

Privacy and Gender in Early Modern German Speaking Areas

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

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Natália da Silva Perez 00:25

Hi, my name is Natália da Silva Perez, and you are listening to the Privacy Studies podcast. This episode is a lecture by Heide Wunder, Professor Emerita of early modern social and constitutional history. She is an acclaimed historian of gender and of rural societies. In this lecture, Professor Wunder reappraises her long career through the lens of privacy studies.

Heide Wunder 00:50

Thank you for the invitation. And while it's not usual for a person of my age, and while I feel provoked, well to do my best, but of course, my English is not perfect. And this is one of the things I should have done more to improve during my lifetime. But now it's too late. So I hope you will be able to follow my argument. As you can see, from the title of my lecture, I shall treat only some aspects of the complex topic of privacy agenda. And I shall restrict my attempts to early modern German speaking countries. I think, because you are a group of interdisciplinary and international scholars, you know, how difficult it is to translate terminology from one country and scholarly culture to another. So I restrict myself and perhaps we can discuss difficult terms and try to translate them. But sometimes it's the problem to translate something which does not exist in the other culture. So there is no name for it. Well, you know, this is really difficult. In the first part, I shall sketch what my past work may contribute to the relation of privacy agenda. In the second part, I want to try out a new approach by asking for the agency of persons, their command of spaces, and of free time. This means to rethink my former research. But this also means I didn't start when I got the information looking for privacy in my sources, but I just went back into my past scholarly history. The invitation brings me back to the 1970s and early 1980s, when private life was established as a relevant field of historical research, culminating in the monumental five volumes of "Histoire de la vie privée" which stretches from Roman antiquity to the present, edited by the famous historians, Philippe Ariés, and Georges Duby of course, you're all familiar with this work. Just to remind you nevertheless, Philippe Ariés is well known for his work on death and childhood, was not only one of the general editors, but also the designated co-editor of the third volume of "la vie privée" dedicated to the period from the Renaissance, to the Age of Enlightenment. He was not able, though, to finish this work before his death in 1984, but he contributed the introduction, which in fact, was the paper he had presented at the séminaire. "John Philippe Ariés: A propos de l'histoire de l'espace privé" in 1983, at the wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. And I should remember that also, Norbert Elias, took part in this conference and you will know what contribution he did to this concept of private life with his research on civility. In his paper Ariés, well in this introduction, Ariés developed his concept

of private life, which from a German perspective, partly seems to be rather similar to older "kulturgeschichte", cultural history, but I don't, nobody would term it like that, but enriched by dynamic concepts such as Norbert Elias's, "Der Prozess der Zivilisation" and modernized by theoretical reflections and overall societal change. In Ariés notion, private is explicitly related to socialité. Well, you can translate it into German as sozialität, or into English as sociality, but I think it means vergesellschaftung in German, which I don't know how to translate into English. It's the process of building society Yes, and putting people into relation with one another of individuals and groups. Yeah, vergesellschaftung, we have the other term vergemeinschaftung, and in general, this means to associate in small groups, while vergesellschaftung societies the larger unit. Well, Ariés, as I just said, now he related to socialité. While the dichotomy of public-private, has no significance in his concepts. As he explains, it was only when his co-editors confronted him with it, that he realized and accepted its importance in the process of shaping the private sphere, and its transformations during the early modern period. But I was privileged to attend this séminaire Ariés, and presented a short paper on l'espace privé and the domestication of women in the 16th and 17th century. Of course, we hear this approach is very dated, looking back on domestication. It commented on the generally positive evaluation of the emerging private sphere, from the perspective of gender history, by pointing to the ambivalent consequences it produced for women of the emerging educated middle classes, their activities were restricted to the house and to the church. My argument in this respect was based on funeral sermons, both for women and men, which point to the ambivalent role of religion. On the one hand, religion served as an instrument of discipline, on the other hand, accepted practices of piety opened up inner spaces of meditation and self-reflection for women to some degree, even temporal command of space in the house, which might be called private in the modern sense. I want to add here, a result from more recent studies. The emergence of several confessions, in the aftermath of the Reformation was accompanied by mixed marriages between people of different confessions. And this might mean that wives were allowed to keep their confession before marriage. They were not forced to take the confession of the husband, and this was put down in marital contracts. So it is a glimpse of independence and even also in a private space. In my research, I did not follow up questions of privacy and gender on the contrary, I fought against mainstream notions in German historiography and research, which correlated the asymmetrical construction of public-private with the asymmetrical construction of gender relations, which, in those days meant to exclude women from politics and professional life, just putting them into the private sphere. These modern, then modern historians based their notions on the enlightened anthropology of gender differences, which defined man and women as natural conditions, whereby women's natural place became the private sphere of house and family. But my aim was just to fight against this notion, because in my sources, I had other findings. And I tried to come back to historical evidence and to take historical evidence to look at this prejudices, which were very common 40 years ago in Germany. Well, the enlightened anthropology of gender is transported in Friedrich von Schiller's famous poem: "Das lied von der Glocke", which generations of schoolchildren had to learn by heart, and I give you at first a short part of the German version and then in English. "Der Mann muss hinaus ins feindliche Leben. Muss wirken und streben muss pflanzen und schalten, erlisten, erraffen, muss wetten und wagen, das Glück zu erjagen. Und drinnen waltet die züchtige Hausfrau. Die Mutter der Kinder und herrschet weise im häuslichen kreise, und lehret die Mädchen und wehret den Knaben. Und reget ohn' Ende die fleissigen Hände. Und mehrt den Gewinn mit ordnendem sinn. Well, the English version, I'm not quite satisfied with it: The man must go out in hostile life living, be working and striving and planting and making. Be scheming and taking through hazard and bearing

