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Forum: Holocaust and History of Gender and Sexuality

Historians of sexuality in the Holocaust go where most fear to tread: Lisa Heineman called the intersection “doubly unspeakable.” Why is it important to explore history of sexuality in the Holocaust and what are the methodological, ethical, and political issues at stake? In this Forum, five historians of gender, sexuality, Nazism, and the Holocaust discuss what the field of Holocaust history gains from integrating sexuality and gender as analytical categories. By connecting Holocaust studies to the history of sexuality the field gains, as we will argue, new theoretical insights, recognizing power hierarchies and societal shifts. As the scholarship moves to examining gender and sexuality in the Holocaust beyond sole (if understandable) focus on sexual violence, topics like agency, love and prostitution, same sex desire, and memory and subjectivity of both the perpetrators and victims come to the fore. What are we allowed to research? Why do we consider so many topics connected to mass violence and sexuality as taboo? How are we to make sense of them? History of sexuality and gender not only introduces new topics to Holocaust studies, it offers, more importantly, new perspectives on familiar themes.

The Forum was initiated by **Anna Hájková** (University of Warwick) and **Elissa Mailänder** (Science Po) as a discussion panel at the 2016 German Studies Association Conference, together with **Doris Bergen** (University of Toronto), **Patrick Farges** (Sorbonne Nouvelle), and **Atina Grossmann** (Cooper Union).

***Q 1** Drawing upon your research, what does gender as a category of analysis help us to see that would be ignored otherwise? How do you simultaneously deepen existing research by applying a gendered lens and insert into work that considers areas and themes that have not yet been developed as part of Holocaust Studies?*

Patrick Farges

Let me start by saying that most Holocaust historians wouldn't consider me to be one! I have worked on the consequences of antisemitism in Germany and Austria – especially on how antisemitism forged gendered identities on a daily basis – and on forced migration. My main focus recently has been to apply a gendered lens to the history of German-Jewish masculinities in the post-migration.

When studying the history of German (and Austrian) Jews ('Yekkes') who emigrated to Canada and Mandate Palestine (which are the two main sites of my research projects), I found it challenging to insert gender and masculinity into a story that is doubly marginal with regard to the Holocaust. First of all, gender is still perceived as a marginal approach by some of those who bear the memory of the Holocaust, in spite of years of scholarly research exploring the gendered aspects of the Holocaust. Maybe this is specific to the country I come from, France, where the reception of the international literature on gender and the Holocaust has been relatively lacunar.

Secondly, working on those families and individuals who were able to leave Europe *before* it was too late means studying a phenomenon that is located at the margins of the Holocaust, and this feeling is largely voiced in the narratives of these families and individuals. In my project on Canada for instance, I studied the 'Camp Boys,' i.e., those men (mainly Jewish refugees) who were interned as “enemy aliens” in England in 1940 and who were transferred to Canadian internment camps. For a long time, it was impossible for them to tell their story, as theirs was a story of masculine helplessness, far away from the war and the Holocaust. What happened in the internment camps – social hierarchies in an all-male

environment, sexual economies, cases of gendered violence – seemed for a long time not worth telling. The ‘Boys’ did not want to tell their story and nobody wanted to hear it. But I would argue that this story of gender and masculinity could not have happened without the Holocaust. Of course, their experience of internment was in no way comparable with surviving an extermination camp. Some Camp Boys, who had experienced Dachau or Sachsenhausen *before* leaving Germany, knew this too well. In the post-Holocaust world, their memory of internment was obliterated. The ‘Boys,’ one can argue, were Holocaust survivors of a different kind – “accidental” survivors so to speak. Erwin Schild, an ex-Camp Boy who became Rabbi in Toronto and whom I interviewed over ten years ago, called this “a minor event, dwarfed by the Holocaust.” But I think ‘marginal’ questions are no longer footnotes in history if we are conscious of the fact that they shaped lives. So the question is: *how* can we write an integrated history of the Holocaust that helps us link the ‘core’ of Holocaust Studies with its margins?

Anna Hájková

I am a historian of the Holocaust, specifically the Jewish history of the Holocaust, who has become increasingly drawn to the history of sexuality. I have always looked at prisoner society to learn about human reactions in extremis: I appreciate Dagmar Herzog’s statement at the end of *Sexuality in Europe* where she cites the gay rights activist Simon Watney about the “much of a muchness” that sexuality means. This is really what I found out when I set out to work on prostitution in the Holocaust: I was looking for the sexual economy and what came to the fore were the power structures and rules the inmate community lived by.

I started thinking, why was it that there was often widespread sexual barter in ghettos and camps, but survivors spoke so dismissively about the women who participated? I realized that we should look at narratives, that is, at victims’ self-testimonies, not only for factual information but also for their form, emotionality, stress and omissions, and narrativity. These are germane to this research: they are the key that shows us what is taboo. So rather than saying that large parts of the topic of sexuality are taboo because it’s sexuality, I think the task at hand is to pose the pesky questions: What makes a taboo a taboo? How does the mechanism of taboo creation work? How is a taboo narrated, transmitted, and maintained?

To explore these issues, my current project follows what I term transgressive sexuality: topics where certain sexual (and by extension, social) conduct in the prisoner community was perceived as deviant and monstrous. I look at same-sex conduct and prisoner homophobia, sexual barter, mothers who left their children at selection. Many of these topics would no longer be seen as perverse today; some still make us feel uncomfortable. The particularly interesting but also heartbreaking part is that if they survived, the protagonists of these transgressive events are always narrated in the third person and as deviant. They never tell the story in first person because they could not; it is a radicalized mechanism of what Patrick described. In order to tell the story of your life, you need to be virtuous or to atone. But someone marked as a monster is a priori sinful and therefore must remain voiceless. This narrative erasure is so significant here because, as Laura Jockusch and Alexandra Garbarini have pointed out, bearing witness is so crucial for people who survived mass violence. It’s really worthwhile to think about the meaning of people rendered “monsters” on the basis of their sexual behavior. When we look at what it is that a society marks as perverse we can draw conclusions about how societal norms are made and what the role of these norms is. Social rules are something that defines what a society is, and they can be otherwise really hard to get at. Gender and sexuality indeed work as a litmus test and are thus key for us to understand what is at the heart of a society.

Doris Bergen

For me, thinking about gender has been incredibly valuable for addressing that persistent question: how did the Holocaust happen? Rather than looking directly at the killers, I focus on what you might call supporters and enablers of the Nazi system: the German Christians, the *Volksdeutschen*, and the Wehrmacht chaplains. In every case, I've been struck by how people invoke and perform gender to navigate extreme circumstances, justify and cover up violence, and shift blame. Like religion, gender is a powerful normalizer because it's both woven into the routines of daily life and enshrined in the frameworks people use to make sense of their lives through judgments about tradition, morality, legitimacy, and honor.

Patrick's suggestion that gender might help "link the 'core' of Holocaust Studies with its margins" applies to perpetrators and their accomplices, too. It's more than 30 years since Claudia Koonz published *Mothers in the Fatherland*, but her insight that non-Jewish German women served Nazism through their domestic roles remains essential to analyzing systemic violence. Even earlier, Gitta Sereny showed that the wife of Franz Stangl (commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka) played a key supporting role in his career ascent and descent "into that darkness". Studying gender gives us tools to examine the dynamics of unequal relationships and the stabilizing and destabilizing effects of intimacy. In extremely violent circumstances, the stakes of such relationships get terrifyingly high.

I'm interested in the tensions in constructs of gender (and religion and ethnicity), because they tend to spark spiraling actions and reactions. There's quite a bit of literature, old and new, on the instability of Nazi gender categories – think about Klaus Theweleit, who so vividly drew attention to the volatile misogyny of the Freikorps. I remember coming across the Protestant hero Martin Niemöller in *Male Fantasies* and feeling simultaneously shocked and not at all surprised. Maybe that combination of shock and familiarity is why we have to keep rediscovering gender and sexuality, which are so wrapped up in everyday lives yet so unsettling when they burst into view amid violence.

