Tribute to Gisela Bock
by Ann Taylor Allen
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I remember Gisela Bock as a great historian, a kind and supportive colleague, and a valued friend. She was a founder of the field of women's and gender studies, in Germany and internationally. Gisela gave us many new theoretical perspectives, particularly on an women's domestic and reproductive functions. Conventional historical works often relegate this kind of work to a "private sphere," marginal and irrelevant to the public realms of politics, war, and economic activity. For Gisela, however, private and public spheres were intricately connected.

Her first lecture at the Berlin Summer University in 1976—a lecture entitled "Work as Love, Love as Work"—drew on the insights of the Italian feminist MariaRosa Dalla Costa to explain the significance of women's unpaid household labor to the capitalist economy. Her book *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus (Compulsory Sterilization under National Socialism, subtitled Studies in Racial and Gender Politics)* brought motherhood into the center of Nazi ideology and practice, showing the control of reproduction (or bio-politics) as an essential strategy of totalitarian rule.

The politics of reproduction and motherhood was an interest that I shared with Gisela, who always cultivated and facilitated international contacts. After I published *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany* in 1991, she and her colleague Juliane Jacobi invited me to teach a guest semester at the University of Bielefeld.

This was not only a great honor, but also an important opportunity to meet and work with colleagues from Germany and other European countries. These colleagues encouraged me to expand my focus to include the entangled history of transnational women's movements, particularly in the area of education. When my travels took me to Berlin, I looked forward to visiting Gisela and her husband, Volker Hunecke.

I was fortunate to know Gisela and will miss her. My collegial relationship with her changed my life. Her theoretical insights help me to understand not only the past but also the present, where the control of reproduction and women's bodies is still a means of political domination (in my retirement, I work for reproductive rights in a state, Kentucky, where abortion is banned). She leaves a rich legacy to future generations of feminist scholars and activists.

Forty years of friendship
by Ann Cova
ICS–ULisboa

Forty years ago, in 1986, I began my Ph.D. at the European University Institute (EUI) under the brilliant, rigorous and subtle supervision of Gisela Bock, who spoke many different languages. At the EUI, I had the chance to exchange with her in Italian. We met on a daily basis when I was her research assistant (1989) as our offices were in the same beautiful Villa Schifanoia. Thanks to Gisela, I have been involved in many academic activities, even after she left the EUI. We never ceased to be in touch, and our encounters took place in Berlin, Bielefeld, Florence, Lisbon, Paris and Rome.

When I was a Ph.D. candidate, I participated in her research project, which led to the publication of a book she edited with Pat Thane: *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s* (Routledge, 1991). During the 1990s, Gisela invited me to stay at her home in Bielefeld where I also enjoyed the hospitality of her husband, Volker Hunecke. In 1994, I defended my thesis and the jury was formed of Gisela Bock, Olwen Hufton, Luisa Passerini, Michelle Perrot and Françoise Thébaud. To celebrate my Ph.D., Gisela and I met in Paris, where she invited me to historical places such as Hôtel Lutetia and Brasserie La Coupole. When my academic career started in Lisbon, Gisela and Volker came to visit me several times.

In 2001, to pay tribute to her, I wrote an entry entitled 'Gisela Bock' for a catalogue of an exhibition that took place in Lisbon, *Mulheres século XX: 101 livros. Catálogo* (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa). In 2003, Gisela and I edited a bilingual book, *Writing Women's History in Southern Europe, 19th–20th Centuries. Écrire l'histoire des femmes en Europe du Sud, XIXe–XXe siècles* (Celta). In 2006, Gisela gave a lecture entitled 'Gender dimensions in transnational history and the history of western European colonialism' at the University of Lisbon's Institute of Social Sciences (ICS–ULisboa). In 2013, Gisela returned to Lisbon to be part of the jury at my Habilitation. I remember that Gisela, my son Filipe, who at that time was a teenager, and I had lunch in a restaurant with a nice view of the Atlantic. In 2014, I wrote a chapter in a book in her honour edited by Oliver Janz and Daniel Schönpflug, *Gender History in a Transnational Perspective: Networks, Biographies, Gender Orders* (Berghahn Books).

