Women's history has come a long way. Some twenty years ago, Gerda Lerner wrote that 'the striking fact about the historiography of women is the general neglect of the subject by historians'. Historical scholarship was far from 'objective' or 'universal', because it was based on male experience, placed men at the centre and as a measure of all things human, thereby leaving out half of humankind. In the past two decades, the situation has changed considerably. In an enormous (and enormously growing) body of scholarship women have been rendered visible. They have been placed at the centre, and what women do, have to do, and want to do has been re-evaluated in view of social, political and cultural change, of an improvement in women's situations and, more generally, in terms of a change towards more freedom and justice. More precisely, what has been rendered historically visible by making women a subject of research was, in the first place, their subjection. In the second place, however, it was their subjectivity - because women are not only victims, but also actively shape their own lives, society and history.

Much of this research was carried out in the context of three conceptual or theoretical frameworks that have been used by many feminist scholars, particularly historians, in the past two decades and which will be outlined in the first section of this paper. These frameworks point to three dichotomies in traditional thought on gender relations, and all of them have been not only used, but also profoundly challenged. The second section will illustrate three further dichotomies which, in the development of modern women's history, have emerged more recently and which presently seem to dominate and direct women's studies. All of these dichotomies have been discussed, to a greater or lesser degree, internationally, but there are some interesting national differences in the debates themselves.
as well as in their sequence over time. Particularly noteworthy are certain changes in language brought about in this context. These are, of course, nationally different, but they also indicate to what extent women's history and women's studies have succeeded in crossing national boundaries.

Women as subject, the subjection of women and women's subjectivity

1. Nature versus culture. It was mainly in the United States in the early 1970s that the relation of the sexes was discussed in terms of the relation, or rather dichotomy, between 'nature and nurture' or 'nature and culture'. Men and their activities had been seen as culture and of cultural value, whereas women and their activities had been seen as natural, outside of history and society, always the same and therefore not worthy of scholarly, political or theoretical interest and inquiry. Moreover, it was the relations between the sexes, and most particularly their relations of power and subjection, that had been attributed to nature. 'Nature', in this context, most often meant sexuality between men and women, women's bodies and their capacity for pregnancy and motherhood. Fatherhood, however, was usually seen not as natural but as 'social'. Female scholars challenged this traditional dichotomy. They argued that what 'nature' really meant in this discourse was a devaluation of everything that women stood for, that "nature always has a social meaning", that both 'nature' and 'culture' meant different things at different times, in different places and to the different sexes, and that women's bodies and bodily capacities were not always and everywhere seen as disabilities, but also as a basis for certain kinds of informal power and public activities. The nature/culture dichotomy was recognised as a specific and perhaps specifically Western way of expressing the hierarchies between the sexes. The binary terms of this dichotomy only apparently refer to antagonistic and independent terms; but in fact, they refer to a hierarchy of social realities and cultural meanings, between strongly interdependent terms. In other words: no such nature without such culture, and no such culture without such nature. One of the linguistic results of such insights in women's history is that the term 'nature' is now almost always placed in quotation marks.

The study of women's identification with nature, of their embodiment and their body-related activities, such as motherhood, nursing and caring, has resulted in a number of important works which deal with these distinctively female domains. Early works on the history of motherhood were written by French scholars. More recently, research on the female body has shown to what degree it is historically conditioned and dependent on the cultural context. Feminist philosophers, particularly in France, are building theoretical frameworks precisely around the distinctive female experience, and this approach is currently arousing great and controversial interest in the United States. On the other hand, French and other historians argue that this focus on women's 'nature' may be politically counterproductive because it seems to confirm traditional stereotypes according to which women seem to be exclusively defined by their body, by motherhood and by their sex, and to overlook the more important political dimensions of women's history.

2. Work versus family. A second theoretical framework for rendering women visible, and for dismantling their identification with the merely natural, unchanging and therefore uninteresting, was the issue of their distinctive patterns of work. The discussion around it had its origins more in the European than in the American context, particularly in Italy, Britain, Germany and France. What had been seen as nature was now seen as work: bearing, rearing and caring for children, looking after the breadwinner-husband and after other family members. To call this activity 'work' meant to challenge the dichotomy 'work and family' (because the family may mean work to women), but also 'work and leisure' (because men's leisure may be women's work), and 'working men and supported wives' (because wives support men through their work). It meant questioning the view that work is only that which is done for pay. Women have always worked, and unpaid work was and is women's work. Obviously, men's work is valued more highly than women's work. In theoretical and economic terms, it has been demonstrated that women's work was overlooked by male theoreticians of work and the economy and why this happened; accordingly the value or 'productivity' of domestic work came to be discussed. In historical terms, it has been shown how strongly this work changed over time and cross-culturally. For example, in Britain and Australia, housewives were counted among the 'occupied' categories in the census up to the end of the nineteenth century, when they were excluded from them; around the same time, radical feminists in Germany and elsewhere were demanding that their work be included in the measurement of the Gross National Product.

