

# Women Past and Present



Women Past and Present:  
Biographic and Multidisciplinary Studies

Edited by

Maria Zina Gonçalves de Abreu  
and Steve Fleetwood

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Women Past and Present: Biographic and Multidisciplinary Studies,  
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# INTRODUCTION

## MARIA ZINA GONÇALVES DE ABREU AND STEVE FLEETWOOD

### Outline of the collection

Women's history, and feminist and gender theory, have become major research fields in all disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences, engaging a truly international array of specialists who examine important social issues and societal relationships, such as those of gender, ethnicity, inequality and power.

The chapters in this collection<sup>1</sup> are part of this overall tendency. They represent a wide-ranging, multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural and international engagement with biography, feminist and gender issues, which reveal some important insights, and challenge some traditional views, interpretations and understandings. They draw upon a variety of disciplines like history, literature, religion, mythology, medicine, psychology, sociology, media, and political economy, which testify to the wide multidisciplinarity of women and gender studies.

The focus of attention of this collection is twofold. It outlines the struggle of women to overthrow the various forces that have, in various spatio-temporal relations, worked against them. It also reveals the significant contribution made by specific women to the establishment of more democratic and gender balanced societies that granted women a more egalitarian political, economic

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<sup>1</sup> The chapters included in the present book derive from a selection of talks offered at the International Colloquium “*Debating Women: Past & Present*” organised by the University of Madeira, Portugal, in June 2011, in partnership with the State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; the Centre of Jewish and Feminine Studies, University of Santiago of Compostela, Spain; the Centre of Classical Studies, University of Lisbon, Portugal, and the Centre of Cultural and Communication Studies, Catholic University, Portugal. The event brought together academics and specialists from different parts of the world, with varied cultural and academic backgrounds, to discuss women, feminist and gender issues from diversified diachronic and synchronic perspectives and theoretical approaches.

and social existence. To this end, very central questions and issues surrounding gender identity and gender politics are discussed, which serve to raise awareness about gender, power, ideologies, institutions, everyday practices, culture and discourse.

It is a fact that, in Western societies, many of the traditional feminist claims have already been fulfilled both in Law and in official discourse. Indeed, legislative steps have already been taken towards securing civil and political rights and equal opportunities for women. This, of course, is not the case in many other regions of the world as some of the data presented below reveals, and as some of the chapters in this book clearly testify. Yet, notwithstanding the gains achieved in Western societies, residual forms of resistance and prejudice still persist in discourses, categories and discriminative practices in this so-called “post-feminist” era. Furthermore, new manifestations of asymmetries in gender relations and new ways of thinking and experiencing subjectivity are currently emerging, as a result of growing globalisation, economic crisis, migration patterns, female sex and labour trafficking, trans-nationalism, new technologies, not to mention the beauty and body sculpting industries.

The chapters included herein are representative of current debates and trends, and of the on-going scholarship in this field of studies. Some authors examine biographic aspects and cultural phenomena that have shaped and affected women’s lives and experiences in the past, addressing topics such as female authorship and gender issues in literary works; portraits of women in Christianity; cultural, literary and social constructions of femininity, womanhood and gendered inequality; marriage, female sexuality, and double-standard morality.

Yet, most studies scrutinise the lives and experiences of women and gender relations on the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Topics discussed are, *inter alia*, gender markers in language and languages (communication and discourse analysis); developments in gender theories; gender representations in the media and new information and communication technologies; new patterns of beauty aesthetics and the “beauty cult”; technological and medical practices applied to body cutting and sculpting; inequality at work and in the labour market; women trafficking, mobility and migration patterns; and gender (re)configurations in both public and private spaces.

Finally, the list of references in the various essays confirms the worldwide growth of scholarship in the field of women and gender studies to the present-day, which will, undoubtedly, and relentlessly, persist in future decades. This collection is, therefore, a valid resource for both readers and scholars interested in women’s history, feminist and gender studies.

## Thumbnail sketches of the chapters

The collection begins with a chapter on women's past history which tracks the course and nature of the relationships between men and women from the dawn of civilisation up until today. The author, **De Abreu**, highlights key phases of the long and thorny path women have trodden to escape the fetters of patriarchy. It also offers a concise description of the major developments in feminist and gender theories.

In chapter 2, **Carlinda Nuñez** goes back two millennia, providing invaluable insights on the representation of women in Classic Antiquity. In this tradition, Nuñez argues, one finds two simultaneously differing and converging representations of women: the female figures in tragic drama and the muses. In tragic drama, female figures are voiceless social beings whose role as protagonists is to scandalise and, in many cases, to suffer violent death as a trophy. The tragic woman moves from the domestic limbo to the highest degree of exposure. However, as in Greek drama the female characters are played by male actors, they remain under the control of male discourse and endure a pain which only indirectly is theirs.

Differently from the tragic woman, the muses only exist as voice, a device to trigger the speech of the other. They are but mythical beings whose invocation necessarily precedes any intellectual activity – a masculine preserve in Classical Antiquity. However, within the larger context of knowledge production, male creativity needs musical validation. It is the muses that confer authority to the male intellectual.

