

Karin Hausen. *Geschlechtergeschichte als Gesellschaftsgeschichte.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012. 394 S. ISBN 978-3-525-37025-4.



Reviewed by Kathleen Canning

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (December, 2013)

Essay collections featuring the work of a single historian constitute an increasingly familiar genre, yet only rarely does such a volume register the emergence and establishment of an entire field of scholarly inquiry. A pioneer in the history of German gender history, Karin Hausen situates her essays, written at different periods between 1976 and 2000, in thematic rather than chronological relationship to one another, a strategy that focuses attention on the definitive questions and controversies that shaped the field of German gender history. Her collection includes brilliant case studies of norms and ideologies; marriages and households; machines, modern technologies and divisions of labor; post-war culture of remembering and forgetting that each are grounded in rich empirical archives. Hausen moves fluidly across borders that were once more rigid between the history of ideas, social-economic histories of production, consumption, and labor, and newer cultural histories of memory and commemoration. As the author of these essays, Hausen is strikingly present at times, reflecting ironically on her own positioning in the field of women's history as it launched and sought legiti-

macy within the German historical profession. One of Hausen's earliest essays, "Die Polarisierung der Geschlechtscharaktere," was written at a time (1976) when feminist historians were still tapping in the dark, in search of both sources and methods. Her assembled articles open the window into the gender historian's workshop, where gender serves as a sharpening stone for her critical readings. By the end of the 1990s, Hausen notes, gender history was widely recognized as a field of rigorous scholarly inquiry, a process that could have advanced more quickly had it not encountered such resolute resistance within the German historical profession.

Originally conceived as a contribution to family history, Hausen's opening essay, "Die Polarisierung der 'Geschlechtscharaktere.' Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben," quickly gained the status of a founding text in the field of women's history. The English title is: "Family and Role Division: the Polarisation of Sexual Stereotypes in the Nineteenth Century," in: Richard J. Evans / W. R. Lee (eds.), *The German Family*, London 1981, pp. 51–83.

Drawing upon an array of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century encyclopedic and prescriptive texts, Hausen analyzes the sexual norms and ideologies that emerged in the course of the gradual transformation from “das ganze Haus” (“the whole household”) to the bourgeois family, anchoring male and female sexual characteristics in both natural and social order and rendering “gender character” an essential part of the interiority of the self. Hausen contends that the polarities of rationality-emotionality and activity-passivity became prescriptive across social, economic, geographic and religious divides in German-speaking Europe, intensifying in the course of the nineteenth century in response to women’s growing demands for political and social equality and that these ideals persisted well into the early twentieth century. Approaching sexual characteristics as constituting an “Aussagesystem” (declarative system), Hausen invented her own analytical concepts, shedding light on a certain creativity that pre-dated the linguistic turn when discourse became the keyword for the kind of “ideological work” of gender that Hausen explicates Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Chicago 1988. . Moreover, in this classic essay Hausen intriguingly anticipates the current historical fascination with emotions and the history of the self. Greg Eghigian, Andreas Killen and Christine Leuenberger, “The Self as Project: Politics and the Human Sciences in the Twentieth Century”, in *Osiris*: 22/1 (2007), special issue on “The Self as Project; William Reddy, “Against Constructionism: The Ethnography of Emotions” *Current Anthropology* 38/3 (June 1997): pp. 327–351; Forum on “History of Emotions” in *German History* 28/1 (2010): pp. 67–80, featuring Frank Biess, Ute Frevert, Alon Confino, Uffa Jensen, Lyndal Roper and Daniela Saxer.

In the volume’s third essay Hausen offers an intriguing retrospective on the reception of “Die Polarisierung der Geschlechtscharaktere,” reviewing those studies that took her essay as a starting

point for their own case studies, including some who set out to critique or refute her analysis of sexual polarities. Elaborating on the term “Spiegelung” in the essay’s title, which was frequently misread as suggesting that binary sexual characteristics reflected or were determined by social reality, Hausen emphasizes the indeterminate and complex “communicative relationship” between them that was shaped not least by the agency and active participation of men and women of the past (p. 100).

The focus of Part II is household and technological transformation in nineteenth-century Germany. Hausen sets out to uncover the history of the sewing machine, a tool that historians had long viewed as emancipating women from arduous handiwork, propelling them into modernity. Deeming the “sewing machine” a “theoretical and empirical no man’s land,” Hausen points to the crucial insights gained by attention to gender. Far from emancipating women’s labor, the sewing machine fostered the emergence of urban sweatshops, staffed mainly by women, paid at piece-rates for the clothing they produced. A hallmark of this section of the book is Hausen’s brilliant refutation of crucial tropes in the history of German industrialization, urbanization, and labor, such as the separations of home and work, production and consumption, productive and “unproductive” labor. This approach also characterizes her study of laundry/wash day and its place in household economies. The third essay in this section examines the ways in which perceptions of “Holznot” (firewood shortages) and recommendations regarding “wood-saving measures” became crucial markers of household management.