The sexual division of labour was found to be not just a division, but a hierarchy of labour; and not just one of labour but, primarily, a sexual division of value and rewards. The lower value of women's work continues - through economic and cultural mediation - in employment outside the home. Here, where women have always worked, they earned only 50 per cent to 80 per cent of men's earnings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in western countries, with variations over time and space. Women's employment in the caring and nursing professions, where they are the overwhelming majority, usually does not guarantee them a decent survival income; the 1989 nurses' strike in West Germany being just one example. The recent international increase in the
number of single mothers has led to a 'feminisation of poverty', even beyond the traditionally high level of female poverty. The apparent dichotomy between 'work and family', between men as workers and women as 'non-workers', turns out to be one between paid and unpaid work, between underpaid and decently paid work, between the superior and inferior value of men's and women's work respectively. The underlying assumption of mutually exclusive superiority and inferiority seems to be another common feature of such gender-linked dichotomies. The challenge posed by women's studies to this opposition is obviously linked to political and economic challenges to pay women's as yet unpaid work, to raise their earnings in low-pay jobs, and to admit more women to well-paid professions. It has also led to some linguistic changes. Even though, in the English language, the terms 'working women' and 'working mothers' are still reserved for employed women only, and non-employed women are still often called 'non-working', the terms 'work and family' are now often replaced by 'paid and the private'. Some feminists distinguish consistently between 'work' and 'employment', Arbeit [work] and Erwerbstätigkeit [income-earning], and Arbeitslosigkeit [unemployment, literally 'worklessness'] has been replaced by Erwerbslosigkeit ['incomelessness'].

3. Public versus private. A third conceptual framework of women's history has been the relation between the public and the private, or the political and the personal, or the sphere of power and the domestic sphere. Traditional political theory has seen them, again, as a dichotomy of mutually exclusive terms, identified with women's 'sphere' and men's 'world'. Women's studies have profoundly challenged this view, pointing out its inadequacy for understanding politics and society. The slogan 'the personal is political' indicated that the issue of power is not confined to 'high politics', but also appears in sexual relations. Men inhabit, and rule within both spheres, whereas women's proper place was seen to be only in the domestic sphere and in her subjection to father or husband. This means, on the one hand, the dichotomy is not one between two autonomous, symmetrical and equivalent spheres, but rather a complex relation between domination and subordination, between power and powerlessness. On the other hand, women's studies have shown that the public 'world' was essentially based on the domestic 'sphere'. Male workers, male politicians and male scholars perform their tasks only because they are born, reared and cared for by women's labour. The boundaries between public and private shift significantly over time and cross-culturally, as in the historical transition between private charity and public assistance, in both of which women played important roles. State policy has not left women out, but has shaped their personal circumstances by public intervention in, for instance, legislation on rape and abortion, and by the absence of legislation. The modern welfare states have discriminated against women in old age pensions and unemployment benefits; they have introduced maternity leave for employed women without replacing their loss of income - in Europe, this was changed mainly through the struggles of the women's movements since around 1900 - and income tax reforms have supported husbands and fathers, but not wives and mothers. The welfare state has not excluded women's sphere but included it as private, implying that it is under the rule of the husband. The Nazi regime went much beyond this, because its intervention tended to destroy the private sphere; not however, as is often said, by promoting motherhood, but by promoting precisely the opposite: a policy of mass compulsory sterilisation for women and men who were considered 'racially inferior'. This antinatalist policy was explicitly based on the doctrine that 'the private is political' and that the boundary between the political and the private is a political act. According to the National Socialists, it was the sterilisation policy which established and asserted 'the primacy of the state in the field of life, marriage and the family'.

Women's history has also discovered that what is perceived as 'private' by some may be seen as 'public' by others. The domestic tasks of bearing and rearing children, for instance, were proclaimed as being of public importance by many women in the early women's movement. They requested that it be re-evaluated, and many of them based their demand for equal political citizenship precisely on this vision of the 'separate sphere', understood not as a dichotomy of mutually exclusive and hierarchical terms, but as a source of equal rights and responsibilities of the female sex in respect to civil society. On this basis, they did not so much challenge the sexual division of labour, as the sexual division of power. In this sense, the late anthropologist Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo argued that women could, and did, challenge male rule either by seeking to enter the distinctively male sphere, or by stressing the value of their own sphere; sometimes they attempted to combine both. Women's historians have also pointed out that the traditional nineteenth-century or Victorian version of the female separate sphere was not oppressive in a simple way, but left considerable space for female bonding and the development of a women's culture as an expression of women's subjectivity.

