

An Interview with Daniela Hacke

by PAOLA MOLINO

Daniela Hacke is Professor of Early Modern History at the Free University of Berlin. She has a PhD from Cambridge (GB) and a habilitation from Zurich University (CH). Her research interests focus on the history of Italian and European Renaissance culture, the cultural history of politics (Kulturgeschichte des Politischen), the history of religious co-existence, gender history, visual history, and, at present, sensory history and the history of emotions in cultural encounters. She has wider interests in global history and methodological questions and is associate member at the Graduate School Global Intellectual History at the Free University of Berlin. She was involved in international projects such as “Cause matrimoniali come fonte storica” (Istituto Italo-Germanico in Trento) and the European Science Foundation Project “Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700”. She is currently a member of the scientific committee of the Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani / Deutsches Studienzentrum von Venedig and a member of the Dahlem Humanities Center at the Free University of Berlin. Daniela Hacke founded the series *Kulturgeschichten. Studien zur Frühen Neuzeit* and has published extensively on the cultural history of early modern Europe. Her main publications include *Women, Sex and Marriage in Early Modern Venice* (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), as editor, *Frauen in der Stadt. Selbstzeugnisse des 16.-18. Jahrhunderts* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2004) and *Moderata Fonte, Das Verdienst der Frauen* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2001). Her most recent books are *Konfession und Kommunikation. Religiöse Koexistenz und Politik in der Alten Eidgenossenschaft – Die Grafschaft Baden, 1531–1712* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2017) and (together with Paul Musselwhite) *Empire of the Senses: Sensory Practices of Colonialism in Early America* (Leiden: Brill 2017).

Prof. Hacke, how did you become a historian, and how did your career develop?

It was never my goal to become a university professor. At the same time I have to admit that there was never a concrete alternative to working as an early modern historian. Already as a graduate student in Hamburg I was fascinated by the early modern period, and my experiences abroad – mainly in Italy – reinforced this. As a student of social and economic history, Italian literature and art history I decided to go to Bologna, where Carlo Ginzburg – known to me through the Annales school –

was lecturing for one year. There I met a group of historians in the circle of Prof. Cesarina Casanova, who were engaged in gender history (Lucia Ferrante and others). Through a friend I became familiar with the new Italian edition of the dialogue of Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne* (Venice, 1600). I wrote a paper about this text for Ginzburg's seminar, and it was he who suggested that I should further develop this topic in my dissertation. I then graduated in Hamburg under the supervision of Prof. Claudia Optiz. This work, which eventually became a book (published by C. H. Beck Verlag), gave rise to two of my main passions and fields of research: the early modern history of Italy, and the history of gender. My PhD thesis topic mirrored both interests: it was about marriage and conflict in early modern Venice. My supervisor this time was neither in Germany nor in Italy, but Peter Burke in Cambridge. The time in Cambridge was formative: I liked both the communicative British academic culture, the flat academic hierarchy, and I loved my broad-minded and helpful colleagues. The academic contacts I forged with Italian, American, English, and German historians who I met in Italian archives or at conferences in Oxford and Cambridge have greatly inspired and influenced me as a historian and still influence the way I teach history at the FU Berlin.

After the PhD I started to search for a supervisor for a new project, which was difficult because I had left the German academic culture and was attempting to re-enter it. I was lucky to get a position at the interdisciplinary Graduate School in Munich where I had the chance to work closely with comparative literary historians and art historians, who introduced me to the New Cultural History. This impact was important for the publication of my book on Moderata Fonte, since it changed the way I conceived literary texts considerably, and in general made the boundaries between disciplines more porous for me. Already during my time in England I had developed a strong interest in cultural history, which was now developed further. Indeed, it would become crucial for my habilitation project and the way I perceived the history of early modern politics as fluid and conceptualized it as grounded in (acts of) political communication. When I was appointed to a position at the University of Zurich I decided to work on Swiss history, since the Swiss archives are extremely rich and underexplored for the early modern period. Additionally, my project could be carried out within the ambit of a Zurich-based SNF project on religious coexistence and political culture in the Swiss Confederation, of which I was the principal investigator. The more I read the archival documentation on conflicts in bi-confessional communities, the more I became interested in the political communication of actors of different confessional affiliations and their heterogeneous narratives of conflicting events. This changed my understanding of early modern politics considerably, especially because it made the intersection between confessional conflicts and politics in early modern societies apparent. Working on conflicts that arose out of situations of religious co-existence, I was

intrigued by the lengthy negotiations carried out by Swiss political actors of different confessional affiliations, which permanently undermined the political structures of the Swiss Confederation. In order to understand how the Swiss Confederation functioned, I started to look more closely at political communication. But there were also new family commitments (children, and a husband working in Munich), which made my professional and private life more challenging.