In this exclusive context of female pre-eminence, Nuñez offers an analysis of two notorious muses: Polyhymnia (Greek) and Tacita (Roman). Of the speaking muses, almost all is known. Of Polyhymnia and Tacita, almost nothing. To Tacita's silence corresponds the detailed record of the rite dedicated to her on the day of the dead. As for the circumspect Polyhymnia, representations in sculpture speak for her and of her melancholy. Nuñez uses Ovid's discourse on Tacita, in *Fastorum libri*, along with a statue of Polyhymnia (wrapped in a large mantle and leaning on a stone pillar, her eyes lost in the distant horizon) to illustrate not only the muses own silence, but also to illustrate what their silence says about others.

Other authors tackle issues of female authorship and constructions of femininity, womanhood and gendered inequality in literary works. **Barbara Vrachnas** scrutinises the invisibility of female writers in the Victorian period, an era in which they felt the need to use male or gender-neutral pseudonyms and were criticised whenever they introduced inappropriate storylines in their writings. Vrachnas analyses gender issues on the works of the Victorian writer Ouida, a pseudonym for Maria Louise Ramé. Ouida is an example of

the invisibility of Victorian authoresses, among many others, like George Eliot and Vernon Lee.

Ouida's novel *Moths* enraged Victorian society as it distorted late Victorian images of women, depicted as either submissive and oppressed, or manipulative and avaricious. Ouida is considered the first female writer to depict divorce and a divorcée who happily remarries her beloved, as happens in *Moths*. Vrachnas argues that this was a realistic view of the age, which cost women writers their reputation in literature, and ostracism from history.

Another Victorian authoress victim of similar literary ostracism was the North-American writer Eliza Buckminster Lee, whose works literary scholarship ignored to this day. **Inês Gonçalves** highlights Lee's contribution to the historical literary genre with her novel *Delusion or the Witch of New England* (1839), where the author voices a variety of social, political and gender specific views, with heroines characterised by a prodigious and peculiar capacity to endure misfortune, a consequence of the insidious witchcraft mania in colonial New England.

**Alexandra Cheira** discusses the cultural constructions of female power(lessness) by analysing the way femininity has traditionally been construed through binary oppositions of either/or. The first polar opposition she addresses is “the angel in the house *vs* the fallen woman”. This takes into account the nineteenth-century (male) categorisation of women into fixedly rigid standards of expected behaviour and social roles that valued what was construed as positive, that is, the ideal woman (the angel).

The second polar opposition “Snow White *vs* the Wicked Queen” is based on Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's revision and subversion of former patriarchal concepts in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). By borrowing a wonder tale trope, these authors invest Wicked Queens with positive attributes to question expected social roles, and value what before had been perceived as negative.

The last opposition pair “the Doormat *vs* the Bitch” is then discussed based on Sherry Argov's 2004 formulation in *Why Men Love Bitches: From Doormat to Dreamgirl*, which sharpens Gilbert's and Gubar's divide by telling women what they must do if they do not want to be a doormat (a woman who submits to men and tries to please them at the expense of herself), and opt to be a bitch instead (an acronym for babe in total control of herself).

Cheira further argues that these constructions of femininity are normative because women are taught (by both men and other women) that they must fit into one of the poles, and thus conform to a stereotype which will either confer them power or render them powerless. She calls for an integrated

vision of femininity that escapes the (patriarchal) need for polarity, arguing that women are both good and bad because they are human beings. More than that, they are human beings in the making because identity is not fixed or given, but a fluid work in progress. Genuine empowerment, rather than the opposition power/powerlessness, arises from this recognition because power then ceases to be something that can be given to or taken from women according to whether they are good or bad.

**Ángel Narro Sánchez** is the only contributor to deal with images of women in early Christian times. His study is based on his reading of two early Christian texts: the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Acts of Xantippe, Polyxena and Rebecca*, apocryphal Christian writings that extol virtue, virginity, and chastity as paramount to Christian life, and highlight the importance of women in Early Christianity.

**Ewa Machut-Mendecka** offers some insights on *Urfi* or customary marriage in Arab culture, especially in Egypt. *Urfi* is a marriage based on the partners' consent, celebrated without any official contract, and kept secret from the family. It is a social practice that became one of the most popular subject matters in Egyptian soap operas broadcast on Arab television channels. According to the author, this type of relationship is a means whereby women express their rebellion against traditional moral codes, sexual restrictions and dependence on their relatives.

**Cristina Vieira** analyses current models of sociability, affection and relationship among young adults. In a study conducted in Portugal, Vieira identified different degrees of romantic and/or sexual involvement between youths, revealing specific arrangements that serve their purposes – some hedonistic, others more relational. By examining experiences, practices, and behaviours, Vieira sheds some light into the different forms of sociability and affection that operate in different relationship types, and assesses the extent to which gender differences, sexual expectations and double-standard morality are perceived and perpetuated by young people at various levels of representations, expectations and practices.

Some contributors offer biographic insights on the life and works of outstanding women. This is the case of the renowned Baroque court poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz whose *Athenagoric Letter* aroused huge controversy and provoked passionate debates amid contemporary literary critics and historians. **Julia Lewandowska**'s close reading of the *Letter* illustrates how Sor Juana, a nun, managed to subvert the official order by engaging in the ecclesiastic debate of her day, under the social, historical and political context of colonial New Spain. She managed to do this despite the restraints to her person, as a writer, a nun and a woman.