During these 40 years of friendship, I could always count on her support (for example, in 2019 when I applied and was shortlisted for a chair at the History Department of the EUI). In 2024, Gisela sent me her chapter for a book edited by Christof Dipper and Heinz Duchhardt, *Generation im Aufbruch: Die Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland im Spiegel autobiographischer Porträts* (Böhlau-Verlag). This was the last publication I received from Gisela, and as it is an autobiography it will contribute to cherishing her memory.

Gisela Bock
by Francisca de Haan
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December 2025.

When I think of Gisela, immediately her beautiful, somewhat husky voice and her kind smile come to mind. I owe her a lot. It was through my participation as a young PhD student in the European Summer University in Berlin (1988), where Natalie Zemon Davis, another beloved friend now missed, was one of the teachers, that the Dutch Women's History Association received an invitation to be represented in the nascent International Federation for Research in Women's History. It is perhaps difficult to imagine now, but nobody was particularly interested. To me it seemed a wonderful opportunity, which it was. Not much later, this became an invitation to be the Dutch representative at the founding conference of the IFRWH (Bellagio, Italy, 1989), and there I met so many of the leading women in our field who would be my inspiration, mentors, and friends in the coming years or even decades, with Gisela one of these guiding lights.

She was so approachable that within a year, I organized a one-day conference at the International Institute of Social History called "The Future of Women's History," with her and Natalie Zemon Davis as guest speakers (March 1990).

One reason why Gisela's work was an inspiration and I would say, still is, are the high standards she had for herself and others. Always precise, always grounded, always relevant. Her contribution to the first IFRWH book (*Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, edited by Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall) was called "Challenging Dichotomies: Perspectives on Women's History." Her unpacking and clarifying of dichotomies, including "sex versus gender," was important for my own learning to think about gender as a historical category, and I also used her chapter later in my teaching. Long before that, in 1992, Gisela kindly agreed to be a member of my PhD committee, when such an international set-up was still quite unusual at a Dutch university.

After my PhD defense, she invited me to give a talk in Bielefeld, we continued to correspond and occasionally meet, and I kept her posted about my developing work. But her decisive influence on my life came in 2001. She was a visiting scholar at the Central European University, and almost in passing I asked her about the CEU. Gisela mentioned this to Susan Zimmermann who was teaching there and who invited me to apply since they had an open position. This would lead to my being at the CEU for twenty years.

Gisela's book on *Women in European History* (2002), first published as *Frauen in der Europäischen Geschichte* (2000), for me was another impressive feat, the book a treasure trove of knowledge based on very extensive research in many languages and her typical careful and precise thinking and writing.

Our last personal meeting in Berlin was around a presentation that Myriam Everard and I did of our co-edited book, *Rosa Manus (1881–1942): The International Life and Legacy of a Jewish Dutch Feminist* (2017), a topic that much interested Gisela. In the summer of 2022,

she gave a beautiful talk at Vienna University at an event in honor of Gerda Lerner. The evening we spent there was the last time I saw her in person. She was an important friend and I am sad that I won't be able to visit her when I next go to Berlin, as I had hoped to do. Thank you Gisela.

Gisela Bock, a friend and a great historian

by Françoise Thébaud
Emeritus Professor of history
University of Avignon

It was with deep sadness that I learned of the passing of Gisela Bock. I had not seen her for a long time, but I considered her a friend from across the Rhine. She was also a great historian, a pioneer in Germany in the field of women's and gender history. This conviction stayed with me after reading her landmark article, 'Challenging dichotomies: perspectives on women's history', published in 1991 in *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*. This was the first book published by the International Federation for Research in Women's History, an Association she co-founded. In 2010, I suggested to the journal *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, (then entitled *Clio. Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés*), which I co-directed, that it publish a French translation of the article in a special issue entitled 'Relectures'.

Gisela Bock's work is characterised by rigour, which was also her means of responding to historical controversies. In addition to her scholarship on Nazism, she constantly pursued a stimulating comparative approach to the history of women and gender in Europe. I have always admired her ability to move from one historical period to another, from one historiography to another, from one language to another.

I commissioned her to write the article on Nazism in Volume 5 of *Histoire des femmes en Occident* (1992). Here she brilliantly analyzed the intersection of Nazi sexism and racism, offering a nuanced response to the question of German women's guilt. She then carefully supervised the German translation of the entire volume. In Florence, the day after Anne Cova's thesis defense (1994), we met in a café and she asked me a series of questions to avoid misunderstandings in this translation. A fond memory.