The project was also a strategic choice for the future, as in Germany there were not many chairs in Italian and gender history, though the choice also entailed undertaking a totally new project with a new historiography. On the other hand, in Germany a professor is required to cover a broad spectrum of topics both in teaching and in research. To embark on a new project like this at a time in which my husband and I wanted to start a family was a real challenge, considering that Munich (the city in which we were living) did not have much to offer in terms of child care. I kept working part time on my project, and for this reason it took longer than usual, but luckily not so long as to stop me being ready when some interesting positions came up in German universities, such as the one in Berlin, which I finally got. You have to be able to cope with the uncertainty that comes with the decision to embark on an academic career. Statistically speaking, it is very likely that most of us academics will not get a professorship or a tenured position. So it is always a good idea to have a plan B in mind – just in case.

I feel lucky that I can work in the profession of my dreams. Being a historian inspires me and makes me happy. I love to work in the archives: the smell of archive papers and the peculiar sound they make when you browse through them, the thrill of not knowing what you will encounter, the need for historians to plough through a lot of material (what Aby Warburg called *Wühlarbeit*), and also the intellectual effort that lies behind all of this. To come up with good ideas and to work in a team can be a source of happiness and great satisfaction. I take great pleasure in thinking about and working with concepts and methods, but each new project also brings a new challenge. Besides that, I find that interdisciplinary collaborations are often very enriching experiences.

In all my work I try to emphasize how what I do is also determined by my specific point of view and environment. You realize just how influential these things are once you work in international settings and have to contextualize your work in different ways than you would have to do otherwise. It is always a question of clarifying how the specific work you do is relevant for our societies today. This is pretty evident in the case of gender history. In my seminars I always try to show that historical actors – male and female ones! – are able to change social structures. This

means that gender roles and the ways we inscribe bodies with meaning are malleable over the course of time and can always be negotiated. To me, this is actually one of the most important lessons that the study of history can teach us, which is also of great political importance: we cannot change the past, but we can change the world we live in!

What are you currently working on?

I am currently trying to familiarize myself with a number of fields of research that I do not yet know very well. One is the history of the English and British Empire, the other one is the closely related field of transnational and global approaches to history. I feel it is very important to give the early modern period its place within the very new and dynamic historiography of global history, also in terms of research politics and strategies. The early modern period is not just the prehistory of the processes of globalization in the 18th century, but has its place in global history in its own right.

Another field that I am very interested in right now is sensory history (the history of the senses). I find this approach very promising for our exploration and understanding of premodern societies and I like the methodological challenges posed by sensory history. I would like to show that a normativity of the senses existed in the early modern period, which has not yet been studied. By this I mean, for instance, the fact that city authorities tried to police the way their cities smelled. This effort led to all sorts of environmental regulations, but also to the establishment of social norms of behavior. Something similar can be said with regard to the history of sounds and noises, and obviously also for a “history of visibility” and the ways of seeing – I am sure there is a different early modern history of vision and power than Foucault’s important study of the panopticon. It is evident that this sensory history has many potential points of connection with the history of emotions, which has already been around a little longer. Emotions were and are always connected to experiences of the senses, even though this is rarely made explicit. An example of how these connections can be researched and understood is Alain Corbin’s book *Village Bells. The Culture of the Senses in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside* (English edition 1998, 1st French edition 1994), in which he shows how the sound of church bells is related to the sense of identity and the emotional and sentimental culture of the rural population.

In one word: what is the history of emotions for you?

I need at least three words: a very promising method, or, also, a very promising field of historiography.

What makes this topic so particularly relevant, especially today?

I am not sure it has just become relevant now, in the year 2016. After all, the history of emotions can look back on a long tradition. Depending on how you look at it, you could argue that it started with the work of Lucien Febvre, or even that it goes all the way back to Thucydides (454–c.399 B.C.). I think that the field is relevant also because it seeks answers to questions that go beyond what has been called the linguistic turn. It satisfies our desire to understand all those historical phenomena for which we cannot look at representational discourses. Despite this specific focus, however, the methodological and conceptual questions that the history of emotions has to deal with are essentially the same as those of any other historiographical perspective or method. Just like any other historian, we cannot do anything without sources, which means in most cases that we cannot do anything without some sort of material record, whether it be texts or images. This does not have to be viewed as a disadvantage. On the contrary, the ways in which people write about and express their emotions can tell us a lot about the normative set of emotions available to them within their specific historical context. From it we can learn how people could speak about certain things, and how they were not even allowed to mention others. The specific techniques for recording and processing emotions can also reveal what I would call emotional practices. In other words, ‘text’ and ‘emotions’ do not exclude one another, but must be understood as complementary elements of the management of emotions of whatever period or society we are studying. We can glean many methodological insights here from the innovative research that has been done on Self writings.