**Joanne Paisana** analyses the pioneering work of Agnes E. Slack (1857-1946), one of a small group of upper class/aristocratic women who was active in the Temperance Movement in late Victorian/Edwardian Britain. In June 1895, she became Honorary Secretary of the British Women's Temperance Association, and the World Woman's Christian Temperance Union. She was also the last President of the National British Women's Temperance Association (1925-26), and the first President of the National British Women's Total Abstinence Union (1926-28). Slack organised women to encourage temperance by education and other means, and to agitate for the restriction of sales of alcohol. She was a tireless organiser and effective public speaker, not only on behalf of temperance, but also for the Liberal Party. She also argued for prison and social reform, anchoring her work in strongly held Christian beliefs. She also wrote frequently for many women's temperance newspapers and published books on her campaigning travels abroad.

Paisana notes that Slack's activities in the public sphere, both at home and abroad, helped the cause of women's emancipation by demonstrating that women can be effective campaigners without threatening the stability of society. Slack further improved the lot of women by persuading many to abstain from alcoholic drink, thereby facilitating their release from poverty through self-help. Furthermore she helped to shatter the Victorian ideals of sheltered womanhood.

Addressing the question of women's (in)visibility in History, **Isabel Lousada** analyses the roles played by notorious early feminists like Marie Deraismes, Flora Tristan, Olympe de Gouges or Eugénie Niboyet and Jeanne Deroin in the women's movement, and analyses the way in which these leading female figures have influenced feminists in Portugal.

**Maria de Lurdes Godinho** offers biographic insights on the life and works of the Swiss writer and photojournalist Annemarie Schwarzenbach (1908-1942). Godinho focuses on her lesbian and antifascist leanings, characteristics that put Schwarzenbach into constant conflict with her family, especially with her mother, a Von Bismarckian and a Nazi. According to Godinho, Schwarzenbach saw National-Socialism as a threat to European culture. Her own records and reports of travels through occupied countries (1937, 1938) show how deep was her commitment to a "free" democratic Europe, and to European cultural traditions, notwithstanding her ambivalent view of European dictatorial regimes like Salazar's in Portugal.

Another outstanding woman, whose life and works co-authors **Ana Margarida Falcão** and **Ana Isabel Moniz** discuss, is Maria Lamas (1893-1983). They highlight her invaluable contribution to 20th-century Portuguese women and society. A pioneer in female journalism and feminism in

Portugal, Lamas' daring editorial options for the magazine *Modas e Bordados* (*Fashions & Embroideries*) – expected to be a bastion of female domesticity – ironically helped change the paradigms of womanhood in her day. Furthermore, as a pioneer in investigation journalism, Lamas also boldly addressed controversial issues under Salazar's dictatorial regime which ultimately forced her to seek exile in Paris.

A number of authors analyse cultural and social constructions of femininity, womanhood and gendered inequality. **Raluca Bibiri**'s study examines the status of women under another dictatorial regime – “communist” Romania. Bibiri argues that, despite the shortcomings of the heavily propagandised “emancipation” of women, the “communist” regime in Romania created a social setting that discouraged gender difference. At a time when Hollywood was setting the agenda for the “ideal” of femininity, Bibiri claims that in Romania, time-honoured feminine values were neither praised nor encouraged in either official ideology or culture because gender distinctions were associated with the pre-war society, the professed enemy of the regime. Furthermore, as “communism” in Romania was less of a Marxist experiment in turning private property into public than an on-going process of identifying and eliminating all private manifestations considered bourgeois, the regime offered a radical opportunity for women to explore new identities and (re)fashion their womanhood in reaction to the new social settings. Be it from inside the system, or in opposition to it, female literary testimony depicts a narrative of a conflicted self, split between private and public. Although no writer conceived of such personal issues in terms of “gender”, their struggle was nevertheless visibly woman-specific.

By scrutinising literary texts and rich visual material from television archives, Bibiri highlights the “dialectic” of womanhood in a “communist” setting – public *vs* private; a dialectic within the dynamics of the self that pseudo Marxist propaganda failed to include on its agenda.

**Komal Kahlon**'s study is an analysis of the changes of status of women in India, where he argues that in this country wealthy and educated women have managed to rise from the status of an “unwelcome entity” at birth, to positions of power. Yet he notes that despite the gains achieved, female feticide, domestic violence and honour killing continue, and that the feeling of wretchedness, anguish and horror are still pervasive in Indian society today, a reality he deplores.

Blending fiction and social science, **Steve Fleetwood** sketches the working-life-cycle of a fictional woman (Anna) from her early years, through school and university, via her various jobs, work aspirations and experiences as a working mother, to her eventual retirement. With this tale, Fleetwood aims to illustrate the kinds of gendered inequality faced by millions of

working women every day in this allegedly “post-feminist” era. This author further speculates on the likely effects of the current policies designed to deal with the alleged economic “crisis” on gendered inequality at work and in the labour market.

In an attempt to contribute to the development of an updated theory of gender, which connects to feminist epistemology, **Valerija Vendramin** takes broadly defined feminist theory as a starting point. This she perceives as a struggle for common or general knowledge, and a more narrowly defined feminist epistemology with its concept of situated knowledges. This includes a critical stance toward “universal” truths and a reflection on the situatedness of the researcher in the research project. Vendramin first presents some fundamental postulates, highlighting the socially embedded knowing subject and problems related to the notion of objectivity, before critically evaluating them. She further inquiries into the notion that legitimisation of knowledge claims are tied to domination and exclusion. This line of thought ultimately brings Vendramin to “definitions” of epistemic subjects and to the relevant theories that reflect the problem of the epistemic subject in general, and the gender-related categories that need to be carefully rethought in order not to repeat the rigid traditional and/or canonised feminist concepts. This leads to the questions of: how is the epistemic subject of feminism gendered; and what are its epistemic limitations?

