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Politics and Hegemony in the Historiography of Women's Movements

(Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries): A Call for New Debates

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Introduction

My aim, from an early-twenty-first century perspective, is to try and summarise, with as much nuance as is possible in such a brief overview, the main factors complicating the writing of women's movements history today. The paper is styled as a structured series of reflections on the institutionalisation and professionalisation of women's movements and feminist history.

After a brief historical overview of debates in the academy over the exclusions which have been enacted by both Western women's movements and their historians, I suggest that while feminist theory has paid careful attention to different historical forms of, say, class/race bias in Western feminist thought and practice, and while many of these insights have filtered into the writing of women's movements history, a less well interrogated dichotomy still persists in the historiography of women's movements between so-called political and non-political spheres of women's activity. I argue that this particular dichotomy of political/non-political (or the infamous public/private dichotomy, on which a vast feminist theoretical literature exists) not only persists in the historiography of women's movements, but has in some ways helped to strengthen asymmetries in the way the activities of different groups of women are perceived.¹ I argue that this is particularly ironic, given the deep awareness most gender-sensitive historians have of the structural hierarchies that dichotomous constructions such as public/private, political/non-political generate, reinforce and reproduce. Furthermore, I link the dichotomy of political/non-political to another problematic dichotomy that I call »real« versus »inauthentic« feminism – a dichotomy which I think underpins certain historiographic/methodological assumptions about how historians may know and/or identify feminism in a given historical context. I must admit that the »real/inauthentic« feminism dichotomy is of my own making insofar as no serious scholar would think to explicitly speak in such terms. However, while working on this essay I decided to explore the covert operations of this dichotomy in historiographic practice, as the notion of »real« feminism seems to remain all too easily available to students and scholars alike. Therefore I seek to

interrogate the ways in which feminist historical narratives may help reinforce hegemonic definitions of »real« feminism versus »something else« – i.e. something which is not feminism, or »fake« feminism. It is to this »something else« that I refer when I use the term »inauthentic« feminism, which I argue tends to be both identified with Eastern European or non-European regions of the world and therefore constitutes another West-centric paradigm that we must work to address. But I also believe that this paradigm lies at the heart of another important issue for feminist/women's movements historiography: namely the difficulty of defining »the political«, and the tension between the political and the non-political which continues to haunt feminist history in the academy. I ask readers to consider the extent to which a modern liberal, national, juridical/rights-based model of citizenship frames and structures dominant historical perceptions of political activism and agency. I then call for a debate in feminist and women's movements history that could make this problem central to its concerns.

Making Waves, Parting Ways: Exclusions and Difference in Academic Feminism

The global emergence of the woman question in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries accompanied the parallel emergence of women's movements worldwide – the so-called feminist first wave. At the same time, it could be said, informal and non-institutionalised practices of doing women's movements history were born, since many members of women's organisations not only kept archives of their documents and correspondence, but took an active interest in the history of what they considered the women's movement.

In the early 1970s, the woman question appeared to resurface as a burning problem for the Cold War capitalist order, as militant and advocacy factions in Western Europe and North America, seeking to address women's interests as a group, made their presence felt in the immediate aftermath of 1968 and its radical political milieu. One well-documented outcome of this feminist second wave was the consolidation of women's studies as a marginalised but influential disciplinary field in the Western academy, and the accompanying development of new fields of academic study: women's and feminist history.

It is therefore possible to claim that the 1970s was the decade in which women's movements history was officially born; what occurred in the next two decades was professionalisation: historians, not activists, took on the responsibility for writing the history of women's movements (although of course many of these

historians were also activists or former activists of the second wave). One significant effect of professionalisation in the field was the promotion of the idea that there was an objective value in knowing about women's movements of the past. Previously, women's movements history had been conducted by those subjectively interested in the history of their own movement(s). During the period spanning the early 1970s to the late 1990s, the focus of interest in women's activism broadened in scope. Historians were not only interested in researching the historical conditions of women's movements in one country, but also, quickly enough, in creating comparative frameworks for researching the woman question and its corresponding women's movements and feminisms in international (though West-dominated) perspectives. Women's movements history began to crystallise around notions of global »beginnings« and »origins«, and a first wave of internationally organised women's movements from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

The effects of acknowledging this first wave – the starting point for women's movements history – were twofold. In the first place, it became relatively easy to speak about the women's movement in the singular, uniting causes, strategies, identities, activist networks under this umbrella concept that was understood to have paved the way for thinking and practicing feminism now (i.e. to have paved the way for second-wave feminism in the 1970s and even third-wave feminism in the 1990s).² In the second place, debates began to emerge both on activist terrains and in the academy over the concept of »sisterhood«, critiquing the universalism of this concept and some feminists' unwillingness to acknowledge differences of class, race, location, sexuality, etc. between women, as well as drawing attention to the difficulty of speaking about either women or the women's movement in unitary terms. This is important because it is indicative of the critically reflexive nature of women's and gender studies as a discipline (including its historical branches). The idea that historically there were chronological waves leading from one (international) feminist or women's movement in the singular to another, later one, has never been taken for granted over the last two decades, but, in the wake of the above-mentioned debates, has been subject to intense interrogation for as long as it has been an object of scholarly inquiry within the academy. What has been less subject to interrogation and discussion, however, is the way in which narratives of feminist and women's movement history link women to a particular vision of the political in order to make women's agency historically accessible, or, as I discuss below, visible.³