... ... ...

These three dichotomies seem to have some important characteristics in common. They are eminently gender-linked, and as such they have distant roots in European and western traditions of gender perception. They have
been taken up and used as crucial conceptual frameworks in the newly emerging women's history of the past decades, and simultaneously their long-standing apparent validity for the perception of gender relations has been thoroughly challenged. This challenge concerned the analysis, historicisation and deconstruction of the character and meaning of these three dual categories, as well as the links between them, and it questioned the traditional assumption that these dichotomies were expressions - natural and necessary expressions - of sexual difference.

The question has been raised as to whether these dichotomies are just a few examples among many similar binary oppositions and dualistic modes of western thought in general, or whether their gender-linked character makes them very special. (Of course, other classic dichotomies, such as 'subjective/objective', 'rational/emotional', have also assumed gender-linked meanings, even though not all of them have been equally central to historical analytical frameworks; on the other hand, the dichotomies discussed above have also been studied in contexts which were not primarily gender-linked.) But it seems that, whenever they are used for describing gender relations, they do not refer to so much to separate, autonomous, independent, equivalent dual spheres, as to relations of hierarchy: hierarchies of spheres, meanings, values, of inferiority and superiority, of subordination and power; in other words, to relations where 'culture' subjects 'nature', the world of 'work' reigns over that of the 'family', the 'political' dominates the 'private'.

In terms of logical rules, these apparent dichotomies are not mutually exclusive contradictions, as in A is not B, B is not A (woman is not man and vice versa). Rather these apparent dichotomies are (really) contrasts, for they may coexist freely, and/or coexist with C (as alternatives to the dichotomous attributions) and all of them may have a positive reality. Patriarchal theorists have constituted these dualisms on the model of logically contradictory opposites, as in the impossible combination of A and Not-A, in what what defines Not-A is its privation with respect to A, that is, its lack of A. These contradictory opposites in their rigidity, allow for neither alternatives (tertium non datur) [no third value is given]; nor reversals, as in Not-A being attributed to men and A to women. When, for instance, gender is constructed on a model of mutually exclusive, binary opposites, if men are defined as rational, then women are defined by an absence of rationality. In this construction, for the woman to take on rationality is for her to begin to assimilate to the male norm and thus to begin to cease to be a woman. Contrariwise, in contrast, allow for a multiplicity of alternatives. Feminists have argued that 'mere contrary distinctions are not eternally tied to dichotomous structure, and as dichotomies they are limited in scope'. Therefore, it might be useful to distinguish more clearly between dichotomies of mutual exclusion and hierarchy on one side, and contraries, distinctions or differences, on the other, which are neither hierarchical nor mutually exclusive. Above all, sensitivity to the prevalence of binary oppositions of a dichotomous kind in discourses of gender has taught us to beware of their historical and political pitfalls.

Gender equality, sexuality difference and women's autonomy

Somehow, ironically, the same process by which women became historically (and not only historically) visible through the critique of these contradictions has also led to a number of new dichotomies of which little or nothing was heard during the first phase of women's studies, and which later came to the fore within the context of feminist scholarship itself. In part, they are the result of past attempts to resolve the earlier binary modes with the help of new concepts and theoretical frameworks. It seems that future strategies for women's history lie precisely, and once more, in the possibility and necessity of challenging these newer dichotomies.

1. Sex versus gender. The concept 'gender' has been introduced into women's history and women's studies in the 1970s as a social, cultural, political and historical category, in order to express the insight that women's subordination, inferiority and powerlessness are not dictated by nature, but are social, cultural, political and historical constructions. Whereas 'gender' had previously referred mainly to linguistic-grammatical constructions, it now became a major theoretical framework. One of the reasons for its success in replacing the word 'sex' has been the insistence that the study of women does not only deal with sexuality, wholeness and motherhood, but with women in all walks of life. Women's studies do not only concern half of human kind, but all of it, because it is not only women who are gendered beings, but also men who are therefore far from representing universal humanity. Consequently, 'men's history' and 'men's studies' which analyse men as 'men' have emerged. The concept of 'gender' radicalised and universalised the efforts to make women visible, and the insight that gender is a basic, though flexible structure of society meant that women's and gender studies concern, in principle, any field or object of historical (and non-historical) scholarship.