his fortune ensnaring. Then streams in the, well these verses I have not written to you in German, so I will just switch to the women's part. "And indoors ruleth the housewife so modest, the mother of children and governs wisely in matters of family." Of course, there's no word of family in the German version. So here we have the problem. "And maidens she traineth and boys she restraineth and goes without ending her diligent handling and gains increase hence." Yeah. well this sounds very rather unfashioned to us, but many parts of this poem have the status of proverbial notions in in Germany and they are cited very, very often today. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that Schiller's notion of gender relations in matrimony did not receive full applause by the educated public of his time. For his verses also depict the old fashioned model of the housemother. Her central role for the inner organization of the household. She is reigning, she's teaching and she is contributing to the household's profit by her work and her wise management of its resources. This model did not fit the picture educated women of the middle classes then had of themselves. Ignoring though that their daily life routine was just as was described in Schiller's poem. They were still housemothers economically. But, let me come back to my former aim, to reconstitute women to the history by proving their legitimate agency. Not just situate it in privacy in the negative, in the passive role. Reading early modern autobiographical and legal evidence but also reflecting the logics of dynastic rule, I was able to show that during the early modern period, women participated in the exercise of authority. Authority in German I would have said: herrschaft. In English we have two words: authority and power but in this case, I preferred authority. Well they exercised authority on all levels except in republics, where legitimate authority was based on elections. Well as of course, Natalie Zemon Davis was the first to tell us. The degree of women's participation and the exercise of authority varied, of course, according to their personnel as well as to their social status. It made a big difference whether you were a single, married or widowed person, whether you belong to the nobility to the peasantry, or to the urban bürger. For married women, the most common form of participation in the exercise of authority was the position, the position of mistress of the household, while the role of wife that is role compared to that of her husband. Women were under their husbands tutorship. Only widows were their own master. Legally, the house was a sphere of legitimate private authority. As we would say, in German: private Heerschaft. Where housefather and housemother were responsible to keep order and peace among the members of the household. As the household was not only a social, but also an economic unit, it has to be taken into consideration, that it was founded on property, which included movable and immovable objects, as well as property rights privileges. Well, legally. Also, children were regarded as the parents property. Command of property conferred agency if not even authority to wives. In consequence, the wife had agency in matrimony, because she had brought property into the marriage and contributed to the households wellbeing by her work and expertise. Her status as a legal person in German: rechtsperson, was regulated and protected by private law. This term was used since the 16th century, since, well, during this age, the Roman law was what we call received in Germany. Yes, private law is very important in this argument. You will have noticed that the concept of public-private based on the difference between men holding public offices and men without public office interested only in their own well being, in their own interests, does not help to understand the structures of authority I have just described. On the one hand, a public officer, would also be a private: an privat mann, insofar as he was head of a household. On the other hand, the position of head of the household was regarded as an office: amt, as well, because the housefather took responsibility in guaranteeing order and peace inside the house. This interpretation, corresponds with Anna Becker's work on the household in early modern political theory, stressing that the household was supposed to be the origin and model of public order. The house as the space for households was a

