

## 1. *Meanings of gender in early modern German history*

ULINKA RUBLACK

Meanings of gender are historically situated. This book's terrain is Germany, largely within its current political boundaries, during the period 1500–1800. Early modern Germany was a highly complex society. It was politically polycentric, made up of territorial courts, imposing Imperial cities, strong village communes, small archbishoprics, supra-regional alliances, and Imperial political and legal institutions.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the 1520s, the Reformation movements convulsed Germany. The debates that were set in motion, which so differentiated the towns and territories by confession, constitute the frame in which this book must be located. The first half of the sixteenth century was one of radical debate and experiment. Its most dramatic manifestations were the short months of the Peasants' rebellion in 1525 and the Anabaptists' taking of Münster in 1534. After the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, Germany became a truly extraordinary patchwork of bi-confessional cities like Augsburg, cities of either Protestant or Catholic confession, and of many small states whose rulers determined their confessional allegiance.

From 1555 onwards, reform movements were increasingly subsumed within developing state policies of order and control.<sup>2</sup> Sustained harvest failures, more rigid social stratification, confessional conflict, a cultural distancing of elites from non-elites, and the onset of major witchcraft prosecutions in the 1590s, soon created a climate in which social relations were intensely conflictual.<sup>3</sup> This particularly affected attitudes towards the poor, to young people and to women. Throughout the period, hospitality, charity and generosity were scaled down, vagrants and 'bastard-bearing' women harassed, and sexually transgressing youth punished. Rules of citizenship, guild-membership and communal belonging were tightened and linked to new standards of respectability and wealth.<sup>4</sup> Confessional cohesion was increased, especially after Calvinism was introduced in some territorial states as a third confession distinct from Lutheranism and reformed Catholicism. Political and religious frictions culminated in the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) and in further attempts to solidify state control through social regulation in the second half of the seventeenth century.

2 ULINKA RUBLACK

These processes interacted with various local, political and religious structures, and so they necessarily had diverse effects. This diversity has heightened historians' awareness of the intricacies of change and has led them to stress a history of gradual modification rather than a history of radical shifts.<sup>5</sup> Instead of concentrating merely on the Reformation period and on the sixteenth century, they now increasingly focus on long-term patterns of confessional, state and communal development, and to the role of gender in social regulation, or in the *longue durée* of small town and village life.<sup>6</sup> Attention is given to policy implementation rather than only to policy-making, to the period culminating c. 1800, and to the practices of all social groups.<sup>7</sup>

This volume explores meanings of gender within this expanded vision of German history. Much writing about early modern Germany available in English, and about gender in particular, has focused on certain parts of Southern Germany – on large cities like Nuremberg and Augsburg, and areas such as Franconia and Swabia. One aim of this collection is to broaden this outlook geographically with articles on Hamburg, Counter-Reformation Munich in Bavaria, and territories in the north, west and east of Germany. Moreover, since scholars have tended to focus on Lutheran Germany, this collection presents research about neglected topics, such as the effects of the Counter-Reformation on nuns, Marian symbolism in village communities, or conflict in a bi-confessional city. Instead of isolating 'female experience', each contribution highlights how men and women assimilated or altered gender norms as they interacted with each other. These perspectives aim to convey the multifacetedness and dynamics of gender experiences, politics and everyday life across early modern Germany. For this was anything but a 'traditional' society, in which the interpretation of norms was clear-cut and static, and authority easy to obtain. Rather, people and institutions attributed shifting meanings to gender, which were mediated by complex ideas about supernatural influences on men and women, or about the workings of passion and reason, at a time of unparalleled religious reform and socio-economic change.<sup>8</sup> Much effort went into applying gendered categories to specific contexts and causes. Women were commonly regarded as the desirous and hence irresponsible sex, because they were ruled by passion rather than by reason. They were supposed to live under male control. One aim of this volume is to draw attention to processes through which attributions of meaning were or were not rendered plausible, and to the larger social and economic costs of such gender stereotypes.<sup>9</sup>

All this raises the methodological question of how gender can be used as a wider analytical category; that is, what it tells us about how societies work. One of the most important arguments in writing on gender, developed by the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, has been that sex difference offers itself as a binary division to which social values may be attached, and which naturalise them within a 'natural' gender hierarchy. An idealised masculinity is equated

with positive values of self-sufficiency. This quality is understood to reside in the ability to abstain from unreasonable demands on others, to control the passions and to work for the common good.<sup>10</sup> Femininity is linked to narrower interests and a greater concern for personal good, and to weaker control over the passions. Crucially, however, individual women are never entirely identified with sexual stereotypes. They can become 'good' in so far as they distance themselves from the negative components of femininity, by acting for the common good.