Another fond memory: the Arrábida conference in Portugal organised in September 1999 by Gisela and Anne Cova to explore and compare the state of the art of women's and gender history in Southern Europe (published in 2003: *Writing Women's History in Southern Europe, 19th–20th Centuries. Écrire l'histoire des femmes en Europe du Sud, XIXe–XXe siècles*, Celta).

A few years later, in 2006, while she was on sabbatical leave, she asked me to replace her for two courses at the Freie Universität Berlin. The university exchange programme organised by the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) allowed me to get to know her better, appreciate her kindness and discover Berlin. Given our relationship, I was delighted to contribute to the book in her honour, edited by Oliver Janz and Daniel Schönpflug, *Gender History in a Transnational Perspective: Networks, Biographies, Gender Orders* (Berghahn Books, 2014).

Thank you, Gisela.

Memories of my friend and colleague Gisela Bock
by Karen Offen
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(11/30/2025)

I first met Gisela Bock in Paris in February 1986, after she had contacted me about my article, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siecle France, published in 1984 in the *American Historical Review*.

We had so much to discuss, both about our historical research and about our struggles as women in the historical profession! And in the course of those conversations, we became fast friends. This led to an invitation from Gisela to lecture at the European University Institute in Florence (in February 1987). It also led to her being chosen to serve in the founding executive board of the International Federation for Research in Women's History (IFRWH/FIRHF), which Ida Blom and I were organizing in order to apply to the CISH as an officially affiliated organization during its General Assembly in Athens in August 1987. Our effort succeeded (with the help of Natalie Zemon Davis and Carl Degler). At that time I was chairing the American Historical Association's (AHA) committee on international historical activities, and thus representing the United States to CISH. In 1989, Gisela attended (as an IFRWH board member and active participant) the week-long founding seminar of IFRWH, organized by Mary Beth Norton and myself at the Rockefeller Center in Bellagio, where she presented her thinking on "gender," subsequently published in 1991 as "Challenging Dichotomies: Perspectives on Women's History," in the first volume published by IFRWH, *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, (1991) which I edited along with Ruth Roach Pierson (Canada) and Jane Rendall (U. K.). We had invited participants from 19 countries (and five continents) to share their insights into the development of women's history in their respective countries; Gisela impressed everyone with the depth and solidity of her innovative analyses.

In the ensuing years I had the privilege of participating in two of Gisela's projects in comparative gender history at the European University Institute (EUI, in Florence, Italy), the first resulting in her edited book on *Maternity and Gender Policies* (Feb. 1987), and the second a colloquium on the topic of "Difference and Equality: Gender dimensions of political thought, justice and morality (Dec. 1988), published as *Beyond Equality and Difference* (1992) . Both volumes were foundational publications. Gisela's gift for bringing stellar participants together from different academic fields and countries to foster cross-national and crossdisciplinary perspectives was extremely ambitious and important in these – still relatively early – days of scholarship in women's & gender history. In her letters she often complained of "overwork" – quite understandable in the circumstances amid building programs at the EUI. In fact, I think Gisela was perhaps the hardest working and possibly the most prolific and fearless *historienne* I've ever known. In February 1989 Gisela accepted the offer of a chair in women's history at the University of Bielefeld, back in Germany. Having

laid the groundwork for a continuing emphasis in women's /gender history at the EUI, she felt it was time to move on. It was also about this time that in a highly critical review of Claudia Koonz's book on Nazi women she stirred up a heated international controversy by attacking Koonz's interpretation of Nazi policies concerning women. Gisela based her critique on the findings of her research on Nazi compulsory sterilization policies, which were primarily directed toward ethnic minorities and the mentally or physically disabled and included men as well as women.

For our first day-long international IFRWH conference in Madrid, during the CISH quinquennial congress of 1990, our board chose Gisela as one of two keynote speakers (the other keynote speaker was Gerda Lerner). Gisela joined us again in Toronto in 1995.