protected space. Protected from outside intruders and assaults. Nobody should peep through the windows nor overhear what was going on inside the house. Boundaries were but visible boundaries were eaves. I hope I pronounced that - traufe, eaves. Is it correct? Eaves? Yeah. And thresholds as a türschwelle. Of course, this was also true for the members of the household, nobody, especially servants, should spread information concerning the household, which might weaken the households position in the neighborhood or community. On the other hand, in case of emergency housefathers and housemothers had to cooperate with neighbors and people living in their house, in order to defend their house. To summarize these results, choosing authority as my point of reference, I was able to bridge the dichotomy of public-private. As authority was common to both of them. It's what we had public authority and also private authority. And the aim of this authority was also common to both public and private, it was the common good, they relate to the common good. The house as a sphere of private authority, provided safety to the domestic group, while the topic of individual privacy was not touched. Private authority seems to be instrumental, well it seems to me as so, seems to be instrumental to control bodies and social interaction within the house, and the household, but does not refer to the minds of its members. "Tell me where is fancy bred, or in the heart or in the head." That was Shakespeare, you know, these were one of his points. This sphere is not touched by the arguments about public and private authority, there is a space and perhaps this may be the space of privacy. In consequence, it makes sense to inspect sources, which might give hints to detect aspects of privacy in early modern society. This brings me to the second part of my argument, which is, well, of course, rather experimental, tentative. And I wonder what you will think about it. But, first of all, what is needed is my, what you need to know is my definition of privacy. Living in the 20th and 21st centuries, I refer, of course, to the modern notion of privacy. Modern privacy is part of human rights, which are granted to the individual, which is supposed to act as an autonomous person, or in other words, as a responsible citizen. Responsible, it's not quite what is "mündig" in Germany. It's grown up and self, and so on. The catalog of personal rights includes the integrity of the body, and of the dwelling or house. Freedom of thought, speech and religion, freedom to marry. Finally, freedom of movement. The differences between modern individual privacy and early modern private spaces for social groups is evident. In the modern definition, you can decide which information concerning your person or your ideas, you want to communicate to others. Who may enter your dwelling. Which person, you can decide which person you want to be associated to. And finally, wherever you can decide wherever you want to go, well in principle. This wide range of the private sphere, well as a private sphere in this instance, not privacy, because this notion of space depends on the process of state building, in which the legitimate exercise of power was accumulated and monopolized by the state by which personal individual safety was guaranteed. But gender matters. Also, in this case, as you will really realize. For the modern family emerging, at the same time as the modern state, since the 19th century, still remained a sphere of legitimate power by the familyfather, I don't say housefather, I say, familyfather. In Germany, his right to discipline his wife, by corporal punishment was only abolished in 1928. And his right to punish the children only after World War II. So, this is just the top of the difference between private rights of married people. And I think that's very important, what is it for the early modern times to make all these differences, you have to make these differences also in the modern period. Marriage is still the lieu, the place where privacy is not the same for men and women. But now, coming back to the question of early modern privacy, I shall look at marriage and friendship, which both are connected with intimacy and love, sympathy and confidence, and to mark the difference between the early modern sort of privacy and modern privacy. My first case is Burkhard Zingg. He's my favorite man in history. Yes,