I also find it important to think about how the history of emotions can be connected to other fields of historiography, especially with regard to the question of how emotions might have been constitutive of social processes of change, or how writing about emotions helped individuals to overcome moments of crisis. In my book on *Konfession und Kommunikation* I read conversion narratives not as a rupture of existing social and private networks (convent, family etc.) but rather as documents which – read from the perspective of the history of emotions – elucidate that, despite a change in confessional affiliation, emotions persisted and were permanently performed in letters. Therefore, I think it is fruitful to connect a history of emotions with a perspective of research that focuses on the individual in a larger historical setting and, for example, on performances of the body, gender, and identity. One way to do this would be to ask about the social functions of specific emotions and the modes of expressing emotions in different media. For these research questions in particular, I find Monique Scheer’s concept of emotional practices very helpful, since it bridges dichotomies with which historians often struggle, for instance body and mind, structure and agency. The advantage of the concept lies in the possibility to conceptualize emotions not as an inner feeling but as a practice and a performance. Emotions are bodily-affective experiences, but they are socially conditioned and as

such culturally embedded. Emotional practices can be analyzed within a historical perspective, and they can help us to understand the distinct meanings that different historical and cultural sets of emotions carried for those that constructed their experiences and societies around them. This is a very promising perspective on the past, and was discussed at a conference I recently co-organized in Berlin [30 June–2 July 2016], entitled *Emotions: Movement, Cultural Contact, and Exchange, 1100–1800*.

Emotions: Movement, Cultural Contact, and Exchange – what lies behind this title? What did you want to achieve with this conference?

The conference was both interdisciplinary and international – we had speakers from four continents here with us in Berlin. We planned the conference in cooperation with the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions (CHE), in particular with Andrew Lynch, Jacqueline van Gent, and Charles Zika. Claudia Jarzebowski and I took care of the organization in Berlin. We also received generous financial support from CHE and the Center for International Cooperation (Free University, Berlin). The response to our call for papers was great and incredibly diverse. The basic idea was to combine two fields of current historical research, namely the history of emotions and the history of migration and colonialism. We were particularly interested in understanding the various transcultural encounters and tensions that lay at the origin of the cultural conflicts that developed in this period. I found this dual perspective particularly fruitful, but also our decision to study cultural contacts within global and European contexts. Admittedly, it is always tempting for a convener to over-emphasize the success of a conference, but even so: the conceptual and methodological focus of the conference were extremely fruitful and intellectually challenging, given that emotions are particularly important for the management of transcultural encounters and all the uncertainty, fears, curiosity, and wonder that comes with them. We were able to open up new perspectives during the conference, but obviously we could not explore all the possibilities in depth. We managed to demonstrate that the cultural encounters were very complex, and specific dynamics were at play that are worth exploring. Brokers and mediators negotiated between different cultures, making it no longer possible to differentiate between two cultures; boundaries were porous, bringing to the fore practices of cultural exchange, and forms of appropriation and hybridization. At the same time we have to deal with various different processes of cultural translation, which I find fascinating to engage with: translations of language (the language of the sources we read might not be the language in which we compose our scientific narrative about emotions) and translations of different notions of emotions in diverse cultures. I think writing a history of emotions is in part a matter of doing cultural translations; they are important if we want to understand the meaning of emotions in pre-modern societies.

What are the methodological pitfalls and limitations of this perspective?

First of all, I would like to say that I was really impressed to see how very fruitful the historical narrative enabled by the history of emotions has been for our understanding of the history of cultural encounters in European and global contexts. But speaking of the limitations and pitfalls, I see two in particular. One relates to the sources, the other to the more general question of how we can circumvent a Eurocentric perspective. We simply lack written sources from many of the indigenous people that were just as involved in these encounters as their European counterparts, which means that we can only rely on the documents left to us by Western travelers or, more generally, by Europeans. Those texts were written under very specific circumstances and following patterns that did not necessarily offer much scope for the reflection of emotions and feelings. When planning the conference we discussed these difficulties, and we thought that we might be able to circumvent a Eurocentric perspective by focusing on regions and comparisons between regions that stood in connection with one another directly, and not via Europe, such as northern Africa and the Arabian peninsula. But all those limitations notwithstanding, the conference demonstrated, and I think impressively so, how important it is to take the global history of the early modern period seriously, to appreciate it in its full diversity and strangeness, and to stress that it is more than the predecessor of the processes of globalization that marked the 19th and 20th centuries.

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