Anna's reminder to be attentive to "narrativity" made me think about a stock narrative in Holocaust and genocide education: "dehumanization." That storyline – "Nazis didn't see their victims as people" – buffers "us" from the violent past, but looking at gender shatters that comforting divide. At Yad Vashem I found the US military interrogation of Johannes Müller, an SD official who was questioned about Odilo Globocnik and Hermann Höfle, the heads of Operation Reinhard. Both had carried out horrific massacres of Jewish children. Müller reported hearing Globocnik tell Höfle about his three-year-old niece: "Listen, I can't even stand to look at that little one if I think about those other kids." What did it mean for killers to see themselves as uncles and fathers to children so like those they murdered that they grabbed up pairs of their underwear to send home to their own families? Using a gendered lens helps to defamiliarize the Holocaust, a task I've increasingly come to see as essential.

Elissa Mailänder

Perpetrators are indeed so much more complex than historians used to think, and zooming in on gender and sexuality really nuances the picture. Take the concentration camp personnel. They lived right next to the camps, in the so-called SS housing estate, and commanding officers were even allowed to bring their families. One of my favorite anecdotes is Johann Schwarzhuber's son getting lost in Auschwitz. As Hermann Langbein recalled, the search for the child was frantic, but at least he could not have been gassed since no deportation train was scheduled for that day. When they finally found him, someone came up with a brilliant

solution: from now on the boy would wear a sign around his neck identifying him as the son of the camp compound leader.

This incident is telling because it shows that the boundaries between the domestic “safe space” and the camp universe of killing were porous. Sure the Schwarzhuber family lived in a parallel world, but it was impossible to ignore what happened outside. The anecdote further shows how ordinary and accepted violence and mass killing were. This brings me to another point: applying a gendered perspective to mass violence helps us recognize and evaluate low-level agency and grassroots political implications – of German women, for instance. Of course, Nazism was not particularly concerned with women’s rights; few women had access to political leadership and only camp guards and “euthanasia” personnel were directly involved in violent actions. However, this does not make women victims of Nazism, nor did it turn them into opponents.

As Elizabeth Harvey, Franka Maubach and others have demonstrated, around two million “Aryan” women were what we might call second-tier agents of terror. At different levels and stages of their “careers,” these mostly unmarried women in their twenties and thirties helped implement policies of discrimination while working in welfare, education, and charitable work, domestically and in the occupied territories. There is, however, a class bias we have to take into account: although Nazism claimed to level social differences, the regime recruited uneducated, working-class women as camp guards to do the “dirty work” (Everett Hughes), whereas educated, middle-class women served as colonial workers, educators, and secretaries within the Wehrmacht and SS. It all gets even trickier when we look at the majority of German women, what we might call the supporting cast of genocide.

National Socialism—as an ideology and *modus operandi*—spawned new taxonomic relationships between the sexes that are best understood by applying the categories of race, class, and gender. Doris mentioned the pioneering work of Theweleit. It is no surprise that the first work on proto-fascist, perpetrator masculinities was done in 1977 by a *Literaturwissenschaftler* and sociologist, not a historian. I would add Raewyn Connell’s gender sociology that helps reflect on power dynamics and imbalances within and between the sexes. By now masculinity studies have convincingly shown that being in a subordinate or marginal position does not necessarily render a man powerless nor does it mean that this person is on the “good” or “safe” side. It’s high time for a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy and a focus on “*emphasized femininities*” (Connell/Messerschmidt). What role did German women play in establishing a fascist, heteronormative dictatorship and Nazi genocide? To answer this question, we need to recognize and further theorize the female everyday collusion to patriarchy and fascism.

Atina Grossmann

Working with gender as a key category of analysis has always been my “common sense,” surely because my identity as a historian and academic is inextricably connected to my generational experience in the women’s movement, but perhaps also because I did not start as a Holocaust Studies scholar. I started out as a historian of modern Germany, focused on periods – the Weimar Republic, National Socialism, and the immediate postwar – when the body, reproduction, and sexuality were clearly central to everyday life and to the workings of political power. When I rather gingerly inched my way into Holocaust research, through the back door, that is, by studying its aftermath, I carried that “lens” with me and it proved enormously fruitful, indeed indispensable, for what turned out to be my main arguments. My conclusions about the “close encounters” between Jews and Germans after the war relied to a large degree on research about reproduction and sexuality; particularly the ways in which the Jewish DP “baby boom” was linked to interactions with German nannies, household help, and

medical personnel. If selective population policy and the extermination of the racial other's body and capacity to reproduce was the core of genocide, then the insistence on « life reborn » and the recovery of the gendered body (as well as, it must be said, mostly conventional gender roles) was crucial to Jewish survivor communities in allied-occupied Germany, and involved multiple complex encounters with Germans and Allies. My longstanding assumption that following the gender trail would always guide my research agenda has, however, been much harder to sustain in my current research on "Remapping Survival."

My difficulties in immediately situating gender as a category in my recent work push me to think about what has changed, in my topics and in feminist research. I am struck by Anna's point that the narrative silences in testimony are especially frustrating because "bearing witness" is so important to survivors; certainly first person accounts, by victims, but also as Elissa and Doris note, by perpetrators, have become more and more critical to Holocaust studies in general. Indeed, it may well have been feminists' facility with teasing out and contextualizing the "personal" in the "political" – or historical – that generated the distinctive insights of our scholarship on the Holocaust (consider Arlene Stein's nexus of second generation narratives and "coming out" culture or Zoe Waxman's foregrounding of testimony in her "feminist" history of gender and the Holocaust). Moreover, well before any of us were ready to work on the Holocaust, second wave feminist research on National Socialism was significantly driven by (then!) young German women historians' confrontation with their own mothers' unexpectedly positive memories of (homosocial) youth in the Third Reich, as captured in Annemarie Tröger's oral history project at the FU Berlin, precisely the combination of shock and familiarity Doris flags. We would do well to revisit that trajectory – which I can trace in my own development within the NY based German Women's History Group – from research on National Socialism (including Gudrun Schwarz's early work on masculinity and the SS) to the questions animating this Roundtable.

Q 2: *What are the traps and gaps of a gendered historical approach on the Holocaust? Reflecting on your own work, which are the blind spots that you identify? What do you leave un-reflected?*

Doris Bergen

There are so many! One blind spot is actually a good problem to have: with so much to look at, it can be hard to see. I hear about dissertations, books, articles, and movies being produced in Israel, Poland, the Netherlands, and other places, in disciplines and languages I don't know, and it gives me a thrill but also makes me realize I'm missing a lot.

A thornier problem is the failure to integrate the work that has been done into what is still a canon in Holocaust studies. I taught my first course on Gender and the Holocaust in 1992, and if I had a dollar for every paper I've graded that begins, "Only recently have scholars of the Holocaust begun to look at [fill in the blank: women/gender/sexuality/gender variability]," I would be rich by now! It's like we need to rediscover these issues every year, all over again.

Why is this? I can think of several explanations (and they might all be valid). Some people say they want to incorporate gender but don't know how: they lack training, dislike theory, or are afraid of being criticized if they get it wrong. Or maybe people ignore work on gender and sexuality because they don't consider it important in addressing "big questions" about the Holocaust. Finally – and most serious – it seems there's still a fear of being sidelined or pigeon-holed if you focus on these matters.

In the existing scholarship, age remains a blind spot, especially old age and its intersections with gender. Elizabeth Strauss wrote a wonderful dissertation on elderly Jews in the Łódź ghetto that raises many questions about men, women, and how they/we age. One speaker at our Women's Narratives event in March 2018 was a gerontologist, Paula David. She analyzed family secrets and the impact of aging on oral histories (their content and how they're received) in ways I found profound and completely new.

There are also some gaps around comparisons. Dorota Głowacka has raised the need to decolonize Holocaust studies, and I'm convinced she's right. Gender is a valuable place to make connections, though there's still a tendency to reduce women's victimization to sexual violence, define sexual violence narrowly as rape, and in the process erase women and other victims as persons. Fortunately Regina Mühlhäuser, Gaby Zipfel, and the international group, "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict," [SVAC] are doing critical work to counter those old habits.

