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Foreword: Unholy Alliances

Andrea Pető

We all know the value of the discussions during conference breaks. These are the moments when experts on gender and women's history usually talk to each other about their marginalization in the profession. Unless they find the separately flagged "gender" panels and special issues of peer-reviewed journals comforting, not much has changed in the power dynamics of the historical profession in the past decades. In the institutional inertia, the concept of "gender" as an analytical category has gone through a major transformation. Joan Scott, in her very influential and widely quoted Siegrist lecture of 2001, pointed this out in her article entitled "Gender as a Category of Historical Analysis," published in the *American Historical Journal* in 1986, did not bring the expected intellectual and political breakthrough. Instead of a major epistemological transformation by applying gender as a category of analysis, it led to "genderism," meaning that researchers used gender as a category of analysis ignoring intersectional approaches that take into consideration other differences.¹

Those who are working in the field of Holocaust and Jewish studies are of course familiar with these complexities of institutionalization and application of gender as a category of analysis too well. They do not even need a conference break to recall that the famous debate about "asking the wrong question" has a long shadow, especially when jobs are scarce

1 Joan W. Scott, "Millennial Fantasies. The Future of 'Gender' in the 21st Century," in *Gender: Die Tücken einer Kategorie. Joan W. Scott, Geschichte und Politik. Beiträge zum Symposium anlässlich der Verleihung des Hans-Sigrist-Preises 1999 der Universität Bern an Joan W. Scott*, ed., Claudia Honegger and Caroline Arni (Zürich: Kronos-Verlag, 2001, 19–37.

anyway.² Historians working on gendering the Holocaust are also struggling not only of the remasculinization of their profession but also the resistance of history writing against these epistemological challenges. Sara Horowitz sets out two aims for those undertaking gender analyses of the Holocaust: “recovering the experiences of women and reshaping or nuancing Holocaust memory.”³ The first approach—“recovering the experiences of women”—seeks to gather the lost and neglected stories of the Holocaust; the second focuses on the framework, or rather settings, in which these stories are situated.

Recently, however, unexpected allies showed up on the thus far quite gloomy horizon of gender historians of the Holocaust. A number of books and journal articles covering this “recovery of the experiences of women” during the Holocaust has, surprisingly, increased. But these new allies are only interested in the first task set by Horowitz: to recover women’s voices as they were. Representatives are returning to the main objective of women’s history writing of the 1970s, but with a very different political agenda. This “her-story turn” is a result of the failed epistemological change in history writing together with the illiberal memory turn. Their aim is to recover female figures, mainstreaming them into the very center of national history where they failed to find a “proper home” in the past decades.⁴ The ongoing illiberal shift demonstrates that feminists do not have a monopoly to write women’s history, just as they cannot count on their monopoly to politically represent women. They have to prove that they are better, more relevant and first of all more interesting. *If This Is a Woman: Studies on Women and Gender in the Holocaust* is an attempt to do exactly that: because if we fail, there will not be too many conferences in the future to complain about marginalization over coffee.

2 Andrea Pető, Louise Hecht, and Karoline Krasuska, eds., *Women and the Holocaust: New Perspectives and Challenges* (Warszawa: IBL, 2015).

3 Sara R. Horowitz, “Gender, Genocide, and Jewish Memory,” *Prooftexts* 20, nos. 1–2 (2000): 176.

4 Andrea Pető, “Roots of Illiberal Memory Politics: Remembering Women in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution,” *Baltic Worlds* 10, no. 4 (2017): 42–58.