But the new terminology has also brought to the fore major problems. They result from the fact that the concept of gender has been introduced in the form of a dichotomy. It distinguishes categorically between gender and sex, 'sex' to be understood as 'biological' and 'gender' as 'social' or cultural, and both are seen as combined in a 'sex/gender system' where 'raw biological sex' is somehow transformed into 'social gender'. The dichotomous structure of the pair had been
evident since the late 1950s when, even before being taken up by feminist scholarship, it came to be theorised by male scholars who studied intersexuals and transsexuals. But this dichotomy between the 'biological' and the 'social' does not resolve but only restates the old nature versus culture quarrel. Again, it relegates the dimension of women's body, sexuality, motherhood and physiological sexual difference to a supposedly pre-social sphere, and it resolves even less the question of precisely what part of women's experience and activity is 'biological' and what part 'social' or 'cultural'.

Furthermore, the new dichotomy differs in one important respect from the traditional one. It reduces women's embodiment no longer to a traditional nature, but to a modern 'biology'. Today 'biology' is in surprisingly current use by feminist scholars, and it refers almost always to women's body and especially to maternity. The term 'biology' has been regularly placed in quotation marks, but not 'biology', which seems to be self-evident. Yet it is far from being self-evident because historically and culturally 'biology' has itself been a socio-cultural category, a discourse and a strategy for intervention. It came into circulation only since around 1960, was soon taken up by the right and the left and it meant, first of all, 'inferiority'.23 Modern 'biology' is as little self-evident as 'nature' in traditional language, but it has probably more threatening consequences for women's studies and women's liberation, particularly in view of current heavy attacks on nature in the natural (and especially biological) sciences.

The new feminist use of 'biology' as distinct from, and opposed to, gender as a social category has made it possible for gender to be used not only as a rationalising weapon in the intellectual debate, but also as an instrument for rendering women again invisible. Gender has sometimes lent itself to a gender-neutral discourse which implies that women and men are members not of a sex but of a 'gender', in the sense that they are in reality nothing else than essentially identical 'individuals' and that sex doesn't matter, because it is 'biology' and therefore socially irrelevant.24 Here again, the dichotomy expresses a hierarchy: 'gender' seems to be more important than 'sex'. On the other hand, there are feminist attempts to reverse this hierarchy and to view the female body as a female resource against overpowering male culture (but usually referring less to 'biology' than to old-fashioned 'nature'). Both views tend to attribute such 'biology' to women only and to leave unquestioned and unanalysed male 'biology', and they fail fully to historicise not only gender, but also sex.

Feminist scholars who insist on the dichotomy 'sex versus gender' or 'biology versus culture', even though they are aware of these problems, usually do so because this seems to be politically useful or tactically wise, in view of the ever-recurring attempts at confining women to their 'biological' sphere, mostly put forward by antifeminists adhering to 'biological determinism'. But this is merely a defensive position, not an advance. Rather, it seems that as long as intellectual and historical insights are rejected for reasons which are dictated by antifeminists and not by feminists and women's experience, they will not lead to intellectually, historically and politically better results. In fact, it has been argued that what is called 'biological determinism' is 'not more of an attack on freedom than the social or economic determinism which is accepted... throughout social sciences', and what is really injurious is 'fatalism, the presence that problems which are in our control lie outside it and are incurable'.25

Finally, the dichotomous distinction between sex and gender is largely specific to the English language. Attempts have been made to introduce it into other languages - sesso v. genere in Italian, sexe v. genre in French - but their linguistic dynamics and connotations are very different (also, the traditional controversy of 'nature versus nurture' had much less historical impact in Italy and other countries of Romance languages than in the English- and German-speaking and the Scandinavian countries); for instance, the Italian 'gendered being' will continue to be an essere sessuale in Italian.26 There are Turkish feminist scholars who must simply use both terms in English because their own language has different ways of expressing sexual relations. In German, there is only one concept for both, the old term Geschlecht which refers to grammatical gender, to sexual physiology, to the sexes, to families and generations, and to race such as in 'human race', Menschengeschlecht. German-speaking scholars are therefore in the position, both difficult and promising, of not being able to distinguish readily, even though problematically, between physiology and culture with this terminology.

In this situation, it is not the concept of gender that should be challenged - as some feminist historians seem to prefer at present - but the linguistic and theoretical dichotomy of sex and gender. Particularly in history, the humanities and social sciences, it might be challenged through a procedure that has already been used fruitfully in historical research: doing away with the term 'biology' in the sense of the female body, its perception and activities (other and better terms are readily at hand), using 'gender' in a comprehensive sense which may include both the physiological and the cultural dimension, and using 'sex' in the same sense as 'gender', thus leaving space for continuities instead of polarities of meaning.

