Re-reading some of the earlier essays in this impressive collection brought back the sheer sense of excitement felt when reading them for the first time. Despite the passage of time they still display the originality, erudition and intellectual rigour of this German pioneer of women’s and gender history. The publication is most welcome for making available in a single volume Bock’s essays of the last forty years, some of them here translated into German for the first time, others made more easily accessible since they were previously transmitted in a variety of languages through collection of essays and journals in different disciplines; a further two essays were specially written for this volume. The unusual geographical and linguistic spread of Bock’s publications is testimony of her international profile and her wide-ranging research. She inspired students and scholars throughout Europe and the US to address the role of gender as an organising category; indeed some essays reprinted here have become part of the canon of the new historical discipline she helped develop. Taken together the thirteen contributions reflect Bock’s engagements with topics such as gender relations, feminism, women’s rights, suffrage, labour, poverty, social welfare, family policy and women’s role in Nazi Germany.

In her introductory chapter, Bock presents a résumé of the course of gender history. Like Natalie Zemon Davies before her, she wants it understood as „multiple stories“ rather than a „static“ situation or a given „model“ (p. 8). She praises Davies for working comparatively, something in which Bock excelled herself. Comparative analysis should comprise international comparisons and also awareness of variations among social, religious, ethnic and racial groups within national histories. The pioneering work of three US historians are singled out: Davies, Gerda Lerner and Joan Kelly. All three developed new methodologies and concepts to research women in the past, not as a sex but as a gender to be understood in their socially constructed role. Bock’s own first substantial contribution to this debate was her 1981 talk at the West German Historikerinnen treffen in Bonn, published two years later as the lead article in the new journal Gender & History; fittingly this collection starts with it, too. It heralded the beginning of Bock’s influence in Germany and abroad, in itself typical of the transnational character of gender history which had been much stimulated by an array of international gatherings in the late 1970s to 1980s, e.g. the bi-annual Berkshire Conference, Michelle Perrot’s French conferences and the German Historikerinnen treffen also held in Austria and Switzerland. This international co-operation was furthermore aided by a flurry of translations of seminal texts and the exchange of scholars between European and US universities. Apart from gender and class, race and ethnicity was soon to become a central point for gender historians, starting with the work of US historians like Gerda Lerner, but soon taken up especially by Afro-American scholars. Soon post-colonial historians analysed the relationship between gender and imperialism. Since the early 1980s German women historians’ interest in ‘race’ began to focus on Nazi racial policy. Here Bock was again in the vanguard. Her path-breaking study about compulsory sterilisation in Nazi Germany shone the spotlight on the gendered racial state.

Sadly, this important book was never translated although some of her findings were made available in several articles in Anglo-American publications. As a corrective to what she deemed a false emphasis on the Nazi cult of motherhood Bock stressed the regime’s preoccupation with anti-natalism by preventing the birth of “undesirable” children through sterilisation, abortion and even genocide. She writes that she wanted to render visible „forgotten victims“ (p. 17), namely the c. 2000 women who were forcibly sterilised; but she went one step further and ar-

gued that the regime’s population policy potentially victimised all German women, particularly non-Aryan and ‘asocial’ women. She also prioritised women’s suffering despite the near equal number of men who were involuntary sterilised. She claimed that the female procedure was disproportionately more risky and that childlessness was a greater loss for women than men by jeopardising women’s biological and social identity. She was subsequently accused of exaggerating the value of motherhood and “implying that non-mothers are not really women”. A year later her critical review of Claudia Koonz’ Mothers of the Fatherland was to involve her in a protracted controversy over German women’s victimhood versus their role as perpetrators of Nazi ideology. The debate was played out in often acrimonious articles and essays. In her introduction to this volume, Bock prefers not to delve too deeply into this episode of what she and others soon called a Historikerinnenstreit but which has since been largely dismissed as an intellectual cul-de-sac. It is obviously a painful memory and left her defensive: here she rejects as “totally absurd” (p. 16) that her monograph had portrayed all women as victims of National Socialism when, as she insists, she had not written about “women” but about the regime’s anti-natalism and was concerned to bestow agency on all those women who had been the target of Nazi racist and eugenic laws (p. 17). It is hardly surprising then that Bock chose to reprint two related essays in this volume: the first a useful resume of the background, practice and gendered meaning of the Nazi sterilisation policy (first published in 2004) and a second on „Normal women: perpetrators, victims, loyal followers and bystanders in National Socialism“ which echoes Christopher Browning’s and Raul Hilberg’s titles as well as Clifford Kirkpatrick’s concept employed in his 1939 book. In characteristically rigorous fashion, Bock discusses the semantics of these concepts and illustrates the ambiguous and often contradictory relationships between Nazi policies and different groups of German women: Jewish, non-Jewish, those considered dysgenic, opposed to the regime or at least to some of its aspects while always reminding us of the numerical superiority of male complicity in racist politics. But Bock is clear that ordinary German women’s role in Nazi injustices cannot be explained by their actions as mothers or wives, as some historians have attempted to do, since this is based on the false assumption of a ‘cult of motherhood’ in the Third Reich and – here many recent studies are in complete agreement – the illusion of a radical separation of male and female spheres which existed mainly, she claims, in Nazi propaganda.