The figure of the witch provides the classic early modern European example of such gender imagery and of the ways it could influence women's behaviour. Here, as in many societies, women were believed to have a greater inclination to witchcraft. Women who lacked resources or fertility were feared for the likelihood that they, more than men, would envy those who had goods, animals, children and potency, and be unable to control their destructive passions. A woman with the capacity for emotional openness, generosity, and sustained reciprocal exchange, by contrast, demonstrated that she was not a witch.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the figure of the 'whore' was important in the language of insult because it created a reverse image of the respectable woman householder. While the wife worked to sustain resources for her family, kin and the community, the whore wastefully seduced men to spend their income on pleasure and whore's pay. Whores 'consume domestic resources for their maintenance; they also bring into the household profits from illicit sources', so that 'whoredom creates a financial exchange that disrupts both the income and expenditure of the household'.<sup>12</sup> They subverted a 'natural' order of fertility, reproduction, commitment and time in a society in which caring for the 'common good' was a yardstick of moral behaviour.

A good example of how such distinctions further functioned to signify 'relationships of power' is provided by one of Luther's and Melanchthon's pamphlets (Plate 1) from the beginning of our period. It illustrates how the Reformation movements used gender images to mark the Catholic church as antisocial. The 1523 pamphlet featured a woodcut of a monster, which had allegedly been found in Rome in 1495.<sup>13</sup> Luther and Melanchthon wrote that God had sent the monster as a true depiction of the papacy and its aberrant power. To them, every part of its body bore meaning. And a very striking body it was: the pope was shown as a feminised and sexualised ass. 'The womanish body and breasts', the reformers explained, signified the pope's body, that is his cardinals, bishops, priests, monks and students. Those and similar whorish folk and pigs only had resort to eating, drinking, fornication and voluptuousness. They went unpunished and free to lead an insolent life, just as the monster carried its woman's belly naked and free.<sup>14</sup> Well into the mid-sixteenth century the woodcut was reissued in new editions, with its feminised representation visually strengthened. It associated this with an embodied notion of the pleasure a woman derived from her naked belly and breasts, which stood for a concern with the self rather than responsible

## Der Bapstessel zu Rom



Plate 1. The Pope-Ass, from Philipp Melanchthon, Doct. Martinus Luther, *Deutung der zwei gewlichen Figuren Bapstesels zu Rom un Munchkalbs zu Freyberg in Meyssen funden*, Wittenberg 1523.

life with others. As Lyndal Roper has shown, the Reformation's initial appeal in towns rested substantially on its contrasting monks' sensual indulgence with male artisans' sobriety, the latter being represented as a model of social order.<sup>15</sup> The equation of the papacy with a hybrid male–female, effeminate–animal monster touched the audience's fear of mixed categories, and also a desire for clear codes of reliable and civilised 'male' and 'female' behaviour.

In these ways, gender analysis is clearly crucial for our understanding of early modern German society. Print (the new mass medium of the period) along with social movements and new or reinforced institutions (such as state and civic moral courts as well as local church courts), newly reinforced gender distinctions throughout the period by focusing on a social order in which only chaste daughters, enclosed nuns or married women gained respect. The problematisation of gender hierarchies and behaviour was a response to perceived problems of social order. What was perceived as people's dangerous antisocial passions, such as sexual desire, which, it was now feared, would lead to incest, illegitimacy or infanticide, could be categorised in terms of gender and symbolised through images of purity and pollution.<sup>16</sup> Bastards and even prostitutes working for unmarried men were no longer integrated socially.