my first is Burkhard Zingg and his narrative of his first marriage. Burkhard Zingg, who lived from 1396 to 1474/75. Citizen of the Imperial town of Augsburg, married at the age of 24. He was a servant in a rich merchants business, and his bride, Elisabeth Störklerin was the maid servant in the same household, in the merchants household. Burkhard and Elizabeth had decided to marry and took each other in gute freundschaft, well this has been translated in this book, as amicable concord, but well, it's just not the same. Gute freundschaft, well I'll come back to this term of freundschaft later. The bride's mother, a poor widow, approved of their union, for she provided her daughter with a small dowery. Thus the young couple observed a number of formalities for the conclusion of a valid marriage. The mutual consent of the betrothed and the consent of the bride's mother. Zingg had no living parents, siblings or close kin with any say in the matter. Zingg does not even mention any wedding festivals. The public informed of his marriage was doubtless very small for the event took the young couples employer by surprise. He was annoyed that Zingg, who lived as a dependent servant in his household, had not asked his advice, and dismissed both Zingg and his wife without notice. Apparently he had expected Zingg to ask for his consent as head of the household, quasi parent. Zingg had not anticipated this outcome, believing himself dear to his master, since he had proven himself a good servant. Except for Elizabeth's small dowery, the young couple were virtually penniless. Zingg had only his clothes. But I think it's important thing to reflect that, of course, the person and his or hers clothes are part of the personality. But he had only his clothes and a little money. The couple lived in rented lodgings and had to earn their keep by wage labor. Working tirelessly they soon, well it's a narrative of course, a narrative of success. Working tirelessly, they soon succeeded and prospered. Effect that Zingg attributed to this symbolic capital of honor and virtuousness. In German: Ehre und frumkeit. Honor is very simple but frumkeit is not virtuousness. It's not piety, piety would be religious, but frumkeit is to be a proper person, reliable person in society. Well, this symbolic capital of ehre und frumkeit, both he and Elizabeth had brought together. A dowery, he estimated to be more valuable than property or money. Obviously, in this case, it had become possible to transfer love into marriage. That is a private, we could call a private, personal relationship into an institutional one, I think the aspect of institution is also very, very important. Now, which were the conditions that allowed this transfer of a love affair into a legal institution. Zingg's marriage was a clandestine marriage, what we also call a secret marriage. Which by canonical law, needed only the couples consent, while in town laws, marriage was treated differently. The couple needed, the parents consent and witnesses of their betrothal. If they wanted to get the property, which was exchanged between the bride's and the bridegroom's parents. In Zingg's case, there were no longer any relatives. Nor was there any family capital or property left. Therefore, young people earning their own living, were free to follow their feelings, making their own choices. This type of marriage has, of course not found scholarly attention, because it did not leave written evidence. It's not found in marriage contracts. So everybody looking at marriage contracts thinks this was the rule. But it's just the other way around. And it's just the question, which sort of people could also allow for love in making this match. Nevertheless, personal sympathy as the foundation of matrimony is also documented for the propertied classes not only for wage earners. Since the 15th century portraits of the future marriage partners, living in different towns were exchanged, and when the courtship was successful, they were combined to represent the married couple. In the 16th century this trend to reveal personal affection is also found in family portraits, which show both the conjugal pair and the loving relation to their children as parents. But this also is nothing new. At the beginning of the 15th century, Burkhard Zingg, indirectly expressed his affection for his eldest daughter Anna, by describing how everybody wanted to fondle her. Zingg does not report anything about the love of Elizabeth for her 10