Part III features Karin Hausen’s later essays on labor and sexual difference, the first of which expands her concerns with the social division of labor between town and country, household and factory, home and work, to the sexual division of labor that became an anchor of both social and economic order. She dismantles one by one the

presumptions of a “natural” sexual division, from the gendered segmentation of labor, to notions of skill and scales of wage, to presumptions of physical traits such as dexterity and psychic traits such as passivity. Hausen emphasizes as well the assertive agency of male workers in protecting their spheres of labor, not least through marking female workers as “wage cutters” and “double earners,” a demarcation that sharpened in times of crisis, as in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Hausen’s signature essay of this section on protective legislation for female workers delineates how the deeply rooted sexual division of labor shaped visions and policies of social reform and state welfare policies. While female workers and activists often saluted the enactment of protective measures, Hausen points to the demobilization decrees of 1918–19 as an example of their use to restore or deepen women’s dependence on men, an argument that she elaborates further in the third essay in this section, “Arbeit und Geschlecht.”

Hausen delivers a dazzling cultural and social explication of the place of gender in postwar mourning, popular memory, and the attempts to foster a new commemorative culture in this volume’s fourth section. Investigating the German adoption of Mother’s Day, celebrated since 1914 in the U.S., Hausen probes the links between the marketing strategies of German florists and campaigns of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundung to heal the Volk in the aftermath of war, thus embedding the celebration of mothers in visions of social hygiene, population policy, and the broader regulation of popular culture. The specific postwar circumstances of femininity and motherhood form a crucial backdrop here, from the demographic “excess” of two million women to declining birth rates, the intensified burdens of working mothers, and the new public presence of young single women whose self-definition did not emanate from family and motherhood but encompassed the pursuit of cultural and material consumption and sexual self-expression. As ideology

and performance, the celebration of Mother’s Day not only silenced real mothers, but also attested to men’s longing to reorder motherhood and gender in the wake of war, defeat and revolution.

In her Mother’s Day essay of 1984 – the volume’s crown jewel in my estimation – Hausen engages the impulses of cultural anthropology, highlighting the significance of symbols, performance and emotions, while also edging towards a history of masculinity in highlighting men’s desire for a restoration of pre-war motherhood. The work of mobilizing the private grief of millions into a new “Volksbewegung” involved rituals of memory work that overlooked the wounds and deprivations of wartime that women and children experienced. Her essay on attempts to institute a national day of mourning (Volkstrauertag) shares some of these same methodological impulses. In her final essay of this section Hausen explores the history of war victims “from below,” focusing on the seldom-analyzed travails of war widows and orphans during the early years of the Weimar Republic. On the basis of records from war victims’ welfare organizations, Hausen sketches a profile of the 365,000 war widows, their ages, pre- and postwar economic circumstances, and the numbers of children they were to raise alone. She examines the responses of military and wartime welfare to the plight of widows and orphaned children as wartime welfare expanded to identify them as primary objects of state support, improvising pensions and subsidies that would become a crucial challenge for the postwar welfare state of the Weimar Republic. Hausen’s insights about the significance of gender in the shaping of the German welfare state, and in the emergence of commemorative culture in the postwar period, provide important contexts for the war widows’ political reticence.

Hausen’s volume closes with two essays on feminist theory and historiography. Following her remarkable forays into wide-ranging historical topics and rich empirical archives, it is no sur-

prise that Karin Hausen concludes her meticulous reconstruction of patriarchy's place in feminist theory with a critique of one-dimensional and trans-historical concepts. The volume's final essay (1998) delivers a persuasive plea for the "Nicht-Einheit" of history, resisting the urge – or the fantasy – of welding femininity and masculinity into a new coherent and unified narrative, a mainstreamed "universal" history of gender. Sexual difference, she asserts, should remain the starting point of gender history, one that should aim to highlight the uneven, dissonant, and contradictory relations between femininity and masculinity over time. This extraordinary collection makes visible for subsequent generations of historians not only that present-day history of gender, sexuality and body has a history of its own; rather, it also opens the doors of the gender historian's workshop, allowing readers to retrace the methodological steps and conceptual turns that Hausen took as she sharpened the stone of German gender history as one of its foremost pioneers. It is Karin Hausen's unique accomplishment to have never sought to fill a historiographical gap or to add a dimension to an existing story. Instead, she turned the familiar objects of historical study upside down and inside out, melding conceptual critique with meticulous investigation, with subtle and stunning reinterpretations of the place of sexual difference in shaping many of the definitive turning points and transformations in modern German history.

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Citation: Kathleen Canning. Review of Hausen, Karin. *Geschlechtergeschichte als Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. December, 2013.

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