More blind spots surround disability. Could thinking about gender, sexuality, and bodies help us not lose sight of these issues and people who lived them? Patricia Heberer-Rice at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum is working to "put a face" on the "faceless crimes" of Nazi "euthanasia." She recently gave a talk at my university. The turn-out was good, but looking around, I recognized many in the audience as people with learning, mobility, or hearing disabilities (including me). Did no one else think the topic was important? Is this the flip side of linking identity and scholarship – I only care if it's about me?

Elissa Mailänder

Amen to that! Let me begin with an anecdote about France. Back when I was a PhD candidate working on female SS guards and workaday violence at Majdanek, whenever I applied for French scholarships, friends who proofread my prose would kindly warn me: "Do you *really* want to mention 'gender'? That might irritate the jury; maybe safer just to put 'women' instead." This was the early 2000s when gender was not yet a prized research category in France nor was it considered worthy of mainstream teaching. Ten years later, everything changed, as students started to ask specifically for gender in the curriculum, just as they had in the 1960s with *herstory*. I was hired in 2012 because I did "serious" research on violence, perpetrators, and war, but the fact that I could teach gender classes suddenly became an asset.

Looking at these "energies from below" it's encouraging to see specifically undergraduate students from different disciplines engage with sex and gender as an analytical category in war and Holocaust studies. However, when I look at History as a discipline and (Holocaust) historians as a guild, I am less optimistic. First, for most of my male but also female colleagues in France and Germany, "gender" is a synonym for "women" and thus a "niche" research field mainly for female scholars. Second, most people frame gender as female/male relations and interactions, which is limiting since gender is about so much more! And third, Holocaust historians still tend to insist on the "hard facts" and "proof" and to surrender to the archive as the ultimate standard of veracity.

That said, some self-criticism is needed: no wonder students increasingly link identity with research, as Doris mentioned; women historians too reduce gender and intersectionality to categories of identity. This is becoming a huge epistemological problem, as Dubravka Zarkov from the SVAC group recently pointed out. Yes, Kimberle Crenshaw developed intersectionality as a tool of social critique in the political struggle of the late 1980s. But as Zarkov emphasized, the concept also analyzed social relations of power within activist groups and across a larger socio-political landscape. I think we are losing this dimension in

Holocaust studies because we tend to essentialize agency and our historical agents. By focusing on structural violence and exclusion, for instance, we take a linear approach that freezes the people we study into categories: victims, perpetrators, women, gays. Or to give another example: gender historians usually focus either on men or women and in the process perpetuate static binaries of male domination and female subordination.

I find it extremely difficult simultaneously to investigate the politics of femininities and masculinities within and between classes, ethnic groups, or sexual orientations. It is so hard to capture the positionality of our historical agents and to acknowledge the asymmetries and contradictions within gender dynamics. I say, let's do less "feel good" history and do more of a three-dimensional history that explores the width, height, and depth of power relations. Maybe it will take more team work, but let's explore the multidimensionality of our agents – be they men, women, Jews, gentiles, working- or upper-class, abled, disabled, old, young, gay or straight.

Anna Hájková

The good news is that now women and gender are often included in mainstream Holocaust studies; the bad news is that the way it is done is not always intellectually productive. Like Elissa says, gender is usually reduced to women. What is even worse, they are often singled out in "and now a few pages on women," which deal with topics like abortions, sexual violence, childbirth, and prostitution. This approach really undermines the potential of gender and women's history. Occasionally, studies dealing with gender reduce it to sexual violence or the authors slide into the sexualization of women. Of course the readership is curious to learn about sexual violence – in a twisted way, it's a "sexy" topic – but we need to avoid the voyeuristic gaze. We also need to treat the victims of sexual violence as people, not objects! I recall reading a colleague's manuscript where he used the example of a rape to prove a different point, but he wrote not another word about the woman beyond the fact that she was assaulted.

We are still missing more analytical gender histories of concentration camps and even more so of ghettos. The works of Maja Suderland and Nik Wachsmann provide a really wonderful base to build on, and of course there are many, often very astute, case studies of single concentration camps. Eventually, Sarah Cushman's and Na'ama Shik's dissertations on the women's camp in Birkenau will come out as books in English. But other than Kim Wünschmann's book, there are actually very few good studies that analyze prisoner society beyond one camp. A significant lacuna is masculinity of the victims; Kim, Maja Suderland, Robert Sommer, Maddey Carey, and I have worked on prisoner masculinity, but there are many more topics to be explored: How are ethnicity and groupness expressed through gender roles, various habitus, class and age groups in the camps, a topic raised by Doris? What can we learn about gender when we examine how it played out in the concentration camps? Jane Caplan raised this issue in 2009 and it is just as salient today. Insa Eschebach's work on homophobia in the camps is particularly inspiring here.

One issue that we are aware of, but little work has been done on, is the intersection of gender and narrativity: we know that women survivors wrote their testimonies somewhat less often than men, were less likely to publish them, and their memoirs did not become successful as often. There is a source bias and it's important to keep it in mind. It would be very informative to learn about how differently men and women narrate, over various genres – letters, diaries, early testimonies, oral histories, and published memoirs. In my work on the legal testimonies of Holocaust survivors I found that men witnesses were often perceived as

the more reliable, factual informants, whereas women came to report on the emotional dimension of the catastrophe.

Atina Grossmann

To echo Doris, “There are so many!” Somehow the more we know, the more challenging it becomes to insist on the “ordinariness” and “comparability” of our subjects while also recognizing the limits of our understanding. I am still never quite prepared for the shock with which students, inundated daily with violent imagery, respond year after year, to *Night and Fog*. Some are taken aback when viewing original footage or photographs of the victims; they are so *young*, they say, as if surprised, because, with all our emphasis on memory, they had grown accustomed to thinking about survivors as elderly, well-dressed people with accents talking into a camera. Or, I will suddenly stop and blurt out to my students, “they were *your age*.” At the same time, picking up on Doris’ point about age, I am brought up short when I realize that the “elderly” women, my grandmothers, who remained behind in Berlin to be deported after their sons and daughters had managed to escape, were respectively younger and barely older than I am now. As feminists trained to think in terms of “subject position,” we haven’t perhaps reflected enough on how our own sense of research priorities might shift with age and life-cycle; whether, for example, we focus on motherhood and sexuality or age and disability.

Moreover, we still have trouble integrating the study of “victims” and “perpetrators” (which Elissa and Doris bridge), between history and memory studies, between Holocaust and comparative genocide research, and (certainly in my work) between “history” and family “memoir,” while at the same time making sure to foreground gender in all those projects. My current research on a long neglected topic, Polish Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union (after all, the largest group of East European Jews to survive the Final Solution), highlights the ways general blind spots compound those we face in the study of gender and sexuality. Ironically, our immense progress in writing about “gender and” or “women and” or the “politics of sexuality in,” or, indeed, the widespread adoption of Doris’s textbook, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (now in its third edition!) which matter-of-factly includes gender, has empowered us to embark on more broadly conceived studies that dispense with such specific themes – where, to my chagrin, I find myself struggling to re-insert gender as the key category I *know* it is. This is especially the case with a topic where so much basic research (in multiple languages and regions) remains to be done and there are no rich layers of prior scholarship to build on, complement, and critique.

It really shouldn’t be so hard. Given the “belated” nature of this work, one would expect that it could from the outset incorporate the insights of existing feminist scholarship about the intersecting significance of gender, age, and family, as well as (u.a.) gendered (including male) experiences of sexual violence, instrumental sexuality, family tensions and solidarity, and the centrality of mothers in survivor memory. Yet, my own, mostly uncharted, research terrain has only accentuated questions about how best to position gender and sexuality in Holocaust studies.

Patrick Farges

As a global phenomenon, the Holocaust affected multiple lives and families in multiple ways. Like Elissa, I think our challenge – and probably one of the blind spots – is to take into account the multidimensionality of this historical experience, which includes gender and sexuality. But how do we do justice to the connected perspectives of the persons who lived these lives? I guess this – among other dimensions – has to do with how we handle scale in

our work: How can we look at the intimate and personal, at the individual and the family level, and yet not lose track of the global aspect?

