“Indelible stains”? Introduction to special issue on Gender and Memory

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Gender and memory: The indelible stain?

This special issue starts with a short autobiographical story, ‘*How to get rid of Rose*’, by Slavenka Drakulić, the celebrated Croatian journalist, novelist, and essayist. Her concept of “indelible stain” has two meanings: making marks that cannot be removed but also something that cannot be forgotten. This complexity of meaning is central to the articles in this special issue: women’s lives, their emotional and physical labor are forgotten, omitted from collective memory and yet, memories are ‘indelibly stained’ by gender, often marked by painful patterns and practices.

This opening story illustrates the complexities of remembering in different ways. First, the everyday experiences of women in a rapidly changing social and cultural setting are often silenced and omitted. Second, dominant national frameworks for remembering and commemorating need to be rethought. The countries where the three generations of women in Drakulić’s story were born ceased to exist during their lifetime as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was transformed to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and then throughout the 1990s disintegrated into an ever larger number of smaller states. Third, the lives and experiences of women during these transformations of institutions and financial systems required women “to be practical”. Drakulić remembers that the unpaid care work they were doing for the family was a fundamental and indispensable resource as well as a key to the survival of the whole kinship unit. We have chosen the Drakulić text to introduce this special issue as it speaks about and from a region, Eastern Europe, which is often still omitted from feminist scholarship and often orientalised. It reminds us that hegemonic definitions of Europe still exclude regions and actors.

The questions of memory, collective memory, memorializing and commemorating are important themes for thinking gender with a European sensibility. It was for that reason that a previous special issue of *The European Journal of Women’s Studies*, edited by Ayse Gül Altinay and Andrea Pető in 2015, focused on genocide research and how traumatic experiences are being remembered.

That collection foregrounded the silencing and un-silencing of genocide and mapped directions for new forms of remembering and memory activism. (Altinay and Pető 2015: 379-385). Since then, memorializing and commemorating has forced itself onto university agendas in new ways in South Africa, the UK and USA where groups of student and staff are making claims to renaming buildings, removing statues, tracing the bequests and gifts given to universities by enslavers and colonialists. In turn, various universities are themselves officially starting inquiries into these issues, with some accepting that they need to act in the name of 'reparative justice'—further demonstrating that memory activism and the un-silencing of injustices has important consequences for social action and social relations. This special issue adds to conversations such as these by taking stock of recent developments in feminist work on memory, including in feminist memory studies.

Thinking memory/thinking gender

> *[M]emory and gender are multiply intertwined: gender is a product of cultural recollection; it is called up by memory and social practices and constantly re-inscribed into collective memory. Moreover, memories are gendered. We have to ask who remembers what, how, why, and for whom... Thus, the question of gender in memory culture addresses the issue of representational power and access*. (Paletschek, 2009: 166)

Memory has become a buzzword in the study of the past and memory analysis is increasingly common. Yet, new forms of political radicalization foreground memory politics in ways that are producing multi-faceted exclusions, intolerance and erasure as well as the exclusion of challenging memories from minoritised ethnic groups. At the same time, memory politics also produce new solidarities. Some anniversaries that commemorate historical events force issues previously submerged into public view. For example, the 2017 Danish commemoration of the centenary of their sale of the Danish West Indies to the US (now the US Virgin Isles) raises questions about the meanings of loss of, or emancipation from, empire for colonisers and colonised. The notion that repression of such memories has long-lasting and damaging cultural consequences is increasingly the subject of academic theorising. This is exemplified by Paul Gilroy's (2005) notion that failure to engage with the lessons of the colonial period produces 'postcolonial melancholia' (cf. Goswami, 2013), which, as Jane Flax (2010) suggests results because burying the past does not obliterate the dead, who return to haunt us. The ways in which what is learned from history changes

over time is particularly pertinent as the adoption of memory cultures foreground notions of recovering denied historical truths (Assmann, 2011) and 'decolonizing knowledge' (Mohanty, 2003).

As Paletschek (2009) argues in the epigraph above, resonances of historical power relations are gendered. However, as Selma Leydersdorff suggests 'a single focus through the lens of gender might no longer satisfy our empirical and theoretical needs... Our challenge will be to determine whether the gendered story bears any relation to other explanations for the narratives we listen to, and if so, to redefine that relation.' (Leydersdorff, 2017: xiv). Redefining the iterative relationship between gender and memory requires the centering of intersectional perspectives. Gender, race, social class, sexuality and nation, for example, are all central to understandings of history and social, cultural and political practices that produce canonical versions of the past. It can, however, be difficult to engage with the intersectionality of memory in ways that are both meaningful and provoke thought, rather than closure. The 2017 British Turner prizewinning artist Lubaina Himid's work navigates this fine balance by telling powerful stories. In *Naming the Money*, Himid presents 100 wooden life-size, cut-out black figures sumptuously dressed and symbolising enslaved African people. While fictional, every figure is named and given memories, achievements and practices that are both written and spoken, making them individual as well as part of a mass. This humanizing helps to shift memory and commemoration—to produce a counter-narrative to historical stereotypes or unidimensional representations. More than this, Himid's visual and oral acknowledgment of historical trauma and its contemporary resonances in the mundane, link memory, commemoration and history with cultural activism. She genders and racializes memory. As Himid (2017) herself says:

> I need to do it because there are stories that need to be told. There are stories that aren't being told. There are gaps in history that are not being filled. There are gaps in education that aren't being served by the system we live in. And I only know how to paint. So rather than being a politician or a historian then that's what I do.