At the same time, Luther's and Melanchthon's pamphlet shows the potential fragility of such codes of civility. Few men were controlled at all times. Nor did they want to be, for another code of masculinity required them to play with the limits of self-control through heavy drinking and to build social trust in the experience of a mutual loss of control in male company.<sup>17</sup> There also existed a more exuberant vision of a common good which was maintained through emotional openness and generosity and which required men to acknowledge feelings such as empathy, despair and care, and was distant from the notion of a self-sufficient self.<sup>18</sup> Among elites, a widened group of learned men from bourgeois backgrounds experimented with highly emotional humanist languages of friendship in their correspondence. Reformers sought to develop new repertoires of feeling in their marriages.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, educated women had confidence enough to expect that intimacy, and to rebuke men when it was withheld. They could write love-letters with astounding honesty, such as Anna Bühler, the young mayor's daughter in Schwäbisch-Hall, to a *Juncker*:

Noble, kind, and most darlingly gracious sir. I should write your grace a long letter, but I am now so confused that I don't know what I should do . . . You send me messages every day, one saying you are coming, the other that you are not. The messenger reminds me of a cat I send off in the night to Limpurg that both licks my face and claws my back . . . This is how I see things.<sup>20</sup>

Hence, Strathern's argument about sex difference as facilitating the naturalisation of attitudes towards the social good can help us analyse how gendered categories express basic values underpinning society. But we also need to register the extent to which conflicting codes of normative social behaviour

6 ULINKA RUBLACK

could be developed, and the relative diversity of social roles which people could still adopt in specific contexts. As has just been implied, early modern German men were confronted with several codes of masculinity. The dominant one instructed that their honour depended on fearlessness and combativeness as well as the withdrawn (*eingezogenes*) behaviour befitting a bourgeois *Biedermann* – a term which became common currency during the sixteenth century denoting respectability and honesty. The boundaries of what counted as positive emotion and negative passion were not always clear-cut. They were both debated and felt confusedly, especially when new practices of social relating developed. People did not merely behave according to socially structured scripts, and in a changing society behavioural ‘scripts’ often did not exist. Moreover, individuals organised their emotional and mental experience on the basis of their peculiar life history and character. People had ‘options’ about how to behave – whether to aspire to become a saint or to become a witch, whether to remarry for a third time or to remain single, whether to accuse a witch or keep away from courts. Material conditions and hence socio-political notions such as the ‘common good’ were highly important to early modern people because economic safety was so fragile. People had to rely on one another, and especially husband and wife, because most agrarian and crafts production was now organised around the labouring couple. Most workshops could not afford to employ journeymen. Familial support was crucial in many villages, because even basic farming tools could be split up through inheritance – a brother and sister inheriting different parts of a plough. Help during the harvest, in case of war, death or illness, or if there was a breakdown of credit relations, was crucial. Even so, we cannot understand these people’s action principally in terms of a material ‘interest’ which is dissociated from psychic structures and social values.<sup>21</sup> There existed, for instance, a clear sense of emotional well-being in relationships independent of mere material care. Anna Büschler’s and many married wives’ complaints convey the anticipation of this. They ask for care, respect and trust as the basis of a relationship. Such needs were linked to powerful physical experiences, such as illness, intimacy, sexuality, fertility or sterility, pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and aging.<sup>22</sup> These experiences were difficult to express in consciousness and language, but formed a strong part of what accounted for human motivation.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, then, gender distinctions can tell us what was regarded as productive and social behaviour, and what was rational or uncontrollable in societies. They reveal how fears about loss of control were mapped on to gendered as well as class-related images. Gender analysis is about the ways in which these distinctions are expressed in the verbal, physical and symbolic languages with which men and women make sense of the world and their experiences of feeling, phantasies and embodied dimensions of subjectivity. Gender history assesses those past evaluations and expressions, their meanings for men’s and women’s relationships, their political function and their human quality.

In order to understand better the precise relationship between subjective and social experiences, historians have recently turned away from an exclusive focus on social groups, 'structure', language and representation, to the stories of individuals and communities, the history of the body, emotions and sense perception.<sup>24</sup> Seeking to contextualise male and female everyday experiences, much German research has attended to household relations, since the early modern household was at once a political, productive and familial entity and the space in which people spent much of their time. Heide Wunder has demonstrated how married couples needed to co-operate, and how ideas about complementary equality between the sexes cut across hierarchical notions of gender roles.<sup>25</sup> Hans Medick, David Sabean, Claudia Ulbrich and others<sup>26</sup> have likewise questioned the harmony and alleged stability of a patriarchal *Ganzes Haus* and investigated familial strategies to build up social, economic and emotional support and the extent of conflict and dynamics of conflict resolution among kin.<sup>27</sup> Ulbrich's important recent study of an eighteenth-century village for the first time integrates gender history fully into a community's microhistory.<sup>28</sup> The village she investigates was called Steinbiedersdorf and had a large Jewish population, in which up to 20 per cent of Jewish households could be headed by a woman. It was also a village with a history of protest and intra-communal political factions. The study therefore presents us with the typically complex realities of German communal life across a century. Within this setting, Ulbrich uncovers individual life-stories of 'ordinary' women within different social contexts. While female power within the household remains a focus of her analysis, Ulbrich also follows women on to the streets, into the courts, the church or synagogue to examine which roles they played outside the home and marriage. Her analysis examines how women could claim needs and interests in each of these settings *vis-à-vis* men or other women depending on their status, religion and the personality of those involved. Here, we come closest to an *histoire totale*, which is fully rooted in a sense of place and its people as socially conditioned, but also individually responsive human beings.