For instance, what do we do with family histories and the Holocaust? Doris has pointed to the ‘family narrative’ in her response, and I know Atina is both interested in a sort of “family turn” that seems to be happening in Holocaust history, and at the same time skeptical, as this sometimes threatens to overrun gendered approaches. In some cases, though, focusing on families helps us approach a form of integrated microhistory of the Holocaust. In my book on refugees in Canada in the 1930s, I dedicated a chapter to writing the history of a German-Jewish family from Düsseldorf from multiple perspectives, because this was based on the self-narratives of various members of this family: a mother, a father, two sons born in the 1930s, and one son born after the war. The family’s emigration history began in March 1933 when the father, banned from exerting his profession as a judge, left Germany and emigrated to Amsterdam. His wife soon joined him, and two sons were born in the Netherlands. After Germany invaded the country in 1940, each family member lived a different experience of the Holocaust. These ranged from emigration to deportation, from being *ondergedoken* (hidden) in a Catholic family to surviving Bergen-Belsen.

This fragmented experience of the Holocaust was determined by gender, age, life experience, individual character, chance... and other important aspects, like the possibility to ‘pass’ as non-Jewish. And yet this fragmented story must also be taken as a whole, because the nuclear family was ultimately reunited in Montreal after the war (while numerous members of the extended family perished in the Holocaust). It is a profoundly intersectional family history that was narrated at different times from different perspectives. The mother’s unpublished memoir (written in English) ends with: “Only when one has the same experience as you, we understand each other without words.” But what exactly had these individuals experienced – both individually and as family? I think a gendered analysis can help us grasp some of those aspects, as gender (and age) did shape trajectories in the global phenomenon of the Holocaust. And I find Zoë Waxman in her latest book – though she focuses on women in what seems to be a ‘traditional’ women’s perspective – has actually done a wonderful job in exploring the multiple layers of gendered relationships and kinship dynamics, and the ways in which the microsocial fabric was violently dismantled.

Q3: *Where are women's history and feminism in relation to queer history? Is this a particular blind spot?*

Anna Hájková

I sometimes feel that queer theory tends to ignore feminism: many of the issues at the heart of queer history owe a lot to women’s history/second wave feminism. However, queer history does not acknowledge this legacy very much; a colleague once called it ‘gay men talking about gay men.’ Queer history is not free of patriarchal structures.

And yet feminist and queer histories have plenty in common, most important their political charge in the struggle for sovereignty of interpretation. Both women’s and queer history are so charged because gender is so pregnant with meaning, so ingrained and basic. These fields disturb and transgress because, as Pierre Bourdieu stated for sociology, but it’s just as valid for gender history, “the particular difficulty of sociology comes from the fact that it teaches things that everybody knows in a way but which they don’t want to know or cannot know

because the law of the system is to hide those things from them.” Women’s and gender history as well as queer history undermine this system, because they describe the patriarchal structures in which we live. Even more, both fields criticize oppressive patriarchal history to overturn it in favor of a more inclusive history with various actors, different questions, a different chronology, and different sources. I want to stress here the significance of questioning what is “important history” and whether there is such a thing. This questioning is what makes feminist and queer history so subversive and why both have often been ignored or laughed at.

The ongoing struggle for a memorial for lesbian victims in Ravensbrück is evidence of how transgressive it is to place lesbians into an existing master narrative. There has been harsh criticism from survivors who see lesbians through the ongoing homophobic prism: Lesbian prisoners were either described as “asocial” or perverse and therefore unworthy of being commemorated. More criticism came from representatives of gay men’s associations, who de facto bring in a hierarchy of suffering thus deeming lesbian victims unimportant, and even some historians, who reject the proof of Nazi persecution of lesbians as insubstantial. Many historians also refuse to recognize that Nazis persecuted lesbians because in Germany, they did not fall under Paragraph 175. But they still were persecuted, socially ostracized and thus vulnerable to denunciation. The sources only rarely mention their sexual orientation, and so the lesbian victims are without an archive, history, or commemoration.

And so lesbians often fall entirely out of history. They are women and gay, and so doubly marginalized. It is no accident that the very few self-testimonies of homosexuals who were persecuted as Jews (Jerry Rosenstein, Walter Guttman, Gad Beck) are all men. It takes an incredible amount of digging to unearth the histories of persecuted lesbians – the work of Claudia Schoppmann has been incredibly important – and I can really confirm this for women who were deported for being Jewish and who engaged in same sex conduct. The sexuality of these women, if they are mentioned at all, is often erased, and this research for a long time was pushed into the LGBT history corner and barely acknowledged by mainstream Holocaust history. While German history has embraced queer history (see Jennifer Evans’ fantastic special issue of this journal), there is a gobsmacking blind spot at the intersection of Holocaust and queer histories. Yet excitingly, things are changing, as demonstrated by the fantastic work of Laurie Marhoefer, which came out in *American Historical Review*.

Elissa Mailänder

Excellent point, gender seems obvious because it is so deeply rooted in society and structures us, whereas queer, by definition, is what goes against the norm. Laurie Marhoefer did something great by analyzing the case of Ilse Totzke, a presumed lesbian who liked to cross dress. Totzke was denounced by her neighbors because of the absence of male visitors, but it was not clear what bothered these people more, her lesbianism or her closeness to Jews with whom she kept contact long after the Nuremberg Laws. It was certainly her helping Jews that most interested the Gestapo. Totzke was, however, quite unusual because she actively resisted Nazi regulations.

Non-Jewish Germans with same sex preferences were nonetheless full members of the *Volkgemeinschaft* and therefore could contribute at an everyday level to the larger processes of normalizing Nazism. Some might even have reinforced race-based inequality, domination, and exploitation. And even those who opposed the dictatorship and actively resisted, for instance by hiding Jews, did not live in a bubble but had to pretend, outside their homes, to be “good” Germans in order not to attract attention. People at the margins too are an active part

of what Foucault and Thompson called a *field of force*. It's impossible to pull out of power relations, whether on a structural level or within social micro-dynamics.

As much as I welcome and sustain the need for more research on marginalized groups, in this case gay historiography or even the niche of lesbian studies, I am also very critical towards "identity historiography." There is so much need for integrated history; we can't just focus on the margins and pretend they are not part of a larger Nazi society. We need not only to triangulate "victims," "bystanders," and perpetrators but also to take "men" and "women" equally seriously and think the "straight" and "queer" segments of society together.

Maren Röger found examples of married German or ethnic German employers in occupied Poland who abused their racial power to force young Polish men into sex. Do we consider these harassers to be queer? Are they gay? I share Jack Halberstam's skepticism about queer historiography that merely concentrates on political engagement and enlightenment, "success and succession," as he puts it. Why is it so hard to look at the dark and compromising sides when it comes to queerness, but also women? Why is it so difficult to recognize contradictions and multiple affiliations? And how can we conceptualize the asymmetries of power relations without congealing identities?

For me "queer" is not only a synonym for gay but a way to ask questions about what goes *against* the norm. It is about challenging our most basic assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality. Hence one could ask: how queer were the Nazi leaders? Not that I am particularly interested in those guys; I go more for the second, third, and fourth tier. However, if I had to pick one I'd try to gender and queer the minister of propaganda: ambitious, competitive, 165 cm small and with a disability, he was a prolific husband and lover and a vicious writer and thinker. How do these qualities puzzle together to explain the masculinity of this top ideologue?

Doris Bergen

I want to underscore Anna's point about the subversive value of queer and feminist histories, and also second Elissa's insistence on an integrated approach. We need both of those positions, I think, (and the tension between them) to analyze the self-reinforcing dynamics of oppression – and to be alert to the ways that academic and commemorative practices can end up reproducing those systems.