This review has hardly scope to do justice to the richness and breadth of this fine collection. Only some essays can be mentioned here and then only fleetingly: for example the discussion of the „Querelle des Femmes in Europe“ which displays Bock’s interest in medieval and early modern history and her dazzling familiarity with an array of literature in various west European languages; or her sophisticated critique of Reinhard Koselleck’s famous discussion of the concept of emancipation from the antique meaning of „becoming of age“ and the early modern self-reflexive „liberating oneself“ to the 18th-century „emancipation from blind obedience“ and the 19th century battle cry against all kind of privileges (p. 102). But where Koselleck relied on male authors to chart the history of women’s emancipation which he granted a mere subsection, Bock lets women speak for themselves in France, Britain, Germany and the US. Thus, she is able to trace many transmutations from „women’s emancipation“ and „the woman’s question“ to „feminism“. But

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3 Claudia Koonz, Mothers of the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics, New York 1987; in German: Mütter im Vaterland. Frauen im Dritten Reich, Freiburg 1991.
since the 1960s the „autonomous” women’s movement rejected both „emancipation“ and „feminism“ as old-fashioned and restrictive and preferred „freedom“ as in „women’s liberation movement“, until „feminism“ was adopted once more in the early 1970s and then projected backwards to the 18th century.

The reappraisal of the Declaration of the Rights of Woman, written in 1791 by the French activist, feminist, and playwright Olympe de Gouges in response to the Declaration of the Rights of Man is further proof of Bock’s astonishing scope of research interests reaching geographically and chronologically far beyond her main field of twentieth-century Germany into early modern French (and British) history. In her 1999 essay on „Suffragism in Germany and in its international comparison“, she explored a topic, which to her surprise was comparatively neglected at that period although Angelika Schaser’s 2006 study has since largely filled the gap; but it remains unacknowledged in this unrevised version.

Bock’s careful and detailed research into French, British and US developments and theories enables her to demolish the persistent myth of a German Sonderweg in the trajectory of the campaign for women’s votes, based as it was on four false premises: first, the German bourgeois women’s movement was wrongly said to emphasise female gender characteristics compared to Anglo-Saxon campaigners’ stress on gender equality and the rights of man; second, there was no strict demarcation between the moderate and radical wings of the bourgeois women’s movement; third, the German campaign was not timid and cautious in contrast to the apparently militant and radical approach by English suffragettes; and fourth, the notion that the German campaign had a late start (1902 and 1904) was misleading.

Bock also took issue with historians’ deep scepticism towards the moderate bourgeois women’s movement and the claim by some historians that the German suffrage campaign with its apparent lack of political and democratic culture facilitated Nazism and the holocaust.

One of Bock’s earliest contributions to feminism was her 1977 publication, „Labor of Love“, written with Barbara Duden, which analysed the origins of housework in capitalism. It is quite rightly reprinted here and serves as another reminder of Bock’s originality and ability to inspire second wave feminism. Bock in turn was inspired by Gerda Lerner’s engagement with the subject – she had coined the expression „unpaid labour of love“ and it is therefore fitting that the penultimate essay in this volume is Bock’s 2013 obituary of the great American historian, „the best-known representative of Women’s History“ (p. 359). She credits her as the main driving force behind its creation and its establishment in academia. Lerner was both a scholar as well as a feminist campaigner and both her life and work was guided by the principle that „Women’s History is the primary tool for women’s emancipation“ (p. 377), a principle which can also be applied to Bock’s own engagement with women’s and gender history. This timely publication reminds us how far the discipline has come but also warns historians not to become complacent and continue to develop new and diverse histories of women.


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