Several authors examine issues such as technological and medical practices applied to body cutting and sculpting, childbirth and maternal care, and new patterns of beauty aesthetics, all of which aim to meet cultural and social normative imperatives. **Katherine Cooklin** analyses the intersection of female bodies and inequality, via the practice of body modification, itself motivated by ideas of what female bodies are “supposed” to look like. The cutting of women’s bodies is embraced by many as they aim to meet beauty-cult imperatives, such as vaginal enhancement surgery or labioplasty. Cooklin juxtaposes this practice against similar practices that are strongly abhorred when cast as female genital mutilation.

Cooklin addresses the epistemic conditions that allow certain knowledge claims and constructions of female bodies, while disallowing others. Drawing on Charles Mills’ view of the epistemology of ignorance, and on Nancy Tuana’s taxonomy of ignorance, Cooklin argues that strategic ignorance complicates consent, both in terms of women’s participation in actions that evidence their constructed inequality, and also of those whose actions towards women can only be justified by viewing women’s bodies as a site of inequality. According to Cooklin, the identification and analysis of these epistemic conditions are the first steps to transforming this ignorance.

These themes are continued in **Takayuki Yokota-Murakami**'s chapter where he considers how recent developments in plastic surgery technology have had contradictory implications on gender politics. Such developments re-established the beauty cult which women have been encouraged to pursue, and demonstrated the contingency of physical beauty. Yokota-Murakami analyses the representations of plastic surgery in various cultural texts (film, fiction, comics, animation, etc.) and explores the new images of "operated" personae and their significance for feminist politics. In his study, this author scrutinises Okazaki Kyoko's graphic novel *Helter Skelter*, Kazuo Ishiguro's story from the collection *Nocturn*, and the film *Faceless*, which re-define, in various ways, the notion of beauty itself, both natural and artificial, and suggest new formulation of subjectivity. By the close reading of these related texts, and the acknowledgement of the cultural significances of the literary tropes therein, as well as their respective semiotic functions, Yokota-Murakami seeks to discover the emancipating force of such cultural representations for women.

Based on their analysis of Portuguese literary works for young adults, which offer/question stereotypes of adolescent female experiences, co-authors **Glória Bastos** and **Maria Conceição Tomé** discuss the changing patterns of feminine beauty. These patterns are related to the new body aesthetic, the narcissistic body cult that emphasises slenderness and slimness as a response to the bourgeois female beauty aesthetic of plumpness associated to wealth, which renowned artists like Rubens, Goya, Caravaggio, Raphael, among others, transformed into a female beauty archetype.

The new social and cultural way of seeing and (re)defining the body has been exhaustively promoted by the media as a kind of passport for happiness, health and sensuality. It has, however, triggered the obsession with weight and diet, the growth of the beauty industry and the demand for body sculpting, all of which have detrimental consequences on the lives of women today, especially on adolescents, whose bodies can become a burden too heavy to carry. Bastos and Tomé highlight the implications that literary representations may have on the physical and emotional development of teenage readers – the potential recipients of literary works of the kind they analyse.

Two Cuban authors focus on the ways the media and new communication technologies have impacted upon women's status and lives in contemporary societies. **Yasmin Machado** analyses the role of the Internet in undermining the control of ideas and the use of knowledge in Cuba. This, she argues, has allowed non-hegemonic voices to gain visibility. It has also, importantly, opened-up spaces where Cuban women can discuss their working environments,

sexual or reproductive health, family conflicts, and issues regarding the struggle for gender equality, namely in the blogosphere.

This theme is also taken-up by **Sandra Álvarez Ramírez**, who studies the intersections between gender, racial discrimination and identity, and respective representation in Cuba's media. She tackles this by analysing the psychological aspects of black Cuban female citizens racial identity, something that blurs the boundary between national and racial identities. Ramírez further analyses, *inter alia*, the myth of black women's hypersexuality, deep-rooted in the Cuban social imaginary, and the way this myth is portrayed in the Cuban media. She further considers how white men and women, as well as black men themselves, see Cuban women.

The exploitation of migrant women through trafficking and trafficking-like conditions has now become a global phenomenon. In a comparative study conducted in three countries, Vietnam, Ghana and Ukraine, **Ramona Vijeyarasav** identifies various political, legal, sociocultural and economic roadblocks that continue to hinder efforts to counter trafficking in these countries. In relation to the role of governments, barriers include challenges in the reliability of government data, the impact of criminalisation of sex work, and stigmatising attitudes towards trafficked victims, particularly in Ghana and Vietnam. In Ukraine, the lack of strong involvement in prevention or even direct service provision by governments, to support the reintegration of the country's victims, undermines the sustainability of counter-trafficking efforts. Further challenges remain, rooted in stereotypes of who exactly constitutes a victim of trafficking. In Vietnam, the focus is on the trafficking of women and children. In Ghana, by contrast, adult victims are largely neglected from Ghanaian discourse altogether. Vijeyarasav claims that sexual stereotypes continue to shape the view that trafficking is an issue largely impacting upon women. She also argues that, in the countries studied, cultural attitudes concerning economic betterment abroad encourage migration in the first place, particularly in Ukraine and Ghana. In cases like this, the image of the successful migrant worker living abroad plays a significant role in reproducing and amplifying migrant myths, thus undermining awareness-raising regarding risks of exploitative labour abroad.