Laurie Marhoefer's article, already mentioned, demonstrates the multiplier effect of homophobia in a nexus of suspicion, denunciation, and destruction. Totzke's neighbors were hostile because of her gender non-conformity, the Gestapo attacked her for obstructing the regime's goal of destroying Jews, and these intersecting vectors killed her. There's plenty of evidence of other multi-directional assaults. As grounds for selecting some asylum patients for death, the infamous "euthanasia" physician Friedrich Mennecke noted that they were homosexual. Nanda Herbermann, a devout Catholic imprisoned in Ravensbrück, disparaged lesbians in the camp as prostitutes and vilified sex workers as lesbians. As Geoffrey Giles has shown, class played a major role in determining who was busted, prosecuted, and incarcerated under Paragraph 175 (and who was not) – so did political allegiances and family connections.

Just starting to think about queer history has given me some ideas about the Wehrmacht chaplains I've been working on. In Hitler's Germany, Christian chaplains were on the defensive, viewed by soldiers and Nazi leaders as weak and "womanly." Their eagerness to prove themselves and perform their militarized manliness helps explain their pliability. I used

to wonder why the Military Bishops said nothing when their old friends Blomberg and Fritsch (minister of war and commander-in-chief of the army) were fired in 1938. Then, while telling my class about the charges – that Blomberg’s wife was a prostitute and Fritsch a homosexual – it dawned on me that those accusations were perfectly chosen to prevent solidarity with the disgraced men. Who was going to stick his neck out for a superior shamed in that way?

Looking at Holocaust/Gender/Queer studies I feel a mix of optimism and pessimism. As Anna notes, there are exciting developments, including her work! Yet she’s an exception in our discipline, History. In gloomy moments, I wonder if there’s actually less historical research at this node now than there was 20 or 25 years ago. I remember the thrill in the 1990s of hearing George Mosse, John Fout, Claudia Schoppmann, Günter Grau, Christa Schikorra, Geoffrey Giles, Klaus Müller, and others. Some of that work has never been published, and the publications that do exist are not well integrated.

Holocaust memorialization raises additional questions. As an undergraduate, Frances Tanzer (now a PhD student at Brown) studied how Holocaust museums in the US and Canada present persecution of homosexuals. A number of museums, she noticed, had nothing about gay men in their permanent exhibits (and certainly nothing about lesbians or trans people) but included the subject in public programming. According to one museum professional, those programs were necessary to connect with high school students, who care about sexuality. And the rest of us?

Atina Grossmann

I’m sensing an odd and problematic, paradox or “dissimultaneity” in Holocaust studies. On the one hand, we are seeing new attention to research – and commemoration – in regard to queer experience as well as analysis about what “queer” – still a (perhaps deliberately) blurry and capacious term – readings of that history could reveal. Anna points to the memorial event at Ravensbrück, which has been a very long time coming, given how significant that memorial site has been for research on women and National Socialism/Holocaust, as well as for historians who identify as feminist and/or lesbian/queer. We could also consider a wide range of popular culture references: the backdrop of Magnus Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin and the assault on trans identity by the Nazis in the hit series *Transparent* or even the earlier popularity of the novel and film *Aimée and Jaguar*.

At the same time, I observe what we might term a “family turn” in Holocaust studies, which builds on, but also explicitly challenges, feminist “gender” research that has finally gained traction. It aims to escape the gender “binary” not by considering queer elements but by (re)instantiating family as the key entity within which decisions were made, agency expressed, and persecution experienced, arguing that for Jews and Roma, “to divide men and women into separate categories is to privilege gender above what might have been an even more crucial element of their identities,” (so the CfP for a recent conference foregrounding “the family”). I find this extremely difficult and bewildering to write about because current work, informed by the “Family Perspective” is actually revelatory and produced by outstanding scholars (such as Eliyana Adler, Natalia Aleksion, Joanna Michlic, Dalia Ofer). Yet, it troubles me, especially given the general political “backlash,” certainly in the U.S. and Eastern Europe. While “family” is unquestionably a critical research context, gender remains a fundamental category of analysis, to cite Joan Scott’s classic formulation, “a primary way of signifying relationships of power.” In other words, we can and do get to family from gender but do not necessarily get to gender or sexuality from family, thereby missing much that queer approaches, alert to non-familial experience, might illuminate.

And there is so much there, even if, as Anna knows too well, it's frustratingly hard to document. Patrick's work on German-Jewish masculinities conjures up my "Weimar Berlin" parents, defiantly matter-of-fact (sex reform *Sachlichkeit*) about gay relationships and with (*Yekke*) contempt for American sexual philistinism. My uncle wrote his Dr. med. thesis on the "Third Sex" at Hirschfeld's Institute but then, "safe" as an internist in Hartford, Connecticut, destroyed his letters and papers during the McCarthy years. Or, how do we get to non-familial relationships in the postwar DP camps, when both non-heterosexual and non-reproductive behavior was "unspeakable" in the powerfully pro-natalist ethos of a decimated people? Furthermore, if memory is already, in its subjectivity, feminized and if, as Dorota Glowacka argues, women's memories are additionally subject to a higher level of scrutiny and suspicion than men's, how might that research dynamic change if we apply a queer lens?

Patrick Farges

I like Elissa's statement that 'queering' is about asking questions that challenge gendered and sexual norms. The result is that 'queering the Holocaust' can go in several directions: it's a new territory. I definitely agree with Anna when she underscores that queer history should not be solely 'gay men talking about gay men.' Queering the Holocaust is about enriching our understanding of the mechanisms and hierarchies that made a difference between life and death. By highlighting the ways in which sexualized stigmatizations intersect with other forms of domination and continue to shape contemporary societies and cultures, we deepen research on the Holocaust. Given that homophobia cannot be reduced to an aberration in history, 'queering the Holocaust' also helps us understand the ways in which homophobia continues to find expression in a post-Holocaust world. As Anna has shown in her work, among thousands of testimonies of Holocaust survivors, we hear but a few queer voices.

I can confirm that what is true at the "core" of the Holocaust is also true at its margins, as my interest in the German-speaking refugees has shown. Concerning my project on *Yekkes* in Palestine/Israel, I found but a few examples of queer voices (Anna already mentioned Gad Beck). Here I would like to highlight Ofri Ilany's and Moshe Sluhovsky's ongoing, thrilling project on queer *Yekkes* in Israel. Let's see what his findings are...

I encountered the "queer question" when studying the all-male environment of interned refugees in Canada. Although there existed a history of internment in Canada (and elsewhere), especially with regard to internment practices during the World Wars, the reshaping of masculinity in detention had received little attention, despite the insightful work that exists on male-bonding in a military context. The microcosm of the internment camp offers a pertinent space to study interactions between men through which subordination was part of everyday practices. Gender, masculinity, and sexuality translated into micro-practices of power. My point is that studying male hierarchies (according to class, religion, age, and sexual domination) is a way of queering the Holocaust. In the case of the internment of "enemy aliens," masculinity constituted a dimension present both in the practices within the internment camps and in the rationale for interning solely men (because they were seen as the 'real' enemy). Thus gender played a role in deciding whether you were transferred to Canada or not.

Far from being non-visible, unmarked and disembodied, the internees' masculinities at the margins of the Holocaust were marked through practices, constraints and routines that affected the men's bodies and sexualities. For instance, the camps' kitchens became strategic places where sexual economies (and phantasies) took place. Internment ended up being a dense period of social, gendered, and – in a sense – 'queer' interactions in these men's lives,

as their veteran memory culture shows. The social, religious, and sexual relations the “Camp Boys” (as they called themselves) were confronted with in the “*Männerküche*” became part of the masculine identity toolkit they took with them after being released.

