognize themselves, and finally because we want to celebrate all the inspiring researchers who have lent their hands and minds and bodies to this Yearbook, we have opted to do a small portraits project of our own. Each contribution is illustrated with a photograph of the author in the process of ‘doing’ their research – whether it is reading, writing, thinking, walking, organizing, analysing, experimenting, or just fooling around. For us, it was a joy to see all the heads and environments that produce such thoughtful and rich scholarship, and it made us reflect on how often in academia, the people you work with remain anonymous and disembodied.

Finally, we hope this year’s issue also gives our readers the chance to reflect about their own research practice, their own development within their fields of research and within academia, and the central concepts which inform their work. As the evocative and passionate concluding essay by Anna Tijsseling reminds us, knowing what we are ‘willing and available for’, in other words being aware of what curiosity drives us and is nurturing for us, can help us stay *in* academia, rather than becoming *of* academia.

Notes

- 1 Zahra Hussain, 'Field research in lockdown: revisiting slow science in the time of COVID-19', LSE Blogs 29 April 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2020/04/29/field-research-in-lockdown-revisiting-slow-science-in-the-time-of-covid-19/> (Accessed 16 September 2021); Robinson W. Fulweiler, Sarah W. Davies et al., 'Rebuild the Academy. Supporting academic mothers during COVID-19 and beyond', *PLOS Biology* 19 (2021) 3; Herman Paul, 'Academische deugden in tijden van corona', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 133 (2020) 2, 167-168.
- 2 Fulweiler et al., 'Rebuild the Academy'; Jessica L. Malisch et al., 'Opinion: In the wake of COVID-19, academia needs new solutions to ensure gender equity', *PNAS* 117 (2020) 27, 15378-15381.
- 3 Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 11.
- 4 Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (eds.), *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. 5th ed. (London: Macmillan Education UK, 2020); Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, *Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. 2nd ed. Sage Key Concepts Series. (London: SAGE, 2017); Alexandra Howson, *Embodying Gender* (London: SAGE, 2005).
- 5 Berteke Waaldijk in this Yearbook.
- 6 See <https://fleurjongepier.nl/thinkster> (accessed 23 September 2021).
- 7 Fragment taken from an earlier version of Anna Tijsseling's contribution to this Yearbook: 'In Academia, Not of Academia. Being Willing and Available for your Important, Non-urgent Projects', *Yearbook of Women's History* 40 (2021).



FIG. 2 The first largely face-to-face meeting of the editorial board since the start of the pandemic. Such a relief! Heveadorp, 14 July 2021.

Levende geschiedenis

Interview met oud-redacteuren

LARISSA SCHULTE NORDHOLT

Het *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* bestond in 2020 veertig jaar. Het Jaarboek werd oorspronkelijk opgericht vanuit de noodzaak vrouwengeschiedenis meer onder de aandacht te brengen in Nederland en volgde daarmee een internationale trend. Er hebben heel wat verschillende auteurs en redacteuren aan het jaarboek bijgedragen door de jaren heen (onder wie Joan Wallach Scott en Natalie Zemon Davies, om een paar grote namen te noemen!) en het jaarboek heeft zich in die jaren steeds verder ontwikkeld. Voor onze veertigste editie die, om allerlei uiteenlopende redenen waarvan de pandemie er een was, in 2021 is verschenen hebben we een aantal oud-redacteuren gevraagd eens terug te kijken op de geschiedenis van het jaarboek aan de hand van drie vragen. Zo hopen we de lezer uit te nodigen na te denken over het verleden, heden en de toekomst van het jaarboek.

Waarom ben je destijds redacteur voor het Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis geworden? Wat betekende dat persoonlijk voor jou? Hoe kijk je nu terug op je tijd als redacteur?

Els Kloek: Ik was vanaf circa 1975 zeer betrokken bij het Vrouwenoverleg van het Historisch Seminarium aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam. Via Selma Leydesdorff was er ook contact met Josine Blok en Jannie Poelstra uit Groningen. Uiteraard deed ik mee toen er sprake was van plannen om een jaarboek te beginnen (waarschijnlijk naar voorbeeld van het *Jaarboek voor de Arbeidersbeweging*, maar dat weet ik niet helemaal zeker). Voor mij betekende het dat ik nog meer ervaring opdeed met redactiewerk en het maken van een publicatie (ik had ook al aan het eerste *Tipje van de Sluier* meegedaan, een publicatie van het Landelijk Overleg Vrouwengeschiedenis). Ik vond dat heel leuk, spannend en inspirerend.



How do concepts such as ‘the body’, ‘intimacy’, ‘adventure’ and ‘intersectionality’ shape our engagement with gender history? In this 40th anniversary edition of the Yearbook we revisit the question how concepts ‘live’ in gender research practices and what it means to ‘do’ gender history in 2021. Contributors include experienced researchers who have spent years, sometimes decades, contemplating the conceptual background of their work as well as scholars who have come to the field more recently and who therefore provide a different insight. As such this Yearbook shows how certain concepts travel within academic culture across the Low Countries, revealing not so much the theoretical underpinnings of the field, but rather how these theoretical underpinnings find a home in individual research practices and may be used in surprising ways.