Other microhistories provide much material similarly to look at men's lives and relationships within the household and community from a gender perspective. David Sabean's two-volume study of the South-German village Neckarhausen, for instance, has created a model historical anthropology of kinship and production, with much material to reconstruct gender identities between 1700 and 1900.<sup>29</sup> One man's story in Sabean's study illustrates how tightly notions of personhood, the social good and gender were interlinked, and again how misleading the notion of a stable household unit and fixed gender roles is in regard to early modern society.<sup>30</sup> It moreover reminds us that gender was negotiated not only by women *vis-à-vis* their husbands or a guild-master, but by fathers in relation to their sons and daughters, or by men in relation to older wives, third marriages and other men in the village. This is one reason why

our understanding of masculinities and femininities is necessarily intertwined. Finally, the story alerts us to the social and psychic complexities of subjective experience. Because we need attentiveness to engage with such stories, and with the pathos and strangeness of ordinary lives, I want to present Sabean's case and my reading of its gendered dimensions in detail. It takes us to the end of our period.

Neckarhausen was a largely wheat-growing village of about four hundred inhabitants which lay not far from Stuttgart, and in which every daughter and son was entitled to the same share of any inheritance. Sabean's story describes Gall Feldmaier, who was born there in 1750, as the son of a village judge. He was left with a legacy of some social capital and aspiration, but no property, and became a farm servant. Aged 27, Feldmaier took a surprising decision. He married his half-brother's sister-in-law, a rich, post-menopausal widow with several children who legally retained all her property. The union breached accepted roles (there was no equality of wealth, gender, age, and no commitment to reproduction and patrimony). Feldmaier could therefore easily have been deemed lazy, a strange and bad man. Instead, he managed to become a village mayor. He achieved credit by acting on behalf of widows and their children. He secured his five stepsons' wealth. This, however, meant that after his wife's death, Feldmaier was a man of humble means again. But since he had proven himself a good husband, stepfather and administrator, another wealthy widow with young children soon married him. She died after two years. Only now, aged 56, did Feldmaier marry a woman of equal property (a 41-year-old widow with young children), and they unexpectedly had a child. He dropped dramatically in the tax lists, but still held the office of mayor. Soon, however, allegations were made that he had dealt illegally with communal property. By 1812, he had lost his office, and people no longer wanted him to act for them in disputes and settlements. After his third wife's death, he lived with their daughter on alms and her small income. Already in her thirties, the daughter had five illegitimate children by different fathers whom she could not name. All Feldmaier left when he died were unusable clothes and bedcovers – and records in the village archive.

How can we make sense of such a life-story – the rise and fall of a village mayor, his preparedness not to reproduce, and his unexpectedly conceived daughter's behaviour? The story is striking in several respects. First, it underlines how, in a society which passed on most productive resources through inheritance and in which key natural resources, such as wood, were communally shared, fairness and the right balance of self-interest, and interest for kin and friends and for the community, were related to property management. They defined a person's integrity and standing. Secondly, it demonstrates how a man could benefit by refraining from building his own patrimony in order to look after women's interests. As long as his rich wives were alive, Feldmaier had a comfortable life and respectable social role. This was at a time when