Q4 *How do we situate ourselves as scholars in the world? How do we integrate our political engagement and our scholarship? How does applying gender and sexuality in Holocaust and genocide research impact political engagement, and what is specifically political to working as historians of sexuality and gender in the Holocaust?*

Atina Grossmann

My formation as a historian coincides both with the political impulses of second wave feminism and the early development of women’s studies within the academy. In the 1970s and 1980s my political commitments aligned remarkably well with the emerging scholarship on women, sexuality and National Socialism, and collective demands for recognition within the academy. Today, with both gender and Holocaust studies legitimized within universities (although still not well integrated with each other), teaching and working within academia matters in new and urgent ways. Every news story cries out, it seems, for an Op Ed, a signature on a petition, or a presence in the streets. We are debating whether universities can be “sanctuaries,” for civil discourse as well as for endangered human beings; the polemical use of Holocaust memory to serve entirely polarized political views – always an issue – has escalated; Margaret Atwood’s 1985 dystopian fiction, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, in which women’s roles as victims, accomplices, and perpetrators define a deeply misogynistic totalitarian society, streams as a much discussed television series. We are living in a historical moment for which none of our practiced roles – as scholars, professors, and activists – have really prepared us and when it comes to our political engagement – as feminist historians of the Holocaust – I think we are making it up as we go along, especially since, despite our transnational networks we still operate in distinct national contexts.

We are confronting assaults on reproductive rights and on queer, gay, and trans identities as well as the mobilization of debates about women’s bodies and attire at the same time as a new populist turn (if that is the right term) calls for our analysis of “fascism,” xenophobia, and the entangled politics of anti-feminism, antisemitism, and racism. Moreover, our increasingly diverse students and colleagues are, at least in my experience, much less inclined to accept the “privileged” status of either women or the Holocaust as objects of study (a very recent “privilege” but perceived as such nonetheless). Students insist on including masculinity(ies) and men’s experiences as well as more fluid and “intersectional” notions of identity in examinations of gender. Even as we aim to highlight gender in broader examinations of everyday experience during the Holocaust, we also face pressing questions about the specific or exceptional status of Holocaust studies in the context of a fading “memory boom” and the rise of comparative genocide studies.

Indeed, for gender scholars, the trajectory of attention to other genocides “threatening” to displace the centrality of the Shoah has in some ways been reversed; the acknowledged centrality of sexuality, reproduction, and sexual violence in contemporary instances of genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass violence, can now serve to frame, undergird, and legitimize feminist research on the Holocaust. The challenge of linking those issues while also figuring out how to responsibly deploy our time and knowledge, to balance our need to be both activists and scholars, and to define how relevant our “business as usual” can and should be, is quite dizzying and daunting.

Doris Bergen

Atina has articulated some of the thoughts crashing around in my head, too, including the sense of urgency right now and the importance of our specific contexts and the perils and privileges that come with them. Here's a reality check: a woman I know graduated from college the same year I did (1982), she in Damascus, I in Saskatoon, Canada. Both of us were good students, proud of the educated women in our families. Now I'm a tenured professor, and she's a refugee, her life upended, country shattered, and family dispersed across three continents.

I think studying the Holocaust has helped me develop certain insights into how systems of oppression function – but I'm not sure it means I can expect people to listen to me ... other than in my class! Even there I can do a lot. I try to open students up to the communities around us and, following Arendt, to encourage thinking and friendship. Last term I taught an undergraduate seminar on Religion and Violence. We moved backward chronologically, starting with Rwanda and Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and this reversal served to de-center the discourse of “violent Islam” that seems almost inescapable today. Students created amazing projects on topics and in formats that they chose themselves. One person made a scrapbook to depict the assault on Indigenous children in Canadian residential schools and the many ways those children and their families fought back for their rights. Another student, a musician, wanted to do a project on music and Indigenous cultures, but she was worried about appropriation and told me she'd decided to switch to another topic. I suggested she first meet with our colleagues at First Nations House. The Elder in Residence, Andrew Wesley, was so helpful and encouraging – it was a striking reminder to her (and to me) of how empowering and even transformative just talking and listening to other people can be. Most of what I feel I know about everyday forms of political engagement I've learned from friend-colleagues in other fields: Anna Shternshis, Melanie Newton, Nhung Tran, Mita Choudhury.

Even in the privileged realm I occupy, there is backlash. Recently we hosted an event on Women's Narratives of the Holocaust. We had five brilliant panelists, four women and one man, Golan Moskowitz from Brandeis. Of the many people we considered inviting, Golan was the only man. We could not think of many men who would be interested in engaging in the discussion (and it was too expensive to bring Patrick from France!) What does that say? And some audience members acted out: the panel was “navel gazing,” one announced in the Q&A; it imposed a “feminist agenda,” another complained. An hour after it ended, two men were still in the room, and they bullied the student assistants (young women) who asked them to leave so they could lock up. Was it a coincidence that this sort of trouble has come up only once in many years: after a panel on women and the Holocaust?

Patrick Farges

I definitely agree with Doris that there should be more men interested in a gendered history of the Holocaust! To continue with what Atina and Doris have just pointed out, I would like to speak from my own perspective as a scholar who these days is witnessing extreme violence in France (and elsewhere). I think what happened in Paris, Nice and, as I am writing these lines, London, hits close... And as a teacher, I feel my students need to make sense of it. We live in rich societies that produce gendered difference and violence... pretending that this violence is not home-grown. But the perpetrators of the recent attacks in Europe are (mainly) children of our societies. We've all gone to the same schools, we've all been watching the same TV-programs, etc. So we really cannot think in terms of “us” against “them.”

What I know from my own research on Germany or Israel is that individuals, families and entire societies get used to high levels of violence. Societies do cope with violent images, violent speeches, and violent acts, although this comes at a cost. There is a growing prevalence of un-reflected hate-speech going on in our contemporary societies, even sometimes in our classrooms and on our campuses. I think what we can do is to continue engaging in transhistorical projects involving the study of texts and language, and ask what hate-speech actually “does” over time. For instance, insults and hate-speech produce marked bodies. Concluding from my own research, I can say that antisemitic hate-speech did alter young Jewish men’s gendered identities and that it shaped their postures and gestures and the way their bodies moved in space. Consequently, it also affected their self-projections and self-realizations.

Our engagement with political issues should highlight to what extent gendered mechanisms help maintain violence because they create elites and ‘chosen’ ones. These mechanisms range from male-bonding, *Kameradschaft* and special rituals in the past (Thomas Kühne), to the ways in which radicalized groups nowadays recruit and train young men. Michael Marrus recently pointed out that there is probably no definitive lesson to be deduced from the Holocaust. But Holocaust and gender studies can help us think about issues of (micro-)power and knowledge. So can critical and contextualized genocide studies. Given the inevitable politicization of our topics (some of our students constantly remind us of this), we need to address contemporary agendas and we need to be open to comparison. With our expertise on gender and violence, we can contribute to understanding contemporary issues such as women’s and men’s racialized bodies that are evidently still a public issue (think of the appalling ‘burkini-debate’ in France last summer!), or current anxieties about the refugees in Europe...

Elissa Mailänder

As Atina mentioned, there is a demand today to push gender questions further and to question binaries, in theory and in practice, which is a good thing. I observe it in Paris, too, in my undergraduate “Gender, Sexuality, and War” class, mostly with exchange students but also with French students who are becoming more and more gender queer. However, sometimes I think that we gender historians only preach to the converted when we should put ourselves and our research out there for debate to a larger audience. Like Doris I get frustrated sometimes. That’s why I decided to use my gender seminar for a collaboration between a *banlieue* high school class and the theatre MC93, which is very engaged in building bridges between the unprivileged Paris outskirts and the privileged center of Paris.

Building upon Guy Cassiers’ adaptation of Jonathan Littell’s *The Kindly Ones*, we split up in smaller groups that worked on everyday practices of exclusion based on ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. My students were very engaged; however they refused to follow Cassiers’ initial instruction to interview someone, fearing that this itself would be an act of discrimination (I must say, I was very proud of them). Instead we decided to work on our truly unusual group constellation – twelve mostly white, middle-class university students and thirty-six overwhelmingly black and Arab teenagers. It was fascinating – they showed true interest and empathy for each other – but it also pointed out conflicts. All the students were deeply concerned by Max Aue’s involvement in mass killing. The most controversial topic, however, was the perpetrator’s homosexuality, which sparked intense debates about gender and gayness in our current societies. Rather than seeing the strong disapproval of the predominantly Muslim schoolboys and girls as sheer homophobia, I consider their position

more of a statement of rebellion, meant to shock the liberal bourgeoisie. After all, they have gay or trans teachers they respect. However, it also showed me how important it is to discuss, exchange, and simply *do things together*.