2. Equality versus difference. The problems of the sex/gender dichotomy are closely related to those of another dichotomy with which we are faced today in a new way and in an international debate which has taken on different shapes and phases in different countries: that of 'equality versus
difference'. Women's studies have largely relied on the concept of 'sexual' or 'gender equality' as an analytical tool, and physiological 'difference' has been played down as insignificant because it has so often been used to justify discriminatory treatment of women. In this perspective, it has been demanded that women be treated in the same way as men, as if they were men, and that new laws and reforms be formulated in gender-neutral terms (for instance, in recent debates in the women's rights commission of the European Parliament), thus eliminating sexual difference and rendering masculinity and femininity politically irrelevant. Other feminist scholars, however, argue that burning issues such as rape, abortion or wife-battering cannot be dealt with adequately in gender-neutral terms; that female 'difference', physiological as well as social, should not be erased but recognized, in historical, philosophical and legal terms; that it has never had a chance to develop autonomous political and cultural forms other than in social niches and in opposition to dominant cultures; that emphasis should be laid on a critical evaluation of men's distinctive needs and activities and that women's distinctive needs and activities should be valued, thus opening alternatives both to female inferiority and to women's assimilation to men.

The best known work using the first approach is Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectics of Sex*, written at a time when the term 'gender' was not yet in widespread use. It proposed to abolish 'female biology' and sexual difference, pregnancy and motherhood with the means offered by modern technology such as *in vitro* fertilisation and childbearing by others than the 'biological' mother. On the other side, and equally well-known, there is Carol Gilligan's important psychological work of the 1980s on women's 'different voice'. It avoide 'biological' reductionism and argues that women's distinctive development of moral judgment emphasises less the values of individual rights and properties than those of care, responsibility and connectedness; and that these values should not be seen as inferior to those of justice and rights, but of equal importance in the development of both sexes, and that they should be respected and practised also by men.

The shift of public and scholarly interest from an emphasis on 'equality' to an emphasis on 'difference' is particularly visible and controversial in the United States. But it is by no means entirely new. In the 1960s, the issue had been raised by the women's movement and the women's studies movement. They challenged the then prevailing assumption that equal rights alone can bring about women's liberation. This assumption has sometimes also been seen as specific to white culture. In 1968, African-American feminist Margaret Wright put it this way: 'In black women's liberation we don't want to be equal with men, just like in black liberation we're not fighting to be equal with the white man. We're fighting for the right to be different and not be punished for it'. In Italy, feminist history, philosophy and feminism *tutti e due* are called, by feminists as well as in other people's daily language, il *pensoio della differenza sessuale*: thinking and acting in terms of sexual difference, affirming a female subjectivity which refuses to be assimilated ('homologised') to male versions of subjectivity such as the values and rights to compete, to possess, to dominate. They maintain that the affirmation of 'difference' in no way indicates weakness and resignation, but that it is a powerful weapon of women's liberation, and they distinguish this type of feminism from 'emancipationism' (emancipazionismo), which demands only the same rights and the same treatment with men - and therefore too little. An Australian feminist philosopher has pointed out that 'odd things happen to women when the assumption is made that the only alternative to the patriarchal construction of sexual difference is the ostensibly sex-neutral individual'. Among such 'odd things there is the argument, used by the United States Supreme Court in the 1970s, that the discrimination against pregnant women and young mothers who are refused maternity leaves and benefits, cannot be considered a discrimination on the basis of sex, because many women are neither pregnant nor mothers; in other words, that motherhood has nothing to do with womanhood. Other examples are the European welfare policies which do indeed grant maternity benefits with fewer problems than those prevailing in the United States, but do so on the grounds that pregnancy and childbirth are a disease. These arguments and practices originate in the efforts of male paternalist politicians to homologise women's experience of maternity to the male-centred policy and experience of sickness insurance, which did not recognise women and mothers in their own right (and from female and feminist efforts to secure financial help for employed mothers within the established insurance system).

Some scholars tend to believe that the dichotomy 'equality versus difference' is simply a false dichotomy, more the result of misunderstandings than of insight. But others insist on the mutually exclusive character of the relation between 'equality' and 'difference', and therefore on the necessity of an either-or choice. The historian Joan Hoff-Wilson urges that a decision be made, particularly by feminist leaders, between either 'equality between the sexes based on prevailing masculine societal norms' or 'justice between the sexes based on a recognition of equal, but different socialised patterns of behavior'. On the other hand, the historian Joan Scott considers this to be 'an impossible choice', and she questions precisely the dichotomy itself. I also believe that it is unacceptable, among other reasons because both the 'difference dilemma' ('difference' being used, overtly or implicitly, to confirm women's inferiority in relation to men) and the 'equality dilemma' ('equality' being
used, overtly or implicitly, as a term for the comparative lack of women’s participation in the political, economic, and social spheres of society.