We are pleased that this special issue brings together multidisciplinary feminist, intersectional, critiques, from different regions that analyze the ways in which gender and other social categories are mutually constituted in their intersections, as well as new studies of gendering memory that employ multiple approaches and perspectives to tell new stories.

The papers

The European Journal of Women's Studies is publishing this special issue at a time when memory studies are increasingly institutionalized in academic disciplines. It is perhaps not surprising then that we received an unexpectedly high number of articles addressing the complex intersections of memory and gender while not addressing the concept of gender or focusing on practitioners in the field.

The articles selected for the special issue show how memory studies and activism are interconnected. The paper by Karolina Krasuska, '*Gendering the Holocaust Gallery in POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews*', takes further some of the issues addressed in the Special Issue edited by Ayse Gül Altinay and Andrea Pető by examining the permanent exhibition of POLIN, The Museum of Polish Jews from a gender perspective. She argues "that the lack of gender reflection undermines other stated principles of the exhibition: namely reading the gallery along gender representations seems teleological and deterministic, a feature of the narrative that was rightly supposed to be steered away from". The article does not suggest that the answer is to "include more women" but argues that the ways in which women's stories are instrumentalised is part of the museum's narrative. A critical feminist lens could, therefore, make the exhibition itself better.

A central thread running through the collection is the critical examination of family connections and memory production in ways that subvert normative temporalities. The process that Slavenka Drakulić reports is clearly a depressing failure that can make everybody unhappy. The article by Dilara Çalışkan on '*Queer Postmemory*' looks instead at alternative meaning making processes in families questioning predetermined framings of family by showing the queer intergenerational transmission of memory in trans communities, where a 'trans mother' can be chronologically younger than her daughter. Çalışkan retheorizes the complex relations between family, time, (post)memory and inheritability in ways that disrupt chrono-normative assumptions of family remembrance as coming from fixed relations and fixed temporal frameworks. This 'transmitting otherwise' of memories enables trans women to protect themselves against 'the discriminatory and isolating structures of normative society and family forms that make them vulnerable to transphobic hate incidents'.

A further issue addressed by papers in this special issue is that gender, memory, memorializing and commemorating are linked through labour that constructs ways of seeing and remembering. The paper by Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Jeffrey Olick, '*Moving Gender: Home museums and the Construction of their Inhabitants*', brings together the examination of family connections and the work of memorializing gender. They critically examine the ways in which family constructions are curated as memorable in museums of home established in Germany and Israel between the 1970s and 1990s. It might be expected that women would be centre stage in the home domain in Germany and Israel since this is the sphere identified with women in that period. However, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Olick convincingly show that the very act of making the domestic worthy of musealization (re)produces unequal gender power relations by sidelining, belittling or concealing women in favour of representing home through the life and work of the men who live in them. Women's work outside home is presented as insignificant or ignored, while their domestic role serves to make home 'relatable' as part of collective memories. The home museums represent 'moving gender' in ways that do not spatialize gendered social change. As Inowlocki and Lutz, (2000) have illustrated, biographical remembering is 'hard labour'. In this case, the labour of the curators produces biographical remembering that reinscribes gendered inequities.

The material dimension of producing gendered memories, so clearly demonstrated by Vinitzky-Seroussi and Olick in the curating of home, has largely been ignored in memory studies. Anna Reading's article '*The Female Memory Factory: How the Gendered Labour of Memory Creates Mnemonic Capital*', builds on her substantial contributions to this theme. She examines the concepts of mnemonic labour and mnemonic capital in a case study of the colonial gendered economy of memory activism in the longest continuous site of female incarceration in Parramatta, Western Sydney in Australia. Reading focuses on the mnemonic legacy of the site through the gendered labour of survivors and memory activists, the Parragirls and The Parramatta Female Factory Memory Project. She argues that the factory has multi-layered gendered memories for indigenous women and is a critical part of the Australian and UK's brutal colonial past as well as being within women's living memories. In exploring the processes by which mnemonic labour creates mnemonic value and lasting mnemonic capital, she shows the gendered dimensions of memory that are critical for on-going memory work and feminist 'memory activism' in the global-digital or 'globital' memory field. The article argues that gendered mnemonic work transforms

into mnemonic capital that can possibly change memory cultures and produce mnemonic legacy, sometimes requiring struggles over the 'means of remembering'.