And we really need that in France. Patrick already mentioned it: the massacre of November 13 was a destabilizing experience for all of us. In fall 2015, I was teaching a seminar on military masculinities. That Friday I met with friends to celebrate a birthday. Being stuck in a cocktail bar for hours, knowing that in close vicinity people feared for their lives and got killed, was a horrendous experience of impotence and contingency. How could I possibly go back to class on Tuesday and do “business as usual”? Instead of rationalizing by explaining terrorism and jihad violence, I opted for a phenomenological and anthropological approach: my students and I just told each other where we spent the evening, how we learned about the massacre, and how we felt. It was one of the most profound moments I have ever experienced in a classroom; just telling each other how we experienced this violence made it clear how differently we perceive and feel and nonetheless how connected we all are. For me teaching violence includes moments where I leave the structuring space of academia for a more anthropological and self-reflexive approach.

Anna Hájková

I differ from Atina in that I think the historian’s role is twofold: one part is analytical and the other political. It’s our task to reflect where our work ought to be situated between these two. In that sense we have a role and responsibility not only “to sit back and contemplate, but instead to step up and speak out,” as we Warwick historians wrote in an Open Democracy statement on post-Brexit racism. Speaking, writing, and in general having an impact are more important than ever currently, as we shift towards the neoliberal, neo-patriarchal, anti-women right. Rather than scaling back our research to be palatable to the majority, we need to be bold and continue to show people what critical and constructive, engaged, scholarly thought is.

In particular, what keeps driving me is the political dimension of not including people in history and dictating what is canon. For example, none of the large oral history collections of Holocaust survivors includes interviews with people who were deported as Jews and engaged in same sex conduct. All mentions of that come from witnesses, and nearly all of these are brutally homophobic. For instance, the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive at the University of Southern California with its more than 52,000 interviews has next to no interviews with LGBT Jewish survivors.

The Holocaust was a deeply socially rooted genocide where society immediately made sense of things, socialized them, and thus also dictated “suitable” and “bad” conduct. It also prescribed what could and can be narrated and what is marked as so deviant that it never will be told or only by witnesses, as a warning. Elissa suggested to me that this is what Gayatri Spivak described as epistemic violence. Here we can observe the political dimension of the archive, where only matters that are deemed acceptable are collected. It means that people deemed “monsters” are made into people unworthy of history (something that has engaged historians politically, just to mention E.P. Thompson); they are literally removed from the past.

The camp histories, then, state as fact that people who participated in same sex conduct were violent monsters. This is the case not only in the earlier accounts written by historian survivors; these assertions bleed into current historiography.

These continuities cast a surprisingly long and lasting shadow, one manifestation of which is the ongoing struggle about commemoration of lesbian victims in the Ravensbrück Memorial.

Women were only included in the Tiergarten memorial for Gay and Lesbian victims of Nazi Germany after years of refusal from gay activists. It's really an interesting (analytical dimension) but also infuriating (political) history of the intersection of patriarchy and homophobia. This is where the political in history emerges: the LGBT Jewish victims were not allowed to bear testimony, to have a memorial, nobody knows their name, and historical works categorize them as monsters. It is the blatant injustice of these historical politics that influence my work.

Q5 *As Elizabeth Heineman and others have observed, sexuality and the Holocaust are topics heavily laden with taboo. Why is it important for historians to address taboo topics? Are there limits? Should some matters remain out of bounds? How have the taboos connected to sexuality and the Holocaust changed over the past seventy years and what kinds of subjects remain taboo? Finally, what is the relationship of sexuality to other issues of taboo in Holocaust Studies?*

Elissa Mailänder

Let me illustrate the taboo question with two examples. Marie Jalowicz Simon's compelling autobiographical account *Gone to Ground* tells the story of her extraordinary survival in hiding in Berlin. Help, as we realize, has a price, especially since hiding a person in Nazi Germany was prohibited and put people at risk. In Jalowicz Simon's case, the price included several incidents of sexual barter with gentile Germans and a Dutch foreign laborer, two attempts of seeking protection through marriage with a Bulgarian foreigner laborer and a Chinese man, an abortion executed by a befriended Jewish doctor, and a rape assault by a Russian soldier during the battle of Berlin. What is extraordinary about Jalowicz Simon's testimony is her factual narrative and unemotional tone. But she also sheds new light on ordinary Germans because almost everyone, including family friends, took advantage of their position of power by exploiting her need for help: emotionally, physically, and sometimes also sexually.

An example that I find most telling is the working class, stay-at-home mother who agreed to hide two Jewish women for money. This woman, who never had a maid in her life, suddenly enjoyed treating these educated women as domestic servants at her command and mercy. Not only does Jalowicz Simon demystify survival by adding sexuality and abuse – she also offers a powerful counter-narrative to women's history that still largely conceives of German women as victims of a patriarchal dictatorship.

Here Cornelia Osborne's new project on German women's illicit love and sexual affairs with foreign laborers and POWs adds a rather controversial dimension. Osborne reveals how Aryan women, while their husbands were at war, deliberately used their privileged position in Nazi society to claim love, affection, and sexual services from racially and politically subordinate men. Certainly the women were in a tricky position, risking severe punishment for adultery and worse for "race defilement." But whereas these women were tried and, depending on their husbands' support, in some cases imprisoned, the POWs and forced laborers surely risked death. Indeed, only by looking at race and gender do we uncover the strikingly asymmetrical power relations between German women and foreign men: Aryan women often forced/bullied French, Polish, and sometimes Russian workers and POWs into sex. The men willingly, sometimes happily, complied, trading sexual intercourse for food. This is quite extraordinary, and an interesting addition to Anna's work on sexual barter in the Theresienstadt ghetto.

What I also find significant and revealing is that German middle- and working-class women – our mothers and grandmothers, one could add with a wink at the 2013 TV show *Generation War* – felt empowered to subjugate foreign men to sex. This is clearly a taboo topic, because women seldom are seen as sexual predators. Hence when it comes to sexuality in the Holocaust, we don't get the full picture if we only look at official policies, legal norms, and male-dominated gender constraints. But by looking at other, more grassroots kinds of agency with an intersectional lens we can dig deeper into the ambivalences of social structures and the contradictions of human behavior.

Patrick Farges

The Holocaust has been a taboo subject in the sense that some areas of inquiry seem unspeakable while others have been sacralized. We can agree on the fact that the sexual history of the Holocaust still remains a taboo question. For the first generation of Holocaust historians, taboos were aimed at ensuring that historical facts were safeguarded against falsification and fabrication. Though these days it is more crucial than ever that we continue producing empirical and factual history (as opposed to 'post-factual' narratives!), positing taboo areas is not the best way. As Elissa mentioned, it's only by looking at race, gender, and sexuality that we can uncover the asymmetries in those everyday power relations that were instrumental in producing the Holocaust.

I'd like to go back to an old taboo question in Holocaust Studies: the debate at the beginning of the 1990s about "probing the limits of representation." Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, authoritative public figures had pointed to the supposed representational dangers of artistic imaginations of the Holocaust, arguing for its radical uniqueness. For some, silence, rather than narrative and description, was the appropriate way of rendering this limit event. And yet this taboo was broken over and over again, and popular literary and visual representations of the Holocaust abound. 'Blasphemous' novels, comics, and movies about the Holocaust are crude, offensive, graphic, and often factually misleading, but they do reveal something about the affects generated by the Holocaust. If Cultural Studies scholars study these materials and affects, I don't see why Holocaust historians wouldn't.