The deep tensions marking different conceptions of feminism or women's interests/movements have been noted by historians of women's movements

and are well known. In the main, as mentioned above, they relate to differences between women on the basis of race, class, sexuality and location; such differences have, since the early 1970s, been the basis for criticising a white, middle-class, heterosexual Western feminism that has claimed to be inclusive of all women. In the early 1980s (when the impact of earlier divisions among feminist and women's groups in activist contexts began to filter through into academic debates), the result of such criticisms was a weakening of any unified concept of women, women's activism and/or feminism, and the problematisation of the notion of *the* women's movement in the singular. Since then, it has become very apparent that feminist and women's movements always mirror deeply racialised and other social divisions. Black feminists located in the North American context, who later wrote on the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970s, commented on the inability of this movement to build a political imaginary for women that transcended class and race lines. In her 1984 essay on »political solidarity between women«, bell hooks noted the refusal of black women to join »the women's liberation movement as outlined by bourgeois white women«, commenting wryly that »black women would have been politically naive had we joined such a movement«. ⁴ Likewise Alice Echols, in her famous history of early radical feminism in America from the late 1960s to the mid 1970s, wrote that »most politically active black women, even if they criticized the black movement for sexism, chose not to become involved in *the* feminist struggle.« ⁵ The question that was being raised was, directly, whether *the* movement, in the singular, was good for black women. Indirectly, this led to a questioning of the underlying *raison d'être* of a movement which could be described as fundamentally inimical to the interests and concerns of marginalised women. The ironic dependence of white middle-class feminists on the domestic services of black women, women of colour and poorer women in general in order to achieve their own emancipation (read: well-paid jobs) has become feminism's standing joke. ⁶

Similarly, in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, feminist scholarship began to criticise the inability of Western feminism to speak to women of the former colonial and so-called Third World. Western feminist discourses, speech and speech acts were historically linked to nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of »maternal imperialism« – that is to say, to white European women's participation in the imperial and colonial government of the non-European world. Using frameworks developed from the work of Michel Foucault, Edward Said and the scholars of the *Subaltern Studies Group*, feminist theorists focused on the racial exclusions of European feminist movements, with their civilising missions and »white women's burdens«. ⁷ More recently, scholars have explored

the imperial exclusions enacted within West-dominated international feminist organisations in relation to Eastern Europe in the years leading up to World War One. Stateless nations in the Austro-Hungarian Empire struggled unsuccessfully for representation in West-dominated international women's organisations of the so-called feminist first wave, some of which lay down a national basis for membership that did not easily accommodate the geopolitical realities of Polish, Czech, or Ukrainian women. ⁸

The Political/Non-Political Dichotomy in Feminist and Women's Movements History

The racial, imperial and colonial agendas that feminism and women's movements have served in the past have helped establish certain theoretical commonplaces. First, women's interests are no longer defined universally or in the abstract, which has posed quite a challenge to academic feminism. ⁹ Second, and relatedly, in the absence of any unifying category of women, it not only becomes difficult to define exactly what is meant by a »women's movement« as opposed to a »feminist movement« ¹⁰, it is also necessary to remain completely contextual when discussing women's activism of any kind – taking into consideration a multitude of factors other than gender that inform group formation: e.g. ethnicity, class, sexuality, social location, etc. Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, make this point quite dramatically when they call for a new political history of women »that is less constrained by a gendered paradigm«. ¹¹ These authors not only strive to show how women's lives are affected differently by politics, but also warn against the dangers of treating women's political exclusion as the basic premise of feminist historical analysis. They note that the nineteenth-century political participation of British women – in local government and elections, as well as in riots and ceremonial events related to elections in England and Ireland – has been greatly under-researched. ¹² The assumption that patriarchy is a stable historical system premised on the political exclusion of women has also been challenged by sociologists of the modern family such as Jacques Donzelot, whose case study of nineteenth-century France convincingly argues that (middle-class) women's welfare movements and philanthropic activities directed at (working-class) women and their families were important, subtle mechanisms by which modernising nineteenth-century states stabilised themselves and developed social policies within a liberal framework of supposedly non-state intervention in the family: »[a] deliberately depoliticizing strat-

egy for establishing public services and facilities at a sensitive point midway between private initiative and the state.¹³ Donzelot's findings have not really been worked into a dialogue with feminist history in any meaningful sense; one could argue that this is because they challenge paradigmatic constructions of the state as ultimately patriarchal and women's position in relation to it as ultimately one of exclusion from patriarchal politics. Another much neglected area of women's movements history which similarly challenges conventional understandings of patriarchy and politics is that of women's mobilisation against the female franchise – acting out of either anarchist-socialist or conservative-imperial convictions, or else from convictions that simply defy translation into Whiggish political vocabularies of emancipation and progress.¹⁴

The point I wish to make above is that political narratives of women's activism cannot necessarily be reduced to the fight for women's inclusion in the patriarchal state, of which the women's pro-suffrage campaigns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have become paradigmatic examples. Campaigns by women against the female franchise sit uneasily alongside a definition of women's politics as the fight for women's inclusion, and draw attention to the fact that it is not only feminism, but feminist or women's movements/politics that need more careful definition. Scholars aware of the blind spots created by such framings call »for precision«, while seriously engaging with the range of factors that help to shape women's political consciousness and identity.¹⁵ They ask us not to lapse into polarities – e.g. such as speaking in generalised terms about women of the »upper« as opposed to the »lower« class.¹⁶ I call for a reworking of conventional definitions of »politics« which can not only draw attention to under-researched forms of participation by women in a system that is understood to politically exclude them but also incorporate activities and identities based on a lack of resistance to political exclusion, and address forms of women's mobilisation that cannot be translated into a fight for inclusion/citizenship.

I would like now to clarify some of the points made above by summarising what I consider to be the three main difficulties facing women's movements and feminist historians today:

- the difficulty of employing a unifying category of women for the purposes of writing feminist history/women's movements history/women's political history;
- the difficulty of defining feminism in terms of historical »waves« of political activity over the *longue durée*;
- the difficulty of defining politics as the fight of the excluded for inclusion.