The paper by Gulru Goker, '*Memories, Stories and Deliberation: Digital Sisterhood on Feminist Websites in Turkey*', shows the dynamism of memorializing processes through a focus on three Turkish websites that mediate spaces of commemoration and produce a virtual public sphere where collective memory and public deliberation meet. For groups marginalized within mainstream political debate, such as women and LGBTI people, Goker argues that such websites can function as counter-publics for the debate and exchange of ideas and facilitating constructive dialogue about memory work. All the websites Goker studied promote feminist agenda and non-hierarchical, ways of working. Two have sections on history, providing a feminist archiving role, creatively keeping young Muslim feminist and LGBTI histories alive and pointing out the contemporary relevance as well as historical agency around, for example, the Gezi Park protests. These function as 'politically informed counter-memories'. At the same time, women also document the challenges they face as feminists in negotiating intimate relationships that reproduce societal oppressions. In doing so, Goker argues that 'websites in Turkey constitute important projects in feminist memory work as they create a platform for linking private and collective memories' and highlighting activist gains.

Berzigan Taniç's paper, '*History-writing in Turkey through securitization discourses and gendered narratives*', also addresses the writing of history in Turkey, focusing on the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. It argues that state denial of the Armenian Genocide and selective understanding and interpretations of the Holocaust shed light on the distinction between history and memory. The creation of a history by the state eliminates the experiences and memories of particular groups and silences the intergenerational transmission of memory. Official history thus has suppressive and destructive powers. The securitization of memory that it entails attempts to build consensus on how historical atrocities are represented in the nation and, in the process, overlooks gender-based discrimination and violence while foregrounding heroic masculine figures (e.g. Turkish diplomats). The result, as Taniç shows, is that the histories and memories of minority groups and women are marginalized in a selective process of state securitization of historical memory processes that construct men as heroes.

Gender and Memory: Reworking multiple stories of difficult pasts

Together, the papers in this special issue present a rich plurality of ways of researching gender and memory across sites, ages and countries and at multiple, intersectional levels as plural processes. They leave us in no doubt that new ways of addressing the complexity of issues raised are being forged. The fact that three papers address vastly different issues in Turkey illuminate the importance of these issues for societies in the process of contestation and change. They highlight that the nature, or lack, of public commemoration and memorializing requires attention and engagement with controversies, including about implicit constructions that serve to maintain intersectional inequities and to render some groups invisible or insignificant.

This issue became more evident and timely than we had envisaged as we wrote this editorial. On May 23 2019, one of our colleagues on the EJWS editorial board, **Ayse Gül Altınay** from Sabanci University in Istanbul**,** was sentenced to 25 months in prison for 'willingly and knowingly supporting a terrorist organisation as a non-member'. This is because, along with more than 2000 other academics from dozens of universities in Turkey, more than 2000 from outside Turkey and support from national and international institutions outside academia, she signed a statement calling for peace and saying, "We will not be a party to this crime" in support of colleagues, democracy and academic freedom. Ayse is a cultural anthropologist and Director of the Gender and Women's Studies Centre. She is internationally recognized as an outstanding and inspiring gender scholar. The statement she read out in court calls for peace for all. The following is an extract:

> *Every individual, every family living in this geography has suffered from past wars, migrations and experiences of violence.*
>
> *In terms of the cycle of violence that trauma studies alert us to, we live in a challenging, vulnerable geography.*
>
> *Yet, what we make of these past experiences of pain is up to us...*
>
> *Are we going to turn our pain into more violence, hate, pain and injustice, or into steps that multiply life, beauty, love, peace and justice?*
>
> *This is the main question that shapes my work and my life.*
>
> *I firmly believe that we all have new steps we can take towards healing the traumas that have been transmitted from one generation to the other, and to break out of the cycles of violence that we are living through.*

Ayse's statement is resonant with all the papers published in this special issue. All demonstrate that it matters enormously what we make of 'past experiences of pain'. Implicitly or explicitly, they show that we can only heal 'the traumas that have been transmitted from one generation to the other' by treating memory, memorializing and commemoration in complex intersectional ways. Ayse's unfolding case reminds us how much is at stake for nation, globe and persons in the ways we resist or are complicit in the mundane present and how our claims to the future make our representations of past histories crucial, urgent and deeply affective.

In ending this introduction, we would, therefore, like to highlight one of the points made by Slavenka Drakulić to illustrate that sometimes it is easier to dispose of individuals than objects, as illustrated in the story of the old sewing machine, the central object in her story. We argue together with Slavenka Drakulić and with this collection of papers that analysing the ways in which difficult collective pasts are remembered needs to be reworked to include a focus on affect (Schwab 2010). New political methods for reconciliation, healing, justice and transformation can emerge from a new understanding of gendered memory work. This special issue is an attempt to contribute to this long awaited process.

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