## **Gender inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

All we have said above rests upon the premise that gendered inequality *not only existed in the past, but continues to exist*. Yet as experienced teachers we repeatedly come across the idea, held by many (male and female) students, that gender inequality no longer exists – or, if it does, it is already

withering on the vine. Whilst this is a misconception, it is important to understand its causes and counter it – before the chapters start to unfold.

One possible cause of this misconception stems from the fact that most female students have not (yet) experienced discrimination in the workplace and labour market, and most male students have not (yet) witnessed it, become complicit in it, or been responsible for producing, reproducing or transforming it.<sup>2</sup> Another possible cause, and one specifically relevant to arts, humanities and social sciences, is that many students (correctly) see equal numbers of men and women on their courses and conclude, not unreasonably, that equal access to education, including university education, will eventually translate into post-university equality – in the short-run for them, and in the long-run for all women. Yet another possible cause stems from post-feminism – i.e. the view that, because women have now achieved *legal* equality, there is no longer any need for a feminist movement or agenda. The first cause may, of course, correct itself with first-hand experience of gender inequality. This last cause can seem plausible for several reasons, of which we mention three.

First, some women who are employed in predominantly “male” areas of work, such as science, engineering and technology are reluctant to claim an allegiance with feminism which they believe will be held against them – by some men and women. This may well be a response to the lingering, and negative, stereotypes associated with the “radical women’s liberation movement” of the 1960s and 70s. In seeking to avoid this particular kind of negative stereotyping, they distance themselves from many, and in some cases all, aspects of feminist thought and action. Second, much of the analysis carried out under the specific rubric of “post-feminism” follows from the “*cultural turn*” in social science, a turn that placed *culture* (broadly conceived) at the center of the intellectual universe. This “cultural turn” has, however, resulted in the downplaying of political-economic phenomena, and the overlooking or glossing of the fundamental facts of political-economic life – something that will be addressed in a moment. Third, because post-feminism emphasises *de jure* legal equality between men and women, and (non-pejorative) individualism, it creates the impression that little now stands in the way of individual women, in a meritocratic way, achieving equality for themselves.

Consider, as examples, sexual liberation, socialising and education. It is true that (in some countries) women have made progress in attaining a high degree of sexual liberation; they have also managed to wrestle public spaces

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<sup>2</sup> Typical pre-university or at-university, part-time jobs are unlikely to reveal the extent of gendered inequality.

from domination by men; and women often obtain educational qualifications similar, and, in some cases, superior to men. Whilst these are gains, they do not necessarily translate into anything like full gender equality. Even assuming, that being able to shout obscenities at male strippers, for example, constitutes a degree of equality, women remain unequal in almost all other areas of life. For these reasons, we consider post-feminism to be a dangerous doctrine and we reject it. Indeed, we would go further and claim that gender inequality is woven into the social, economic, political and cultural, fabric of society, demanding analysis across all these (and other) domains. Understanding this immediately scotches the idea that gender inequality has anything to do with individual women's failings, such as lack of ambition or some such.

In lieu of this, we felt the need not to simply presume the existence of gender inequality, but to demonstrate (i) that gender inequality remains significant today; and (ii) that even where the gender gap is closing over time, it is doing so very slowly. We do this by providing data from *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2013), compiled by the *World Economic Forum*.

## Gender gap in 2013

Table 1 (below) is a shortened version of a table appearing in *The Global Gender Gap Report*. The statistics are based upon three measures of gender inequality: *economic participation & opportunity (Econ Part)*; *educational attainment Edu Att*; and *political empowerment (Pol Att)*.<sup>3</sup> These three measures are aggregated to give an *overall measure*. These measures are, themselves, constituted as follows:

*Economic participation & opportunity* is expressed as a female to male ratio and measures:

- Labour force participation
- Wage equality for similar work
- Estimated earned income (PPP US\$)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The complete index includes the category "Health and Survival", but we omit it from the table because it is not particularly illuminating for this context. Whilst the full table contains 136 countries, we have truncated it so that it includes only those countries we discuss, plus countries of the contributing authors of this collection.

<sup>4</sup> PPP refers to "purchasing power parity". This is a measure (in this case expressed in US\$) that makes international comparisons possible by taking some account of different currencies and different economic circumstances.

- Legislators, senior officials, managers
- Professional and technical workers

*Educational attainment* is expressed as a female to male ratio and measures

- Literacy rate
- Enrolment in primary education
- Enrolment in secondary education
- Enrolment in tertiary education

*Political empowerment* is expressed as a female to male ratio and measures

- Women in parliament
- Women in ministerial positions
- Number of years of a female head of state

The statistics reveal that, despite inter-country differences, there is an equality gap between women and men in all countries. That said, looking at tables like this for the first time can be quite daunting. It takes a while to figure out how to compare “this” measure to “that” measure, and “this” country’s rank to “that” country’s rank and so on. We suggest that the reader quickly peruses the table, perhaps looking at his or her own country (if it is included) or one that has some significance (if it is not included). Below the table<sup>5</sup> we offer some poignant comments about gender inequality.