These difficulties are symptomatic of the real social, cultural, national, ethnic, generational and economic differences that have caused women to adopt and invent diverse political strategies and identities in the course of history, and reflect the broader linguistic impossibility of defining the political in any coherent way – which is a central problem with which I am concerned here. A unified category of women for the purposes of women's political history implies a unified plane of political action. Similarly, histories of waves of feminism in North America and Western Europe suggest a one-dimensional mode of feminist politics that is immediately recognisable as politics the moment it »erupts« – to cite Karen Offen – on the (political) scene.¹⁷ To question politics-as-eruption challenges both the notion of a unified political subject position (e.g. one that is identifiably activist or feminist) and the notion of a political wave (e.g. of women's activism and/or feminism).

Many postmodern theorists have extensively written about the theoretical non-viability of the unified female subject.¹⁸ I have also already mentioned above the way that postcolonial and black feminists have contested the notion that the second-wave women's movement was one unified movement. Black and post-colonial feminisms in particular have helped to undermine the universalism of categories such as first- and second-wave feminism by pointing out the different precedents for activism that have existed for women, operating across very different political planes, spheres and time frames.¹⁹ The result has been the emergence of a truly self-reflexive theoretical field in women's and feminist studies which sees as a primary goal the development of »more open-ended articulations of [feminism]«.²⁰

Such insights have certainly informed feminist historiography. S. Jay Kleinberg asked in 1992: »[t]o what extent does writing about women's past imply an ideological unity or common set of references among those who undertake it?«²¹ But there is some grounds for questioning whether the filtering of feminist theory into feminist history/historiography has really been enough. In particular, I am suggesting that there has not been adequate historiographic investigation into the ways that notions of the political – and indeed the non-political – have informed feminist historical narratives, and how these narratives in turn have shaped what feminist historians understand by the political. When spaces, actions, identities, forms of consciousness/activism, demands, strategies, organisations, etc. are defined as political, it becomes difficult to disentangle women's history from feminist history – as Jay Kleinberg has also noted.²² But what is meant by political? The late twentieth century witnessed a subsumption of feminist theory under the theoretical mantra: the personal is political. Feminist activists and scholars

tirelessly critiqued the political/non-political dichotomy, arguing that patriarchal systems have relentlessly privatised and depoliticised women's lives and experiences, thereby rendering them historically irrelevant.²³ But, it could be argued, this has reinforced a tendency in feminist history to privilege particular definitions of the political through the motion of politicising the non-political, rather than interrogating what the political is exactly. Feminist activism or women's movements have become knowable in books as outbursts of politics on the otherwise non-political or sociological plane of women's lives, and women's movements history has become identified primarily with the visibilisation of women's political consciousness as marginalised subjects who have defied their sociological ontology by speaking out as political actors and emergent citizens.²⁴ Since the professionalisation of women's history in the 1970s, it has become a commonplace to observe that women have been devalued (i.e. invisibilised) as a source of cheap labour in the market and of free labour at home, and that this is what has led, in mainstream historical scholarship, to a »devalued [...] vision of [women] as historical subjects, as agents of change«.²⁵ Such an approach contains the internally sound argument that women can acquire historical subject positions – i.e. historical visibility – through the exposure of historical documents that testify to their capacities as agents of change. The »visibility-of-the-excluded« approach helps to strengthen a powerful narrative of progress, or gradual inclusion, into the »visible« sphere of what is taken for granted as a sphere of power and politics.²⁶

In the main, women's movements history – particularly in the European core or in North American contexts – has been about an exposure or visibilisation of excluded female political actors, a narrative which can all too easily become conflated with the truth of women's political agency, and which contributes to an overwhelming faith in the knowability of women's political lives. Doing women's movements and feminist history itself becomes inextricable from the historian's own expression of a political act: i.e. one of uncovering hitherto hidden or invisible spheres of political action; in the meantime, the meaning of political action itself is rarely interrogated. Instead, the political actions of women in the past are foreclosed within dominant understandings of politics as that which aims at changing a (state) structure from which women as political actors have been excluded, and into which they seek inclusion. Seeking inclusion in a dominant structure through the demand of opportunities and rights as (future or aspiring) citizens-in-a-state is taken for granted as the main ethos underpinning resistance and feminist/political praxis, which is why, perhaps, we have so very little history dealing with communities of women who, having been subject to genocidal

or extreme exclusionary measures, have acted in history in ways which are not reducible to the political language of participation/inclusion. It would seem that the notion of a political movement does not – and cannot – apply to such communities.²⁷ Similarly, given the overwhelming dominance of North American scholarship in the fields of women's political history, there is surprisingly little scholarship on American Indian women's activism during the feminist second wave of the 1960s and 1970s. All students familiar with this period of American feminism have heard of the Black civil rights and Black Power movement, and its complex relationship with feminism, but how many have heard of the contemporaneous Red Power (American Indian) movement, with its female activists and women-led welfare initiatives? Perhaps this blind spot can be explained in part by the American Indian Movement's basic agenda of non-inclusion in US national politics (»Black Power wants in; we [Red Power] want out«).²⁸

Is it true that political narratives of women's lives – i.e. narratives that strive to provide historical accounts of women's movements and feminisms – are not really drawn to the lives of women who aim for strategic non-inclusion or non-assimilation as non-citizens within the dominant or emerging (patriarchal) state structure? If so, why not? What I am suggesting, or at least opening up for discussion, is that the lives of some women translate all too easily into a non-political or socio-anthropological domain of inquiry, which feminist or women's movements history find difficult to incorporate or render visible/meaningful. I would argue that this reproduction of the political/non-political dichotomy is an unfortunate side-effect of feminist history's politicising effects, which have come about with the inauguration of feminist and women's movements history in the academy.