Neckarhausen women were intensifying their labour and claiming more independence and equality. However, it seems as though Feldmaier later paid the price for overstepping codes of manliness. Through his third marriage he lost the protection of a rich woman and her kin. He could now be perceived as someone seeking self-interested financial gains through his office as a mayor. Thus, the accusation of corruption could be levied only because he lacked sufficient protection, and it would have come from men who were likely to have harboured scepticism against someone who aligned himself with women. Third, his stepchildren's and daughter's behaviour deserve comment. Even though Feldmaier spent much effort helping to bring up and care for his stepchildren and arranged matches for several of them within the kin-network, they distanced themselves from him when he was old, poor and politically tainted. Perhaps, in retrospect, they may have doubted the integrity of his motives in caring for them. This shows how differently acting selfishly or for others' good could be perceived, and how the enforcement of a specific perception depended on people's alliances. Finally, Feldmaier was a man who had married older, infertile women and had no son. His only child, the daughter, ensured that her children retained his name, because they were illegitimate and she remained unmarried. There was no patrimony to sustain them. In this sense his daughter was precisely what Feldmaier had tried to avoid most in his life: she was propertyless, and with children who would never have any approved social role. Perhaps it was in reaction against being an unintended child, or against his careful alliance-making throughout his life, that she had unwanted offspring with random men, and she did so only while she lived with her father. An interest in gender and subjectivity thus leads us to ask about the interrelationship between the social and psychic aspects of character formation within the structures of early modern kinship organisation and material life. We can understand neither communal politics nor early modern people without it.

In pointing to the issues raised here, we have come a long way from subsuming early modern German gender history under the model exam question of whether the Reformation strengthened patriarchy or marital equality. What we know about German demographic, political, religious and social structures, and the quality of the records to be found in German archives provide the basis for a richer understanding of gender relations and subjectivities in the early modern period. The aim of this volume is to introduce research which helps us to get there, through thick description and interpretation, by privileging case-studies as a mode of historical enquiry and by attending to the many different settings in which early modern German men and women could develop and express their identities.

★

*Gender in Early Modern German History* is divided into four parts addressing masculinities, transgressions, politics and religion in order to convey these

multiple ways in which gendered identities interacted with different social, religious and institutional structural settings. In order to counteract more static notions of patriarchal power, Heide Wunder opens this volume by stressing the flexible, and even playful, ways in which male control could be established in marriages. Early modern couples were 'working couples'. Much of the labour and decision-making were shared, and so it was wise for the man not to provoke his wife's resentment.<sup>31</sup> She quotes the diarist Hermann Weinsberg's account of how he heard his father make a contract with his wife, that she should rule one week and he another; and if there was a quarrel, he would ask her whose week in government it was and abide by her judgement. A husband's good government therefore rested on *Gleichmut* – in his control of emotions and passions. Such control was 'embodied'. As Wunder shows, what it meant to become a man was to wear breeches. Boys were about six years old when they were fitted with their first pair of breeches. (Felix Platter immediately dirtied his by eating too many cherries!) Breeches symbolised male power and potency. The upper classes wore them strikingly striped and with bulging codpieces, the early modern man's wonderbra. But at the same time breeches exposed the loss of male bodily control, in sexual excitement or incontinence. Disciplines of shame were in place for men, too, and Wunder shows how boys learnt to give each other confidence in regard to women through their bonding as youths. Once married, they were confronted with much trickier demands on their authority, resulting in shared debates with their womenfolk, rather than in female submission.

Eva Labouvie continues the enquiry into meanings of manhood by looking at men who were prosecuted as witches in the Saar region, the Rhine-Palatinate and Lorraine, an area made up of Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists. She finds that between 1575 and 1634, 157 men were accused and 130 sentenced to death by their own communities, for in this region prosecution was organised from below, by communally elected 'witch committees'. Although here as elsewhere men made up around 20 per cent of the accused, so far historians have focused almost exclusively on women as witches. Labouvie uses the records to explore the village conflicts which led to a man's accusation. Most accused men were older than average and widowed. They also had a reputation for needless quarrelling, unfair dealings with money, and flirtation. An accusation was the outcome of jealousy and ill-will among local men. The charge of witchcraft related to the practice of love-magic or magic relating to male labour and duties, in fields and in the home, which was usually protective but had now allegedly been misused. Labouvie's article therefore documents how men's assertion of power and potency was watched suspiciously by other men and checked against a value system of 'respectability' which emphasised sexual loyalty and fairness to one's kin and business partners. A man's reputation as dishonourable or evil required the building up of a powerful interpretative community whose members lobbied for his extinction. It is evident now that men's witchcraft trials in early modern