Let us start by considering the “best” countries, vis-à-vis the gender gap. The top four countries, *overall*, are Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In terms of *economic participation and opportunity*, these have female to male (f:m) ratios of between 0.77 and 0.84, meaning that women on average, earn between 77% and 84% of men’s pay. They also have the highest ratios of female *political empowerment*.

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<sup>5</sup> Table 1 is based upon table 3b, *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2013, 12).

<b>Country</b>	<b>Overall Rank/Score</b>	<b>Ec Part Rank/Score</b>	<b>Edu Att Rank/Score</b>	<b>Pol Emp Rank/Score</b>
Iceland	1	0.87	22	0.77
Finland	2	0.84	19	0.77
Norway	3	0.84	1	0.84
Sweden	4	0.81	14	0.78
Philippines	5	0.78	16	0.78
Ireland	6	0.78	29	0.74
NZ	7	0.78	15	0.78
Denmark	8	0.78	25	0.76
Switzerland	9	0.77	23	0.77
Nicaragua	10	0.77	91	0.62
Latvia	12	0.76	17	0.78
Germany	14	0.76	46	0.71
Cuba	15	0.75	65	0.67
South Africa	17	0.75	78	0.65
UK	18	0.74	35	0.73
Luxembourg	21	0.74	7	0.81
Burundi	22	0.74	3	0.83
USA	23	0.74	6	0.82
Australia	24	0.73	13	0.79
Mozambique	26	0.73	11	0.79
Barbados	29	0.73	10	0.79
Spain	30	0.72	76	0.65
Kazakhstan	32	0.72	20	0.77
Mongolia	33	0.72	2	0.83
Slovenia	38	0.71	43	0.72
Malawi	39	0.71	4	0.82
Bahamas	40	0.71	5	0.82
France	45	0.71	67	0.67
Portugal	51	0.71	66	0.67
Poland	54	0.70	73	0.66
Brazil	62	0.69	74	0.66
Romania	70	0.69	55	0.69
Brunei Dar	88	0.67	33	0.74
India	10	0.67	124	0.45
Japan	105	0.65	104	0.58
Belize	107	0.64	80	0.65
Qatar	115	0.63	106	0.57
Oman	122	0.61	123	0.45
Lebanon	123	0.60	126	0.44
Benin	126	0.59	31	0.74
Saudi Arabia	127	0.59	134	0.32
Mali	128	0.59	107	0.57
Morocco	129	0.58	129	0.39
Iran Islam R	130	0.58	130	0.37
Côte d'Ivoire	131	0.58	110	0.56
Mauritania	132	0.58	131	0.36
Syria	133	0.57	136	0.25
Chad	134	0.56	75	0.65
Pakistan	135	0.55	135	0.31
Yemen	136	0.51	132	0.35

**Table 1. Detailed Country Rankings**

Whilst other “good” countries score well on *economic participation and opportunity*, they fall short on other measures. Luxembourg, Burundi, USA, Mongolia, Malawi and Bahamas, for example, have f:m ratios of over 0.80 for *economic participation and opportunity*. But women in these countries lose out on other measures. Luxembourg, USA, Mongolia, Malawi and Bahamas only have average f:m ratios for *political empowerment*, and Burundi has a very low ratio for *educational attainment*.

Several countries have *overall* f:m ratios that put them in the top thirty, but have relatively low ratios in *educational attainment*. Switzerland, Nicaragua, Latvia and Germany, South Africa, Burundi, Mozambique and Bolivia only have average f:m ratios for *economic participation and opportunity*, and Luxembourg only has an average ratio for *political empowerment*.

## Gender gap over time

Table 2 shows changes (for selected countries) vis-à-vis changes in the gender equality gap between 2006 and 2013.

What about the “worst” countries vis-à-vis the gender gap? The bottom four countries, *overall*, are Syria, Chad, Pakistan and Yemen. In terms of *economic participation and opportunity*, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen have f:m ratios of 0.25, 0.31 and 0.36 respectively, meaning that women, on average, earn between 25% and 36% of men’s pay. Despite having a very low overall ratios, Chad has a ratio of 0.65 for *economic participation and opportunity*, comparable to Poland and Brazil; and Pakistan has a *political empowerment* f:m ratio 0.15, comparable to Barbados and Kazakhstan.

In terms of female *political empowerment*, Qatar and Brunei Darussalem have the lowest f:m ratios of zero, followed by Lebanon and Belize, 0.0099, and Oman 0.0221. Women in these countries have virtually *no* political empowerment. Bahamas, Belize, Bhutan, Brunei Daraussalam, Guetamala, Lebanon, Quatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Ukraine have *no* women in ministerial positions.

