

Jury report

Sophie van den Elzen

Dissertation Prize 2023

Stichting Feministisch Cultuurfonds Gender&wetenschap
Feminist Cultural Fund Gender&knowledge

Jury 2023

- Rosemarie Buikema, Utrecht University (chair)
 - Marian Mourits, Groningen University
 - Petra Rudolf, Groningen University
- Liesbeth Lijnzaad, Maastricht University
- Maria Grever, Erasmus University Rotterdam

The jury received a longlist of 7 dissertation submissions. These dissertations originated from a plethora of social sciences and humanities perspectives and were defended in Maastricht, Nijmegen, Utrecht and Amsterdam in the period between July 2018 and July 2022.

The jury was undividedly impressed by the quality and the diversity of each of these 7 dissertations. The level of the work and the diversity of approaches and topics is undeniably proof of the richness, the coherence and the academic quality of a field which is continuously growing and developing into innovative and highly relevant directions.

From these 7 submission the jury unanimously selected a shortlist of 2 thesis based on their academic quality, their academic and societal urgency, their accessibility and the expected impact of their dissemination plans.

Jury report Sophie van den Elzen

Sophie van den Elzen, *Antislavery in the Transnational Movement for Women's Rights, 1832-1914: A Study of Memory Work*. Thesis defended at Utrecht University, on March 19, 2021.

This thesis shows how advocates for women's rights, in the absence of an 'own' history, used the anti-slavery movement as a historical reference point and model for their own activism.

Based on original empirical research into the history of the movement for women's rights in nineteenth-century Europe, the thesis succeeds in bringing together a large body of hitherto dispersed documents and integrating them within a common theoretical perspective.

The thesis provides rich historical insights into the different ways in which women activists invoked the memory of anti-slavery as part of their own campaigns and integrated these insights into an understanding of cultural memory in terms of 'memory work.' Something which must be actively done and fabricated.

As such it demonstrates through the detailed analysis of a wide range of textual genres, produced over the span of almost a century, how the women's movement gradually diverged from a position of solidarity with the enslaved into one of opposition based on hierarchical assumptions about class and race.

This approach to the history of the women's movement is unique in pursuing so consistently the ways it positioned itself in relation to anti-slavery and hence created for itself a 'usable past.'

The thesis addresses a topic that has historical, theoretical, and societal importance and it does so in an innovative way that crosses the boundaries between literary studies, cultural history, and the history of social movements. The candidate's willingness to cross linguistic borders and to combine works in four languages is particularly commended by the jury.

While the women-slave analogy has been noted before, this thesis is groundbreaking in its longitudinal and transnationally comparative approach. Using a

rich corpus of texts, its transnational approach gives new insight into the ways in which the cultural memory of Anglo-American anti-slavery was imported and adapted across Europe.

One of the thesis' main findings is that this adoption of anti-slavery narratives by feminists was not just an Anglo-American phenomenon, but also prominent in Dutch, German and French circles.

Although cross-group comparisons potentially may help create solidarities, the longitudinal approach deployed in this thesis shows how such solidarities can also be opportunistic and subject to erosion over time.

The ways in which one group models itself on another, and the sometimes fraught dynamics of cultural appropriation that this entails, is of continuing societal relevance today.