Studying the Holocaust and writing about it implies choosing a form of representation. Moreover, it unleashes affects – to a degree that varies according to the subject position of the historian, the writer, the survivor or the children and grandchildren of survivors, and the children and grandchildren of perpetrators, etc. As the authoritative survivors' voices become silent, the issue of the degree of 'insider'/'outsider' perspective becomes salient. As we all know, scholarship on the Holocaust (and scholarship at the margins of the Holocaust, which is where I would position my own research) involves gradations of proximity and distance towards the phenomena studied – this is also the case with other areas of taboo knowledge. In a way, a daring comparison could be made between the implications of affects in the realm of sexual studies of the Holocaust, and the field of porn studies, where affects are central to the inquiry (Susanna Paasonen's work in that field is impressive). Underpinned by disciplinary notions of what is appropriate or not, our affects towards the materials studied are, I would argue, still somewhat taboo. We probably need to engage more with our ambivalent reactions of attraction/repulsion towards sexual violence, humiliations, racialized and gendered domination patterns, but also towards the noises, smells and images generated by our dealing with the sources and by our writing about them. What fascinates and/or attracts us about gendering, queering and sexualizing the Holocaust? How can we combine an affective address and critical rigor?

Anna Hájková

There are such manifest taboos when you start working on sexuality and the Holocaust, especially in addressing topics beyond the binary of romantic vs violent sexuality. I experienced this in person when I started working on sexual barter.

I find it an important start when analyzing a taboo topic for the historian to treat it in a way that takes the upset out of it – while acknowledging its existence and impact. Holocaust historians often feel uneasy about how to write about sex work, an uneasiness some “solve” by stressing it was so horrible for the women. This approach is very different from what historians of prostitution do, and for me engaging with Judy Walkowitz’s work was eye-opening. Atina Grossmann was similarly innovative in her examination of Red Army sexual violence. The anthropologist Christine Helliwell showed how our society reproduces the pain of sexual violence discursively: rape is horrible because we treat it as horrible. But this reading is so transgressive that some colleagues are visibly uncomfortable when I present this argumentation. Marie Jalowicz Simon’s memoir, mentioned by Elissa, is very significant because it demonstrates that a Jewish woman in hiding could be sexually exploited but as long as there was an element of choice, she also had agency. Thus we need to see it as barter – which can be violent – rather than as rape. Showing Holocaust victims participating in sexual barter, taking their, often extremely limited, agency seriously, rubs many people the wrong way. That’s why we need to pay attention to writing this history not only analytically but with empathy, preserving the protagonists’ dignity.

There are two topics that occupy me that are still taboo. One is the use of real names. As much as I want to return my protagonists their real names (Mara Keire organized a conference criticizing the necessity to anonymize), sometimes it’s difficult. I identified a woman who had spoken anonymously about her prostitution in Theresienstadt; I found her family, worked on her biography, and became friends with her relatives, who are these nice, liberal people. Yet I find it impossible to tell them, because I know they would not be able to see her sex work in context; it would unduly define their knowledge of her incarceration. I’m thus part of continuing the stigma I’m working to eliminate.

Another topic that is still taboo is a critical feminist reading of canonized texts of Holocaust literature that employ a pornographic framework. I am looking forward to Annette Timm’s collection on Ka-Tzetnik. When I taught *House of Dolls* this year, I noticed that some of my students proved remarkably resistant to recognizing the titillating scenes as titillating. I believe that not everything is a construction: there is fiction that is pornographic, and there are depictions of sex that are not pornographic. Also overdue is a book on Arnošt Lustig’s work and life. As Lisa Heineman, Omer Bartov, Ronit Lentin and others have pointed out, it’s the pornographic take on the Holocaust that contributes to these taboos.

Atina Grossmann

This last question is particularly tricky because it seems to me that what we define and treat as “taboo” shifts so profoundly according to context and chronology. As Anna notes, questions that we have deemed legitimate for historical research remain very difficult to ask individuals. Topics that are now openly analyzed in scholarship are painful – or impossible – to reveal or discuss within families. Or conversely, experiences that were shared among survivors are taboo in public testimony and commemoration. Stories that were commonly known in the immediate aftermath, about, for example, sexual violence or barter, family conflict and disintegration, or betrayal and denunciation among Jews, were then mostly silenced for decades, only to be recovered in the past twenty years when aging survivors’ willingness to revisit their memories intersected with a certain “coming-out” culture (Arlene Stein), newly accessible archives, and (especially feminist) scholars’ insistent questioning (see Na’ama Shik, Sara Horowitz, Dalia Ofer, Natalia Aleksion, Anna Hájková).

It is still very hard, I think, to grant victims both agency and dignity; what does

“honesty” really mean when we are narrating such extreme situations? What is obscured by the rather convenient language of the “grey zone”? When does silence or omission become a “taboo”? What are the ethics of self-censorship in the name of respecting limits set by survivors or simply our own historians’ reluctance to go where sources are limited and ambiguous?

I’m thinking of a good friend’s mother who decided relatively late in life to become a “professional survivor,” talk in schools and be interviewed. But there were pieces of her story, seared into memory, that she never narrated publicly: as a young single woman in the selection line at Auschwitz, she handed back the wailing infant she was holding to its mother, thereby escaping the immediate murder that awaited her sister and her children. Nor would she speak about another child, born after brief (desired but shameful) encounters with a British liberator at Belsen; it was taken from her by well-meaning helpers and never found.

We might be better at identifying “taboos” to do with sexuality but the dilemmas are more general. I suspect that my grandmother’s hiding place in a small Brandenburg town was revealed by her trusted “Aryan” daughter-in-law in a desperate, quixotic effort to save her own husband, my uncle, from deportation. I will probably never know; the local Gestapo records are listed as lost and the one living relative I can still ask insistently diverts the question. In my current research I am confronted by children and grandchildren shocked to learn via now accessible ITS files that the family’s Nazi camp survival stories were a necessary fiction, covering up a different survival trajectory in the Soviet Union that might have prevented emigration to the Cold War U.S. We correctly question therefore how far to press individuals while also digging as deeply as we can into the issues they raise.

Doris Bergen

One taboo subject, or perhaps it’s another blind spot or gap, is domestic violence. Two years ago, my colleague Mark Meyerson and I started a new class called “Histories of Violence.” The first draft of the syllabus moved through time considering different settings and forms of violence: war, slavery, feuding, genocide. Only on the third revision did I think with a jolt, “what about domestic violence?” In fact, it was present in the first reading (the *Iliad*, which mentions Zeus’s beating of Hera and the efforts of their son, Hephaestus, to protect his mother). And it made an appearance in many other contexts; see, for instance, the work of Jok Madut Jok on Sudan and South Sudan, and the skyrocketing rates of domestic violence among U.S. veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

But what about domestic violence in Nazi Germany and during the Holocaust? I had never heard anyone speak of this subject until our event on Women’s Holocaust Narratives. In a private conversation, someone mentioned a Jewish survivor who said sardonically that Hitler saved her life, because her husband, a violent abuser, was killed and she survived. Is anything to be gained by pursuing this subject? I believe there is. What happened to solidarity at the family level? What can be narrated, what cannot?

Another set of questions opens when we examine domestic violence within the perpetrator society. Did people who wielded enormous power over the lives and deaths of others bring those habits of domination home with them? How did the law, police, judges, social workers, clergy, and the press treat cases of domestic abuse? As I write this, I get the feeling that everyone else who works on Nazi Germany knows the answers to these questions. Is that true?

I have another thought about taboos, and it goes in the opposite direction. I’m not sure whether *Son of Saul* is the cause, the symptom, or both, but there is a surge of fascination with the Sonderkommandos and in general with the notion of Jews as collaborators that makes me uneasy. On the one hand, I am convinced it’s essential to challenge taboos and pieties that seal some people and subjects off from analysis. On the other hand, I see sometimes a kind of

satisfaction that people seem to take in pointing to Jews working for the Nazis. Am I just imagining a gleeful “gotcha?” And is the problem exacerbated by a vocabulary that describes Jewish victims as “innocent” or even “martyrs?” Perhaps it’s just a matter of needing more contextualization to complicate simplistic assumptions.

Finally, there’s a subject that’s been hanging around the edges of my thinking about gender and the Holocaust – maybe it fits under taboos, if only because it seems awkward to raise it. That’s the increasing disproportion of women to men among my students (undergraduate and graduate) and in the public audiences I address. Is this significant? Do others have the same experience? It’s great, but I wonder what happened to the men?