Complementing narratives of transition from exclusion to inclusion is the key concept of civil society, without which it may be argued that documented records of women's movements – such as minutes and journals, as well as exchanges and personal letters between individuals – lose their political meaning as historical evidence of the emergence and development of a nascent civil society of female political actors worldwide. By civil society I refer to a hegemonic (Habermasian) understanding of women's organisational networks based on communicative action, voluntary association, observation and reflection, operating – at least ideally – along a transnational political plane at a critical distance from the hierarchical power relations of individual states, and in response to the global uniformities of a patriarchy that has excluded women from the juridico-political sphere of action (e.g. by excluding women from exercising the right to vote or denying them property and other citizenship rights within the family).²⁹

The beauty of the idea of a feminist public/civil society expanding transnationally outwards from the Western nations to the rest of the globe through the growth of international feminism lies in its exemplary nature as a perfect example of what civil society is, or should be about – in Habermasian terms. Since women's and feminist movements seem so utterly independent of, and opposed to, the patriarchal state (especially in the so-called patriarchal nineteenth century), which by definition excludes women, they appear particularly powerful examples of autonomous and voluntary association independent from state control. Let us put this ideal-typical embodiment of the Habermasian discursive ideal into its historical context. Sven Reichardt writes:

The worldwide celebration of the civil society today is a predictable by-product of the widespread disenchantment with the state in the west and the fight against corrupt and authoritarian states in East Asia or Latin America. Civil society is an expression of the liberal scepticism about an all-powerful and moral indifferent [sic] bureaucracy that regulates societies along the line of self-orientated and autistic orderliness.³⁰

My purpose in citing Reichardt here is to emphasise a historiographical point: namely that scepticism about the (patriarchal, capitalist) state and a concomitant enchantment with the concept of civil society has been a dominant feature of the milieu in which both women's and feminist history were professionalised/institutionalised in the period from the mid 1970s onwards. Disenchantment with the state and a deep investment in civil societies of actors capable of resisting patriarchal state formations can therefore be seen as important factors shaping the ways in which feminist historians have narrated the emergence of women's movements as litmus-test indicators of democratic progressivism, embodied by healthily-functioning examples of ideal-typical civil society. Joan Scott stated long ago that feminist/women's movements history has served »a compensatory purpose: it [merely] insists that women were social and political actors in the past and provides information to prove that«.³¹ What is now necessary, in my view, is a more comprehensive overview of the ways in which politics has been construed as historians have tried to rescue and reclaim women as historical subjects from their ostensibly non-political sociological existence – an existence which has been, at least since the 1970s, explicitly equated with women's invisibility. The understanding that women's invisibility in history was a result of patriarchal structures having suppressed women's propensity for political action/activism has had both positive and, on the other hand, mystifying effects. One such mystifying effect, or so I argue, is the reification of

politics-as-visibility or what I choose to call »real feminism« – which brings me to the final section of this paper.

»Real« versus »inauthentic« feminism

In the section above, I hinted that certain paradigms in women's movements and feminist history, operating around notions such as feminist civil society and invisibility/becoming visible, etc, have relied on hegemonic understandings of feminist activity: they have conceived of feminist activity as political activity that is directed at the state from a subject position that is excluded from the state – aimed at inclusion in the state, but organised independently of the state, and therefore independently of state ideology. In this section, I suggest that such an approach has helped to create an obfuscating discourse around feminism revolving around notions of »real« and »inauthentic« protest. For my purposes here, I define »real« feminisms/women's movements as those which can be shown to operate in distinction from (patriarchal) state-building processes, and which may therefore be considered authentic examples of civil society. »Inauthentic« feminisms/women's movements, on the other hand, are only conceivable as part of patriarchal state-building processes, particularly nationalist ones – and are therefore less authentic and effective than their »real« counterparts.

My concern with these two types of feminism, as I hope to demonstrate below, is that they emerge historiographically in different parts of the world (never in the same geographical location), reflecting unequal divisions between countries within the global world system. Where new or emergent nations are concerned – i.e. where state institutions are considered to be unstable, incomplete, or developing in decolonising, nationalising, or unstable (totalitarian) peripheral contexts –, feminist and women's movements either do not appear visible or else do not appear »real/authentic«. I will turn to further discussion of this later with reference to the peripheral contexts of Turkey and Hungary, but first it is important to reiterate that what I call »inauthentic« feminism is seen properly to belong in peripheral or non-European countries where women's activities may be characterised as »less visible« and »less public« than, say, patriarchal nation-building enterprises.³² In core patriarchal states, by contrast, so for example in older, supposedly more stable Western European nations, we find stronger depictions of something resembling feminist public/civil societies, which consist of women excluded from the patriarchal/national state and which operate in autonomous relation to this state. »Real« feminism, therefore, may be characterised as a Western European phenomenon.³³

Not long ago a student of mine – a non-native speaker of English – apologised to me in class for what she thought to be her overly simplistic use of the English language. In a history class on the women's movement in late Ottoman Turkey, she had drawn a distinction between what she called »real feminism« and »something else«. ³⁴ The reference in question was to a text by Deniz Kandiyoti on women's emancipation in Turkey in the context of declining Ottoman power in the immediate aftermath of the Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876). ³⁵ Kandiyoti's text notes that the Tanzimat period introduced some »modest legislative advances concerning women«, as well as some »innovations in the field of women's education«, but that the passionate public debates over the Ottoman family and the position of women that followed the Tanzimat reforms were led by intellectual and upper-class male advocates of social reform. ³⁶ Kandiyoti underscores the male gender of these »most outspoken critics of the Ottoman family system«, while noting that women »may have been more timid or at least cautious in this respect«. ³⁷ This is presented as an overall paradigm for the rise of Turkish nationalism well into the 1920s and after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, when »progressive men« were complaining about repressive family laws which had not »raised a murmur from women«. ³⁸ According to Kandiyoti, in this context we cannot speak of women's emancipation as such, but rather of ideological manoeuvres on the part of Turkish nationalism. She writes:

The process of mobilization and the co-opting of women into the ideological struggles of the Republic can [...] be seen to be significantly different from early feminist movements in the West. In this latter [i.e. in the West, A.L.], the women's struggle took place against a background where legislation was lagging considerably behind the socio-economic realities of advancing industrialism and a growing labour movement. In Turkey it was an ideological lever operating on a substantially unchanged economic base, at least so far as women's economic and familial options were concerned.³⁹

Kandiyoti's description of »women's struggle« in Turkey as »an ideological lever« was what led my student to contrast it with what she called »real feminism« – to be contrasted with Kandiyoti's various comments about women's silence and their lack of visibility. »Real« feminism, one might deduce from this, is not ideological, the meaning of this being simply that »real« feminism is not directed from above, but towards the state – from a position outside it. ⁴⁰

Debates about state feminism in the non-Western world have raged for years now in many forms. Leila Ahmed has written on »colonial feminism«: the enthusiasm of European men for women's emancipation in the colonies that revolved

around a discourse entirely divorced from the lives and aspirations of »real« women there. ⁴¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted the instrumentalisation of the idea of women's natural and individual rights in order to legitimise the cause of Indian (Hindu) nationalism and the emergent independent state there. ⁴² More recently, in regard to the countries of the former Soviet Bloc, an academic debate has taken place entitled »Is »Communist Feminism« a Contradiction in Terminus?« – with essay titles such as: »Communism was a State Patriarchy, not State Feminism«; »How Should we Name the »Women-Friendly« Actions of State Socialism?«; and »Communist Feminism: The Unfulfilled Possibilities of a Difficult Relationship«. ⁴³ Here, as in the colonies, and in modernising Turkey, women's activities and the transformations affecting their lives are not seen, to cite Kandiyoti again, »to stand in any mechanical or easily understandable relationship to the woman question«. ⁴⁴ The woman question in these peripheral (non-Western) contexts is simply a series of ideological discourses; as feminism, it is »inauthentic«.

In my class, we gave ideological feminism the name »state feminism«, following Ayşe Kadioglu's discussion of the woman question in Republican Turkey. ⁴⁵ State or ideological feminism may be characterised as »inauthentic« for some authors to the extent that it is seen to modernise from above – so defying any possibility of speaking about the political in terms of feminist civil society. ⁴⁶ However, the significance of linking ideology and feminism in non-Western contexts, as in the Kandiyoti text cited above, lies in what it tells us about »real« feminism (i.e. in the West). In contrast with the situation in peripheral contexts, »real« feminism refers to transformations which affect »real« women, their actions, and correspond directly, or are organically linked to, the emergence of the woman question. This link is very much understood as one operating between social change, political subjectivity and law. In the West, or so the grand narrative goes, changing socio-economic realities produced a new type of female political activist driven to demand inclusion in the state by calling for new laws, legislation and social policies. They did this, however, from a subject position that was excluded from the state, and therefore independent of both the state and state ideology. In Turkey, by contrast, the frustrated pace of social change (industrialisation) alongside slow legal reforms did not lead to the development of a female political subjectivity (high rates of illiteracy and ethnic and religious diversity are also implied explanatory factors for this lack of political consciousness) able to produce »real« or effective feminist politics. As in other peripheral countries, the Turkish state is seen to produce its own woman question as a way of negotiating the gap between a desired objective of national industrial progress and the

agricultural realities of a heavily landed economy. Women's own understandings of their socio-economic realities are not translatable into political awareness -- in feminist terms; instead, women appear invisible and silent: not »raising a murmur«.

I have a great deal of sympathy with Kandiyoti's analysis, not least because her findings for the Ottoman/Turkish case mirror almost exactly my own findings regarding Hungarian women's movements, which also focus on family law, women's civil status and legal reform in the same period. However, in my research I have argued that the lack/invisibility of a Hungarian women's movement addressing areas of law and legislation affecting women was not so much the result of a state monopoly on emancipatory discourses, but rather could be attributed to the lack of a unified national basis for law. I have tried to show how the attempts to codify law along national lines in Hungary generated a great deal of legal scholarship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on Hungarian family law which assumed the national basis of law and the homogeneity of women's legal/civil status. This deceptive framework obscured the diversity of actual legal arrangements and systems on the ground (conditions I refer to throughout my thesis as legal pluralism), but it did help create the basis for a women's movement for legal reform of state law, which appeared after the submission of the first draft civil code for parliamentary review in 1913.⁴⁷ In my own research on Hungary, I noted critical legal theorist Robert M. Unger's observation that a certain conviction is necessary on the part of the members of a legal reform movement that an objective basis for legal decision-making exists. He concludes that since no national basis for legal reform existed in Hungary prior to the drafting of a civil code, no objective basis for legal reform could exist either -- at least in terms of creating a visible (nation-wide) mobilisation of »Hungarian women«.⁴⁸ Male advocates of legal reform of family law in Hungary, as in Turkey, in the absence of an available feminist narrative of resistance to patriarchy, tried to (in Kandiyoti's words) »absorb new positions into existing ideologies, [creating] complex, convoluted bodies of discourse.«⁴⁹ In Hungary, these »bodies of discourse«, as in Turkey, consisted of »civilizational« narratives, celebrating the golden age of national Hungarian law (pre-empire) in which women had historic rights; and »self-peripheralising« narratives, which saw Western industrial progress as the future direction for Hungary as a pariah European state.⁵⁰ A third discourse in Hungary I discovered while conducting my research, and which I felt to be quite cryptic and yet significant, was a highly ambiguous one based on a call to Hungarian women to wake up and free themselves from legal enslavement, while citing legal references from other countries, such as the French civil

code of 1804 (not operational in Hungary), which was condemned as a major cause of women's general oppression under patriarchy.⁵¹