children, but *mutterliebe* was proverbial. The humanist, Johannes Butzbach, he lived about 1500, driven out of the house by the father's brutal treatment, left his hometown Butzbach, which is pretty near to where we live now. But his mother came running after him, because she wanted to give him some money. And this sort of money is called: *mutter pfennig*, mother's penny. But of course, mothers mostly are treated as being too lax in the education of their children, but not in the positive. My second example for an intimate personal relationship is friendship. This topic was treated in 1556 by Jörg Wickram, citizen of Colmar that is a town in the Alsace, an Alsacian town. He treat it in a novel: *Von guten und bösen Nachbarn*, About good and evil Neighbors. This is as you will realize, a literary source, inventing truth. It is near to its reading audience, but free to imagine what is not existing in reality. I know about the tricky questions, one has to put but nevertheless I take this example. This is of special importance, in this case, because the term friends in friendship denotes close relatives normally, but as well, a close personal relation. So yes, let's have a look at this novel. It tells the story of a young merchant who having experienced misfortunes with his friends and neighborly malice leaves his town and travels in foreign countries. There he was without kin. "*Mutterseelenallein*" , you know, you see the importance of the mother. *Mutterseele*, *mutterseelenallein*. Like *Händel und Gretel* in the forest you know. But he met a young craftsmen who found himself in the same situation. Sympathy and a deep friendship soon developed between them. They were both isolated persons. This friendship was strengthened even more when the friends had saved the other's life. The young merchant decided to return to his hometown Antwerp and to make his intimate friend, his partner in business but also his neighbor. After the friends had married, they decided to break a door through the wall separating the houses so that their wives were not forced to enter the street and meet malicious neighbors. That true friendship as a close individual and emotional relationship and improved relationship became the basis of households and good neighborhoods. But the friends even went further, planned to wed that children, who had already fallen in love with one another. Without that the parents had taken notice of it. Here there is the critical aspect of this concept of good neighborhood, which is founded on the personal friendship of housefathers. For the wives and children, it meant splendid isolation from the outside world, from the street, public and from the neighborhood. Inside the house, there was no isolation, there were only open spaces where no secrets were tolerated. Although the daughter had room of her own, the window and the doors were open. So the father could overhear his daughter, talking to herself, about her being in love with the neighbor's son, she was scolded by her parents, for not communicating this very important information to them. You see, there is a discrepancy of free association at the bottom of good neighborhood, even close individual friendship, but not for people anchored, having an anchor in society, but of people traveling, not at home but when you are in a foreign country. But when they settled down, they returned to conventional forms of social association, in households with neighbors. And these neighbors you cannot choose, you can only choose friends. But what you can see here is that the term friends, dominant in the 16th and 17th century was still that of close relatives, not of friendship in our sense, but it was a vision and it was present as a notion. So there was friendship, but it had a different place in a person's life. Well, these have been only two examples of what way we may look at our sources, to find evidence of what we call privacy. And while it really needs close reading, again, and reconceptualizing what is told us in these sources. There's one last aspect, which I haven't found in the literature one last aspect of privacy. And this is the aspect of *freizeit*. That is that you don't only look at the spatial aspect, but also to the aspect of time. In the modern version, you have to have time to develop your personality, to execute all the rights you have. And of course, this I suppose is a big difference to the modern period, and this aspect of time is also

very revealing. When you look to the different time managements possible for men and women which makes privacy possible. Yes. Well, freizeit, perhaps you call it free time. It's the time after work. Yeah, of course, the early modern word would be leisure. And of course, when you hear the term leisure, you know, it's sort of incomparable with free time. Yes, free time, we would say today is the time that is not occupied by earning a living. Time that you can dispose of more or less freely. But of course, it is evident that you have to include into this free time, the time you have to manage your household affairs and so on. But nevertheless, there might be time left for other things. In the early modern period, the majority of people did not have free time. So that's my thesis. In general, they had to work all day long, but also in the evenings. Only those not working with their own hands might have a rest. But this was true only for men. Women continue to work in the evenings, such as spinning. That did the, well the normal population, and noble women did little work. Times of less work were Sundays and holidays, holy Days of the Christian calendar in the original meaning of the word. Here, of course, the role of religion is evident. Then people had the chance to read the Bible, to attend church, to go to a dance. Leisure, in German: Muße, was restricted to the upper classes. In the first instance, to the aristocracy, and to the court society, but also for the non-aristocratic upper classes, that means people working in the administrations at the universities, and so on. They had leisure, but little leisure. You can find evidence that people, men tell: "I have a lot of work and only very wenige nebenstunden. My main work is working in the office and there are some nebenstund, that is a very small part of the time, where I can read and write and so on and collect things, everything I want to do." Ordinary people had feierabend, not leisure, feierabend. And if you look to reports, what people did on feierabend after work. They associated with other people, they were sitting in front of their houses, men were sitting in front of their houses, young people were associating. Men and young men and young women in spinnstube. So they were somewhere doing social networking, those men sitting before their houses and communicating with the neighborhood. And the young people, of course, they were trying to match, to find a good partner and getting to know one another, but it's not free time to do what you like in the modern sense. And I think this depends on another very general change between Early Modern Times and the modern societies. That is, that you have wage labor as a general sort of work and regulated working times, which by and by got smaller and smaller and more and more time to repose of freely. But this aspect of privacy came only while I was writing this paper. So I'm very tentative here and I hope to get your help. We can start a common attempt at discussing this notion of free time and leisure and what is free time for men and what what is free time for women and I'm convinced that even today, married women have less time, less free time than men have. So, but it's an open end of my lecture and perhaps you will take your chance and attack my positions. Thank you.

Natália da Silva Perez 51:09

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