Country	2006 score	2013 score	Δ score 2006-13	% Δ 2006-13
Nicaragua	0.6566	0.7710	0.1144	17.4
Saudi Arabia	0.5242	0.5880	0.0638	12.2
Iceland	0.7813	0.8730	0.0917	11.7
Yemen	0.4595	0.5130	0.0535	11.6
Luxembourg	0.6671	0.7410	0.0739	11.1
Malawi	0.6437	0.7140	0.0703	10.9
Switzerland	0.6997	0.7740	0.0743	10.6
India	0.6011	0.6550	0.0539	9.0
France	0.6520	0.7090	0.0570	8.7
Latvia	0.7091	0.7610	0.0519	7.3
Ireland	0.7335	0.7820	0.0485	6.6
Chad	0.5247	0.5590	0.0343	6.5
Brazil	0.6543	0.6950	0.0407	6.2
Slovenia	0.6745	0.7160	0.0415	6.1
Finland	0.7958	0.8420	0.0462	5.8
Mongolia	0.6821	0.7200	0.0379	5.6
South Africa	0.7125	0.7510	0.0385	5.4
Norway	0.7994	0.8420	0.0426	5.3
Denmark	0.7462	0.7780	0.0318	4.3
Kazakhstan	0.6928	0.7220	0.0292	4.2
Philippines	0.7516	0.7830	0.0314	4.2
Poland	0.6802	0.7030	0.0228	3.3
Australia	0.7163	0.7390	0.0227	3.2
Portugal	0.6922	0.7060	0.0138	2.0
Benin	0.5780	0.5890	0.0110	1.9
Romania	0.6797	0.6910	0.0113	1.7
Japan	0.6447	0.6500	0.0053	0.8
Germany	0.7524	0.7580	0.0056	0.7
Pakistan	0.5434	0.5460	0.0026	0.5
Morocco	0.5827	0.5850	0.0023	0.4
Sweden	0.8133	0.8130	-0.0003	0.0
Mauritania	0.5835	0.5810	-0.0025	-0.4
Spain	0.7319	0.7270	-0.0049	-0.7
Mali	0.5996	0.5870	-0.0126	-2.1

**Table 2. The Gender Gap between 2006 and 2013<sup>6</sup>**

Table 3 extends the data series back to 2000, thus giving a slightly longer view of changes over time. It offers data on the “best” four, and the “worst” four, countries vis-à-vis positive changes in the gender equality gap.

<sup>6</sup> Table 2 is based upon table A1, *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2013, 39)

Country	Score in 2000	Score in 2013	Diff	%Δ
Switzerland	0.6356	0.7736	0.1380	21.711
Belgium	0.6414	0.7684	0.1270	18.800
Finland	0.7240	0.8421	0.1181	16.312
Iceland	0.7632	0.8731	0.1099	14.399
UK	0.7222	0.7440	0.0218	3.018
Czech Rep	0.6670	0.6770	0.0100	1.493
Hungary	0.6697	0.6742	0.0045	0.672
Slovak Rep	0.6845	0.6857	0.0012	0.017

**Table 3. The Gender Gap between 2000 and 2013<sup>7</sup>**

According to *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2013, 35) “Out of the 110 countries covered in 2006–2013, 86% have improved their performance, while 14% have widening gaps”. A small number of exceptions, notwithstanding, the pace of improvement is glacially slow. The UK, for example, has improved overall gender inequality by only 3% in 13 years. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Yemen remain exceptionally unequal societies. Whilst it is tempting to extrapolate, and calculate the number of years that must pass before UK, Saudi Arabia or Yemen, for example, experiences complete closure of the gender gap, this is problematic because it assumes rates of change will remain constant – and history teaches us that this is most unlikely to be the case.

Taking a step “back” from the morass of statistical detail, then, what do these data reveal? They reveal, quite clearly, that despite inter-country differences, there is an equality gap between women and men in all countries. In the “best” ten countries vis-à-vis gender equality, the gap is around 80%; and in the “worst” ten countries the gap is around 50%. Whilst the gender gap is improving in most countries, and worsening in a significant minority, what is more worrying is that the pace of improvement is glacially slow.

Before moving to the first chapter in the collection, the following notes of caution are worth advancing. Quantitative data like those presented above are riddled with problems, and are extremely “blunt instruments” in comparison to the more nuanced evidence presented in the following chapters. If used with extreme caution, however, they can be useful. Furthermore, not all aspects of gender inequality can be captured in quantitative data, indeed, some aspects are hard to define let alone measure. This point is important because it highlights the fact that even if, for example, the gender pay gap were to be closed, many other aspects of gender inequality in social,

<sup>7</sup> Table 3 is based upon table A2, *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2013, 42).

economic, political and cultural dimensions would continue to exist. This is, however, why the kind of arguments presented in the following chapters are so important. They offer a far more nuanced understanding of how gender inequality is produced, reproduced or transformed.

## References

*The Global Gender Gap Report* (2013). World Economic Forum: Geneva.



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# CHAPTER ONE

## TRACKING WOMEN'S HISTORY, AND FEMINIST AND GENDER THEORIES: AN INTRODUCTION

MARIA ZINA GONÇALVES DE ABREU

UNIVERSITY OF MADEIRA, PORTUGAL

RESEARCH CENTRE OF AMERICAN STUDIES (CEAUL)

UNIVERSITY OF LISBON.

MZGABREU@UMA.PT

One of the most significant consequences of the negative social opinions and attitudes towards women derive from their having lived in a man's world that made them ahistorical human beings, whose life experience was framed by 'society's prescriptions about what women should do, be and look like'  
—Elaine Graham (1995, 136)

The consolidated intricate male-oriented and male-dominant socio-cultural pattern of Western societies has made it exceedingly difficult for historians and feminist critics to draw a coherent picture of women's historical past, cultural legacy and life experiences.