What does all of the above amount to? In my view, historical observations of the kind that I have described with reference to Kandiyoti's work on Turkey and my own on Hungary tell us less about historical conditions in particular countries than they do about what it is we want/expect to find in terms of visible feminism. I have grown increasingly cautious in recent times about attributing a lack of visible feminism to the absence of stable political structures and lack of civil society in peripheral parts of the world. I fear that the move to define feminism in universal terms, on the basis of traditional historical narratives of Western feminism, remains all too easy in historiography and scholarly practice. What I mean by a traditional historical narrative of Western feminism is one in which feminist civil society is seen to »appear« (become visible) outside of state ideology, or in which the instability or incoherence of the patriarchal state is downplayed in favour of foregrounding narratives of »real« feminist resistance. This is not so much an argument about racist imperialism versus cultural relativism (and the East/West dichotomy in the writing of feminist/women's movements history). The point I want to make here is that the historical search for »real« feminism can be seen not only as a project of making visible women's actual mobilisations, but also, and primarily, as one of making visible a specific type of »good citizen«: one who, since the 1970s, has been celebrated for his/her ability to strive for inclusion through participatory acts directed at the state, while remaining (ostensibly) autonomous from the state. The definition of the »person-as-citizen« (that is, as political individual) has of course its own Enlightenment origins; it is a definition which has evolved historically alongside debates over the rights and obligations of groups of potential citizens (workers, women, children), who are then incorporated into modern national legal structures. It is only these groups of citizens -- as legal discourse sees fit to produce them -- which are rendered visible in modern history. Those who are not citizens, or who do not claim the pseudo status of aspiring citizens, still find it difficult to make it into narratives of feminist/women's movement history, being less visible and less authentic.

Conclusion

In spite of the fact that feminist legal and political theory has endlessly debated the gendered, raced and classed dimensions of the modern citizen, it is still this citizen (or aspiring citizen) that has provided feminist history with its (national)

historical subject: hence the difficulty of speaking about feminism before the Enlightenment or in relation to non citizens – especially in the periphery where Enlightenment discourses tend to be caught/suspended between competing discourses of modernisation. When we discuss the absence of »weak« feminism, what we are really talking about is the absence of one coherent Enlightenment discourse in which to ground a particular understanding of political agency as participation and the fight for inclusion in the modern national state. To what extent the concept of political agency will be debated in feminist historiography as the post-1968 fascination with civil society begins to wane remains yet to be seen, but it will be, I believe, an important, fruitful, exciting, and very necessary debate.

Anmerkungen

- 1 For example, while the term »women's movement« has been applied to social movements that have explicitly defined themselves as feminist – such as elements within the women's liberation movement of the 1970s –, it could also be argued that »feminist movement« and »women's movement«, used in conjunction by historians, are terms which may serve to create political hierarchies marking off the activities of some women in relation to their supposedly more feminist sisters. Thus, in historicographic terms historians find themselves dealing with two sets of terms: feminisms and women's movements. Women's movements can be defined as aiming »to improve women's status«, whereas feminist movements aim »for women's equality with men and/or to challenge patriarchal structures«. Needless to say, these two definitions are ambiguous and remain open to contestation and this is a problem, I argue, if, in their ambiguity, they suggest that certain types of political or activist identities are more transformative of patriarchy than others. See the introduction to Huan, Francisca de/Daskalova, Krassimira/Loufi, Anna (Eds.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms, Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*, New York/Budapest 2006, 4-5.
- 2 As David S. Meyer has noted, this homogenising process helps to create a particular impression of a social movement as a particular »constituency or cause: the women's movement, the peace movement, the environmental movement«, as if such »periodic formations are distinct and self-contained« [emphasis in the original]. See Meyer, David S., *Opportunities and Identities: Bridge-Building in the Study of Social Movements*, in: Meyer, David S./Whitner, Nancy/Robnett, Belinder (Eds.), *Social Movements. Identity, Culture, and the State*, Oxford 2002, 12.
- 3 See the following section.