Such an approach should be put on the agenda for future women’s history. Why is it, for instance, that ‘equality’ and ‘justice’ seem to imply complementarity in the case of men, but not between women? Why is it that ‘difference’ is only attributed to one half of humankind and not to the other? Why is it that ‘equality’ is so intimately bound up with ‘fraternity’, but not with sisterhood, since the French Revolution but also in earlier political thought?

Again, the only way forward seems to be to challenge the dichotomy itself, and to do so by analysing and dismantling the sexist construction of difference as well as of equality: of an equality that may merely be “based on prevailing masculine societal norms” and of a (female) difference which is merely understood as “socialized patterns of behaviour”. An Italian philosopher of the difference, sessuale maintains that “different and equal is possible”, if equality is not understood as “eliminating one of the two different entities in the other”, if each of the two different sides is free, and if the concept of equality radically abandons its logical foundation in the abstract, serializing universalisation of the male one. Carole Pateman has explored and challenged this dichotomy through a critique of the traditional construction of equality as a relation between ‘individuals’ who are essentially of the same, masculine, sex and which excludes difference, namely women. She has also interrogated this dichotomy through a critique of the traditional construction of difference which is defined not in natural terms, but in political terms as subordination, inferiority and powerlessnes.

The debate seems to be of particular significance to women’s and gender history, not the least because of the fact that studying women and the sexes is important not only in situations where women and men have been treated differently in the past, but also where they have been treated identically – as in the case of the victims of National Socialist anti-Semitism and racism who became victims regardless of their sex. But history may also be useful for today’s attempts at challenging the dichotomy, and three historical issues show that we are by no means the first generation to struggle with it. Karen Olenk has recently pointed out that the earlier western women’s movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dealt with it in theory and practice, and they searched to establish a new relationship between the hierarchical and apparently exclusive terms. These movements demanded equal political citizenship, equal access to well-paid positions as well as equal recognition of the value of women’s distinctive (different) contributions where a sexual division of labour exists. They did so in the United States and in Europe, on the part of radical and of moderate feminism. Concepts that were equally important to this approach include equality, equivalence, equity, and ‘equality in difference’ and also, perhaps, ‘difference in equality’. The discussion of the relationship between equality and difference has some of its roots in the early modern European ‘quarrel des femmes’, at the time when the concept ‘equality’ came to be used explicitly in efforts to improve women’s condition, in place of the earlier controversy around the superiority or ‘pre-excellence’ of the female or the male sex respectively; it was carried on mostly in France, Italy and England. New, and sometimes dichotomous, formulations of their relationship emerged during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, often linked to new feminist ideas and policies for the improvement of the situation of mothers, particularly those living in poverty, and especially with respect to the issues of the endowment of motherhood by the state and protective labour legislation. Since the 1920s, most conspicuously in the United States and Britain, women’s movements have split along the lines of emphasis on ‘difference’ and on ‘equality’. The terms of this historical debate have not yet been sufficiently explored, but it seems clear that we are dealing here with a female and feminist heritage which needs to be both accepted and overcome since we cannot afford to remain trapped in an impossible choice.

Another historical example concerns the questions raised above by Margaret Wright: do we want to be equal to? what is the relation between the right to be equal and the right to be different? what is legitimate ‘equality’ and legitimate ‘difference’? In recent years, the gender-based assumptions and uses of the concept of equality have been studied extensively, particularly in the context of the French Revolution. Women’s progress towards the great goal of equal political rights during the past century has often been compared to the earlier extension of suffrage from the male property class to the male working class. But another comparison seems to be yet more illuminating: the comparison with the emancipation of groups which have been excluded from equal political and social rights in ways similar to women’s exclusion, but different from the exclusion of the male working class, namely the emancipation of ethnic minorities, the male and female victims of racism.

For instance, the concept of Jewish emancipation in nineteenth-century Germany, as it was formulated mostly by non-Jewish German men, was based on an equality which explicitly excluded difference. Male Jews were accepted as German citizens on equal terms if they gave up, at least ostensibly, their Jewishness, if they accepted assimilation to German non-Jews. Among Jews themselves, this situation was expressed in a phrase which characteristically refers to one of the dichotomies outlined in the first section: “Be a human being (or rather: a man) in the public world, a Jew in the private home” (sei drauf ein Mensch und zu Hause...
ein Jude). Jewish men had to become equal (to German men) in order to be accepted as equals. Among others (for instance the various currents for Jewish cultural and political revival), it was the German Jewish women's movement in the first third of our century that questioned this view of equality. Often pointing to the parallels between Jewish and female emancipation, Jewish women insisted in both respects on the right to be equal as well as on the right to be different, as women from men and as Jews from non-Jews. Later, National Socialist racism, and particularly anti-Semitism, excluded Jews not only from the right to be equal to German non-Jews, but also from the right to be different as Jews.