It was only with the sustaining work of feminist scholars since the 1970s, who framed new analytical tools and approaches to the study of women's history, life experiences, and gender relations, that traditional patterns of research and analytic expression have been gradually reversed, thus facilitating further and broader scholarship. Within the new categories, historical events, for example, were thenceforth analysed from different or broader perspectives, placing women at the centre of history and making sense of their experiences. This new approach enabled a better understanding of what History would be like "if it were seen through the eyes of women and ordered by values they define" (Lerner 1979, 168). The corpus of analysis was also diversified. The invisibility of women in historical accounts, and the scarcity of women-authored works that survived, especially in the earlier periods, led feminist scholars to draw on a diversity of sources, such as male and female authored literary works, diaries, letters, the fine arts, and so on. Others opted for an interdisciplinary approach by weaving together evidence

from archaeology, religion, social science, history, and many other fields of inquiry. The aim was firstly to understand the genesis of misogyny, the subordination of women, and the biased gender relations profusely entrenched in society. Secondly, to show that womanhood and gender relations are neither divinely nor biologically ordained (Eisler 1987), but rather firmly rooted in what actually happened in women's historical past and life experiences (Anderson 1990, I, xviii-xix).

In her book *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner (1986, 52) relates the story of civilisation with the struggle of both men and women to free themselves from their vulnerable dependence on Nature and their partial mastery over it. This historian explains that in this struggle women were confined to species-essential activities longer than men, and that this situation led to their greater vulnerability to being disadvantaged right from the dawn of civilisation. Lerner then sharply distinguishes biological necessity, to which both men and women submitted and adapted, and culturally constructed customs and institutions, which forced women into subordinate roles.

In Europe, women's greater vulnerability intensified as time went on, resulting in the gradual devaluing of women's lives, activities, and achievements, and the belittling of female nature. In their two volume book *A History of their Own* (1988), Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser brilliantly illustrate how, for centuries, women have been a disadvantaged and invisible majority. According to these historians, laws, economic systems, religion, and polities have excluded women from the most valued areas and activities of life; and cultural views and attitudes have defined women as innately inferior, and placed them in a subordinate relationship to men. The fact that, broadly speaking, women have accepted without challenge, or been forced to accept, these limitations is, therefore, particularly perplexing. Gerda Lerner sheds some light into women's "historical 'complicity' in upholding the patriarchal system (...) and in transmitting that system, generation after generation, to their children of both sexes" (1986, 6, 52). According to this author, women might have agreed to a sexual division of labour seemingly unaware of the consequences which in the long run would disadvantage them. Yet, some did escape this situation to a greater or lesser degree, chiefly women from wealthy and aristocratic families. A few were queens in their own right, having ruled powerful dynastic states as absolute monarchs, and several talented women achieved recognition and power as abbesses, poets, artists, and writers. Noteworthy are, for example, Hilda, Abbess of Whitby (618-80), female scholars like Hroswitha de Gandersheim (d. c. 990) – whom Conrad Celtes called the German "Sapho" – and Hildegard de Bingen (d. 1179), and

influential mystics like Catherine of Siena (1347-80) and Teresa d'Avila (1515-82), the first women to be named Doctors of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The factors that help explain how women ended up collaborating in, or were forced to accept their own subordination, and how this situation shaped patriarchy, are many and varied. Amongst the most significant, however, are: male superiority in physical strength, maternity, economic dependency on the male head of the family, class privileges bestowed upon conforming women of the upper classes, the artificially created division of women into “respectable” – attached to one man – and “non-respectable” – not attached to one man or free of all men (Lerner 1986, 9), along with the unrelenting indoctrination of their “natural” inferiority. Moreover, the historical invisibility of women's deeds, roles, failures and successes further contributed to reinforce and consolidate subordination.

## Insights on the Genesis and Developments of Misogyny

Many of the cultural views denigrating women are rooted in the earliest writings of the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews, which changed remarkably little over time and whose impact no woman has escaped. For example, for centuries a woman who did rule over men or held a dominant role, whether from a throne or within a family, was seen as “unwomanly” and dangerous to the Universe's hierarchy, which made man come first. In his vicious tract *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1588), addressed to Queen Mary I (1553-1558), the renowned Scottish reformer John Knox, for example, defined female rule as “monstrous and unnatural”, and alleged that the calamities of her reign (religious persecutions) were signs of God's wrath and punishment to his fellow Englishmen for tolerating such a degenerate regime. Identifying Mary with the biblical Jezebel<sup>2</sup> – the paradigm of an idolatrous, wicked and tyrant female ruler –, Knox incited the English people to rebel and overthrow her from the throne, and ultimately to punish her with death if she resisted. He further pinned down his vociferous opposition to gynaecocracy by defining the authority of all women as “a wall without foundation” (Knox 1558; Abreu 2003<sup>b</sup>).

The Aristotelian assumptions that only men were truly human and sovereign, to whom women, as inferior beings, were subordinate (*De Generatione Animalium* 737a25), along with biblical teachings like the

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<sup>1</sup> By Pope Paul VI, in 1970. For more details about this brief outline, see also Anderson 1990, I, 204-13; Sharar 1991, 31, 38ff; Lucas 1984, 140-43; Abreu 2007, 156-66, 175-81; Franco 2008, 176-84.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kgs. 16; 18; 21; 2 Kgs. 9; 30.