- 4 hooks, bell, *Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women*, in: Meyers, Diana Tiefjens (Ed.), *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, New York/London 1997, 484-500 (here: 490). Emphasis mine.
- 5 Echols, Alice, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, Minneapolis 1989, 291. Emphasis mine.
- 6 »It is a source of amusement even now to black women to listen to feminist talk of liberation while somebody's nice black grandmother shoulders the daily responsibility of child rearing and floor mopping, and the liberated one comes home to examine the housekeeping, correct it, and be entertained by the children.« The writer Tony Morrison, cited in hooks, *Sisterhood*, in: Meyers (Ed.), *Feminist Social Thought*, 490.
- 7 See, for example, historical accounts of relations between British and Indian feminists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Burton, Antoinette, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*, Chapel Hill 1994 and Ramusack, Barbara, *Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865-1945*, in: Strobel, Margarete/Chaudhuri, Nupur (Eds.), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, Bloomington 1992, 119-136. For the international women's movement of the so-called first wave, see Rupp, Leila J., *Challenging Imperialism in International Women's Organizations*, in: *NWSA Journal*, 8 (Spring 1996), 8-27. For theoretical explorations of the issues raised here, see the seminal essay by Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse*, in: *Boundary Two*, 12 (1984) 2, 333-358, the equally famous essay by Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in: Nelson, Cary/Grossberg, Lawrence (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana/Chicago 1988, 271-313; as well as the useful summaries found in Roof, Judith/Wiegman, Robyn (Eds.), *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity*, Urbana/Chicago 1995, 3-29; 97-119.
- 8 Such as the *International Woman Suffrage Alliance* (founded in 1904). See Zimmermann, Susan, *Reich, Nation und Internationalismus. Kooperationen und Konflikte der Frauenbewegungen der Habsburger Monarchie im Spannungsfeld internationaler Organisation und Politik*, in: Heindl, Waltraud/Király, Edit/Millner, Alexandra (Hg.), *Frauenbilder, feministische Praxis und nationales Bewusstsein in Österreich-Ungarn 1867-1918*, Tübingen/Basel 2006, 119-167.
- 9 Hence the publication of edited collections of essays such as the Social Justice Group of the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies (Ed.), *Is Academic Feminism Dead? Theory in Practice*, New York 2000.
- 10 See footnote 1.
- 11 Hall, Catherine/McClelland, Keith/Rendall, Jane (Eds.), *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867*, Cambridge 2000, 35.

- 12 Hall/McClelland/Rendall (Eds.), *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 35.
- 13 Donzelot, Jacques, *The Policing of Families*, Robert Hurley (Trans.), Baltimore/London 1997, 55.
- 14 Exceptional works focusing on these areas include Benjamin, Anne, M., *A History of the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895 to 1920: Women Against Equality*, Lewiston, NY 1991. For more recent work on the British context see Bush, Julia, *Women Against the Vote, Female Anti Suffragism in Britain*, Oxford 2008.
- 15 Hall/McClelland/Rendall (Eds.), *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 34.
- 16 As Catherine Hall et al. have argued, enriching gender with class analysis whilst avoiding simple polarities such as upper – and lower – involves documenting the interrelations between religion, ethnicity, nationality, occupation, and the complexities of the class spectrum, comprised of aristocracy and gentry, the upper, professional and bohemian middle classes, clerical workers, small shopkeepers and tradeswomen, and [...] the women of the labouring poor». Hall/McClelland/Rendall (Eds.), *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 37.
- 17 Karen Offen employs the image of geysers, such as those found in Yellowstone National Park (Montana, USA), as a metaphor for European feminism: hot steam or water »erupting« through the cracks of patriarchy. See Offen, Karen, *Eruptions and Flows: Thoughts on Writing a Comparative History of European Feminisms, 1700–1950*, in: Sogner, Sølvi/Høgemann, Gro (Eds.), *Women's Politics and Women in Politics: In Honour of Ida Blom*, Oslo 2006, 281–300.
- 18 Notably Judith Butler. See Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York 1990.
- 19 For example, black »womanist« feminism and/or welfarism has been historicised, its emergence having been traced to the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, as a set of coherent identities and political strategies operating across a very different political plane than those of white feminists in North America. See the famous essay: Brown, Elsa Barkley, *Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke*, in: *Signs*, 14 (1989), 610–633.
- 20 »During the 1980s, debates about difference and equality, pornography and constructions of female sexualities, lesbian scholarship, and the challenges of postmodern, postcolonial, and transnational feminisms began to inflect introductory women's studies texts, [which] took as their central task the struggle to capture lived experience, to create effective political strategies and theoretical visions, and to translate those experiences, strategies, and visions into a coherent feminism neither so rigid that it excludes desired constituencies nor so amorphous that it cannot transform the deeply embedded structures of oppression that transform women's lives.« McDermott, Patrice, *The Meaning and Uses of Feminism in Introductory Women's Studies Textbooks*, in: *Feminist Studies*, 24 (Disciplining Feminism? The Future of Women's Studies, Summer 1998) 2, 403–427.

- 21 Kleinberg, S. Jay (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society*, Berg 1992, x.
- 22 One might argue that this has been a direct result of the academic professionalisation of women's and feminist history in the late twentieth century as a political history of direct action (or *praxis*). See Kleinberg (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, x.
- 23 See, for example, Friedman, Susan, *Mappings. Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, Princeton 1998, 202.
- 24 Denise Riley has argued that from the late eighteenth century onwards, women were increasingly identified with either the familial household or the social world of philanthropy and welfare that was neither public nor private, resulting in a »dislocation of the political« as far as women were concerned and a redefinition of »women as sociological rather than political entities«. See Hall/McClelland/Rendall (Eds.), *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 34.
- 25 Scott, Joan Wallach, *The Problem of Invisibility*, in: Kleinberg (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, 5–29 (here: 14).
- 26 The idea that making women visible as political actors constitutes a historical methodology can in all probability be attributed to the famous publication of the late 1970s by Bridenthal, Renate/Koonz, Claudia/Stuard, Susan (Eds.), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, Boston 1977.
- 27 A case in point is that of Roma women's strategies for survival during the European Holocaust. I am grateful to my M.A. student, Anna Szász, who in her recently submitted MA thesis research has written about the possibilities for rethinking what we mean by women's political actions in ways that do not necessarily translate into the language of »civilik integration, participation or inclusion. See Szász, Anna, *Is Survival Resistance? Roma Women's Experiences During the Holocaust*, unpublished M.A. thesis submitted to the Nationalism Studies Department, Central European University: Budapest May 2008.
- 28 The *American Indian Movement* (AIM, founded in 1968) sought to reinforce the (non-national) juridical autonomy and legal independence of American Indian land and tribal communal structures within US national boundaries. For a rare (and early) account of the history of AIM, see Burnette, Robert/Koster, John, *The Road to Wounded Knee*, New York/London 1974. For a fascinating biography of an American Indian (Red Power) woman activist that deals with a prominent female leader of the movement without necessarily foregrounding gendered aspects of this particular life story see Brand, Joanna, *The Life and Death of Annie Mae Aquash*, Toronto 1993.
- 29 See, e.g., McFadden, Maggie, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth Century Feminism*, Lexington 1999 and Rupp, Leila J., *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, Princeton 1997.