A third historical example refers to our specifically European heritage of political thought. There is one reason why the emphasis on sexual equality so often seems to be the only powerful weapon of strategy for women's liberation and women's studies, despite the awareness that it may imply an assimilation to prevailing androcentric and unchallenged societal norms which not all women (and men) may want to share, and that is the fact that, since the time of the Greco polis, democratic and socialist movements have pursued their goals under the banner of equality (and reactionary movements have attacked them on those grounds). This concept is therefore not only a most precious heritage of western political thought, but also one of its most well-established and accepted concepts. There is, however, another and equally precious heritage: the idea of tolerance as it emerged from the bloody religious wars in early modern Europe. Tolerance emphasised, at least in its early and radical formulations, liberty, justice and mutual respect, understood as a recognition of both difference and equality. Of course, tolerance and liberty, just like equality, were reserved for male- or male-dominated groups and should be analysed and historicised in this perspective. But perhaps one challenge to the gender-linked dichotomy 'equality versus difference' could and should be the idea and reality of a reconceptualised tolerance instead of mutual exclusiveness. In other words, the task might be to recognise and deconstruct 'equality' as well as to deconstruct and recognise 'difference'.

The idea and practice of tolerance of 'difference' has had manifold meanings and important implications for women and women's studies at scholarly institutions. In Germany around 1900, when women's admission to the universities on equal terms with men was debated, an inquiry among about one hundred professors brought to the fore many voices which insisted that academic scholarship was 'men's work' (Männerwerk) and that women were not welcome. Others agreed to their admission on the condition that women were proved to possess capacities equal to those of men. Only one of them, a Jewish scholar, welcomed women precisely because they might have not only equal, but also different capacities; he hoped they would contribute to the revival of rigidified institutions by 'dealing with obsolete methods and authorities in a different way than the men who have been educated, from early youth on, towards iron-hard discipline'.

3. Integration versus autonomy. An analogous argument may be appropriate in regard to the problems of the 'integration' or 'autonomy' of women's studies in respect to scholarship at large, and of women in respect to academic institutions. Despite the expansion of women's studies, and even though it is now occasionally admitted as a 'sub-disciplinary specialisation', its impact on and integration in the academic disciplines have remained minimal, and what has been called 'mainstreaming' is still far from being implemented, even though there are important differences here as to countries and disciplines. For example, the German author of an essay on Edith Stein, a Catholic philosopher of Jewish descent who was killed by the National Socialists, justified his interest in her by writing that 'Edith Stein was not only an outstanding woman, but also a great human being' (ein großer Mensch). Women, it seems, are still not worthy of interest in themselves, are not even necessarily Menschen unless they may be placed alongside 'great men'. On the other hand, women's history is able to change the study of other historical fields, too, even though slowly and paradoxically. For instance, historians still write of 'universal suffrage' for the period when women were excluded from it. Many others are now also using the term 'universal male suffrage' - but this does no more than illuminate explicitly the assumption that male activities are considered 'universal'. When instead the correct term 'male adult suffrage' is used, it shows that a broadening awareness of women's history leads also to an awareness of men as men. But this does not yet, by itself, lead to the integration of the struggle for women's suffrage into books on political history at large; it is still dealt with as a separate and segregated field of research.

Clearly, women's studies need to be recognised as an integral part of scholarship at large. But such 'mainstreaming' may also risk being drawn into a dynamic that makes women invisible again. There are now a number of cases where 'gender history' is being opposed, in a dichotomous way, to 'women's history', and where chairs in 'women's history' are strongly opposed, but chairs in 'gender history' are welcome. As an institutional problem, the latter situation may be dealt with according to institutional circumstances, but the theoretical problem remains, largely due to a specific definition of 'gender' which excludes sexual 'difference', meaning women, by classifying it as 'biological' and therefore as socially and historically irrelevant. In such a view, the radical promise of gender history as an extension of women's history risks being
subverted by the reduction of the history of women, once again, to a mere appendix of an allegedly more ‘generic’ gender history. Again, women are not considered to be an equally universal subject as are others, and male-centred subjects.