- 30 Reichardt, Sven, *Civil society. Notes on the revival of a concept*, in: Eliasson, Sven (Ed.), *Building Democracy and Civil Society East of the Elbe. Essays in honour of Edmund Mokrzycki*, London 2006, 17-28 (here: 23).
- 31 Scott, *The Problem of Invisibility*, in: Kleinberg (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, 13. Emphasis in the original.
- 32 See, for example, Sinha, Mrinalini, *How History Matters. Complicating the Categories of »Western« and »Non-Western« Feminisms*, in: *Social Justice Group (Ed.), Is Academic Feminism Dead?*, 168-185 (here: 176).
- 33 It is not my intention to claim these statements as a set of absolute rules. Nor do I wish to suggest that women's movements and feminist history have not critically engaged with these dominant paradigms: on the contrary, my aim in the earlier part of this paper was to draw attention to the fact that there is a consensus in women's history that no unifying basis exists for understanding women's agency, politics or social movements. My point here is that, to my knowledge, this has not been addressed as part of a historiographical debate about how binary oppositions between the political and the non-political get reproduced and rewritten, and, or so I will argue here, how »inauthentic« feminism gets inadvertently constructed in the process of writing feminist/women's movements history.
- 34 The student in question was Adeline Vialtel. Her careful and thoughtful reflections in class gave me cause to ponder on the ways in which feminist historical narratives serve to construct and reinforce a distinction between authentic and less authentic forms of feminist practices/identity, for which I would like to thank her.
- 35 Kandiyoti, Deniz, *From Empire to Nation State: Transformations of the Woman Question in Turkey*, in: Kleinberg (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, 219-240.
- 36 Male proponents of »enlightened Islam«, »Westernisation«, and »liberal nationalism«. See Kandiyoti, *From Empire to Nation State*, in: Kleinberg (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, 223-226.
- 37 Kandiyoti, *From Empire to Nation State*, in: Kleinberg (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, 227.
- 38 Necmettin Sadak, cited in Kandiyoti, *From Empire to Nation State*, in: Kleinberg (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, 234. He concludes (in the same citation): »The Turkish Republic is insulting you with its laws, why are you not crying out?«
- 39 Kandiyoti, *From Empire to Nation State*, in: Kleinberg (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, 235. Emphasis mine.
- 40 In a similar vein has the woman question, as well as feminisms/women's movements across Eastern, Central and South Eastern Europe (including Turkey) been characterised in ideological terms. »[T]here does not seem to have been an ideological position or party line, faith, political modernization program or cultural/religious national movement that was

- example: from the burning issues of the day raised by what was known across all spectrums of intellectual endeavour as »the woman question«. All the same, two ideologies stand out in their involvement with »the woman question»: nationalism and socialism. »Haan/Daskalova/Loutfi (Eds.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms*, 6.
- 41 Aïme, Leïla, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New York 1992, 151-152.
- 42 Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000, 229-230.
- 43 See the various respective entries by Mihaela Miroiu (»Communism was a State Patriarchy, not State Feminism«), Krassimira Daskalova (»How Should we Name the »Women-Friendly« Actions of State Socialism?«) and Jane Slaughter (»Communist Feminism: The Unfulfilled Possibilities of a Difficult Relationship«) respectively, in Haan, Francisca de/Bucur, Maria/Daskalova, Krassimira, (Eds.), *Aspasia. International Yearbook of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History*, 1 (2007), 197-201; 214-219; 236-240.
- 44 Kandiyoti, Deniz, *From Empire to Nation State*, in: Kleinberg, S. Jay (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, 225.
- 45 Kadioglu, Ayse, *Women's Subordination in Turkey: Is Islam Really the Villain?*, in: *Middle East Journal*, 48 (1994), 645-661 (here: 651).
- 46 See the previous section for a discussion of this term.
- 47 Ioutfi, Anna, *Hungarian Family Law and the Struggle for Gender Order, 1848-1913*, unpublished doctoral thesis submitted to the History Department of the Central European University, Budapest December 2006, 259-289. For a short but similar argument see the considerably earlier essay by Howard, Judith Jeffrey, *The Civil Code of 1865 and the Origins of the Feminist Movement in Italy*, in: Caroli, Betty Boyd/Harney, Robert F./Thomasi, Lydio F. (Eds.), *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America, The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Toronto 1977*, 14-20.
- 48 Loutfi, *Hungarian Family Law*, 293. Reference to Unger, Robert Mangabeira, *Law in Modern Society*, New York 1976, 574-576. It is significant that even members of the main feminist organisation in early-twentieth-century Hungary, the *Feministák Egyesülete (Feminist Association)*, expressed confusion as to their own legal situation as gendered (female) subjects prior to the first draft civil code of 1913.
- 49 Kandiyoti, *From Empire to Nation State*, in: Kleinberg (Ed.), *Retrieving Women's History*, 225.
- 50 Loutfi, *Hungarian Family Law*, 149-150.
- 51 See Mády, Andor, *A feminizmus mint osztály harc [Feminism as Class Struggle]*, in: *A nő és a társadalom [Woman and Society] (February 1907)*, 18-19. Cited in Loutfi, *Hungarian Family Law*.