Therefore, women’s history also requires autonomy from male-dominated scholarship, in insitutional and particularly in intellectual terms, in order to develop its full potential. But ‘autonomy’, another virtue central to the heritage of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, also needs to be redefined.12 In practice, the difficult question is to recognize the fine line, which is also a profound divide, between autonomy and segregation, the ghetto in which women’s studies often find themselves. It seems that the problem ‘autonomy versus integration’ cannot be adequately dealt with through terminological distinctions, between women’s history, feminist history, and gender history, or, in the terminology of the French debates, between histoire des femmes, histoire féministe, histoire féministe, and histoire des sexes, or between all these and histoire tout court; nor does the problem coincide with the debate for and against ‘institutionalization’ which has been the main theoretical political issue in the West German debate on women’s studies for over a decade. Important women-centred and gender-conscious research has been done under all these labels, even outside these labels,13 in universities, in feminist institutions and outside male-dominated or female institutions.

Challenging dichotomies seems to be a major issue on the scholarly as well as the political agenda of women’s and gender history, and of women’s studies more broadly. The act of challenging requires, of course, further study of the precise character of the opposing categories, of the particularities and dynamics of the dichotomous relationship, and of the form and character of the challenge itself.

As to the nature of gender-based dichotomies, there is obviously a significant difference between the first set of three which have been mentioned in the earlier section of this paper, and the latter set of three. This difference reflects, among other things, the increasingly complex character of the categories under which gender relations are being considered and studied. The dichotomies nature/culture, paid/unpaid work, public/private were constructed in alignment with a fixed divide between women and men, the ostensibly internally homogeneous categories on each side of which pointing either to women or to men. In the case of sex/gender, equality/difference, integration/autonomy, however, both (apparently) opposing terms refer to both sexes. We are therefore not dealing just with relations between the sexes, but with relations between relational categories, and not just with (apparent) contradictions between women and men, but with opposing or apparently opposing conceptualisations and practices of gender relations. Hence, women’s studies and the search for new visions of gender has led us – despite, or rather because of sometimes profoundly different approaches – to at least one common ground: gender issues are issues which concern complex human relations, relations both between the sexes and within the sexes.

And what could or should be the character of the challenge? It requires continuous work on the dismantling, historicisation, and deconstruction of the apparently given meanings of the various categories. I believe that it also implies the rejection of mutually exclusive hierarchies, and especially of either/or solutions, in favour of as-well-as-solutions; it also implies the rejection of the principle tertium non datur. In the case of the two latter dilemmas, we may particularly need to challenge their mutual exclusiveness and claim ‘equality in difference’ and ‘difference in equality’, ‘autonomy in integration’ and ‘integration in autonomy’. For both of them one might object, and it has been objected, that women cannot have their cake and eat it too. But for too long, women have baked the cake and taken only the smallest slice to eat for themselves.

**NOTES**


9. For this political theory, the authors of the National Socialist sterilization law of 1933 referred to the philosopher Carl Schmitt: Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Cologne: Gerd-Matthias Press, 1987).


18. For example, Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* [The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1962).


27. In such a non-dichotomous way, gender has also been used, at least occasionally, at earlier periods; for example, see Scott, *'Gender'*, pp. 1053; French examples, to which Karen Offen has kindly drawn my attention, are the *Requête des dames à l'Assemblée nationale* (1789), in *Amadee Lafont, Le Socialisme pendant la Révolution Française* (Paris: Deuts, 1853), p. 139 (2). The sex feminin jouira toujours de la même liberté, des mêmes avantages, des mêmes droits et des mêmes bouffées que le sexe masculin. 3. Le genre masculin ne sera plus regardé, même dans la grammaire, comme le genre le plus noble, attendu que tous les genres, tous les sexes et tous les êtes doivent être et sont également nobles* (and Mme d'Epiney, *Les Conversations d'Émilie* (Paris: 1776), p. 11). See also Marilyn Strathern, *Introduction to Dealing with Inequality*, pp. 6 and 31, note 4.


32. See, for example, Adria Cavaro et al., *DioMi, Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* [DioMi, Philosophy of Sexual Difference] (Milano: Tartaruga Edizioni, 1987).


35. Hoff-Wilson, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 36.


38. See Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, especially p. 3 and ch. 4.


51. One of these cases is described in Susan Magaray, ‘Australian Women’s History in 1986’, Australian Historical Association Bulletin (October 1987), pp. 5-12; there are similar examples in European countries, for instance, in West Germany.

52. For attempts at redefinition see Migley, p. 39, and Pateman, Sexual Contract.

53. One example is Jill Stephens, The Nazi Organisation of Women (London: Croom Helm, 1981), who underlines that this book is not ‘meant to be of the “woman’s history” genre’ (p. 11).