Gisela had mastered many languages, including English. I later learned that in 1960-1961 Gisela had been an exchange student at Sequoia High School in Redwood City, California, right in my future neighborhood. In 1991 she and Volker promised to come to California for her 30th high school reunion, to visit her host family and me. One delay after another, one project after another, postponed that visit to the winter of 1994-1995! My husband George and I were finally able to spend some quiet time with the two of them as well as to organize a gathering at which she and Volker could meet some of our Stanford and Bay Area women historians.

Our discussions, having begun via the postal service, continued for several decades, via faxes and finally via electronic mail, with which Gisela was never quite comfortable. Additional visits in Bielefeld and Berlin ensued, as Gisela finally received the offer of a chair in "general" history at the Free University of Berlin; these visits (while admittedly brief) allowed us to continue our scholarly exchanges and seal our friendship. In 2007 I had the privilege of speaking at a conference in Berlin honoring Gisela in her retirement (how time flies!) from her chair at the Freie Universität; the theme was "Gender History in a Transnational Perspective," a question that had attracted Gisela's interest as she moved into the spotlight as an extremely influential comparative historian, recognized not only in Germany but throughout Europe and abroad. The pathbreaking conference volume, edited by Gisela's former students Oliver Janz and Daniel Schönpflug, was finally published in 2014.

This wonderful woman, with her brilliant mind, dogged work ethic, and extraordinarily forceful personality, will be greatly missed by all of us who knew her. Her life was long and full, her scholarly contributions to historical knowledge and understanding were unparalleled. and in particular her contributions to fostering the birth and infancy of IFRWH as well as the affiliated German Women's History Network were essential to the growth and survival of both these international and national networks.

Gisela Bock
by Marion Röwekamp
PhD University of Munich, 2008 & former Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt Chair of the DAAD at El Colegio de México

Gisela Bock, born in 1942, grew up in a Germany that was only just beginning to emerge from the ruins of National Socialism and war. This constellation shaped her thinking from the very beginning: questions of political responsibility, guilt, power, and the blind spots of historiography became a constant undertone of her scholarly life. After studying in Berlin and the United States, she belonged to that small group of young women scholars who, in the 1970s, made historical women's studies possible in the first place. Her path led her through positions in Berlin, Florence, and Harvard University, eventually to Bielefeld and later to the Free University of Berlin.

She became involved early on in the new women's movement, but she was never "just" an activist—she was above all a precise, disciplined, and at times almost strict historian. Her breakthrough came with her research on forced sterilization and eugenic policy under National Socialism—a topic she treated with a level of precision, courage, and ethical consistency that remains a benchmark to this day. This marked not only an international success but also her place in the first rank of European contemporary historians.

By the time I met her, she was already older—perhaps milder, perhaps simply more at ease. I did not encounter the feared, unyielding disputant some women whispered about, but rather a woman whose wry sideways glance often said more than a long explanation. Yet anyone who looked closely could see that behind this hint of a smile stood the same uncompromising intellectual stance that shaped her work.

Her focus was always on substance. On sources, on materiality, on historical truth. Her writing was rich and clear, but never an end in itself. She had no patience for academic games that drifted away from the subject—no tolerance for discourses more concerned with identity politics, representational debates, or career choreography than with the matter at hand. For her, the only thing that mattered was what could be historically demonstrated, not what happened to be intellectually fashionable.

Her international horizon was remarkable. At a time when English-language scholarship was far from standard in German seminar rooms, she was already reading American, Italian, French, and British research—and integrated it naturally into her own work. Her perspective was both European and global; she opened windows that many of her colleagues later barely cracked open.

She remained loyal to women's history and insisted on calling it that—clearly, deliberately, against all academic fashion. "Gender" was, for her, an analytical tool but never a substitute term. Until her final years she said explicitly: I do women's history. And she meant it literally. Her knowledge was grounded in sources—never pleasing or superficial, but deeply rooted historical analysis.

Yes, she could provoke disagreement. And yes, some people were afraid of her. But it was the productive kind of fear—the kind that forces one to sharpen one's arguments. And even in such moments, that small crooked glance, that dry, almost mischievous smile could appear, as if to say: "I'm listening—surprise me."

In a broader perspective, Gisela Bock embodied an academic generation that understood scholarship as a moral practice: a search for truth, not visibility; a responsibility toward the people she wrote about; and a serious engagement with the political and social foundations of modernity. Her independence, her courage, her intellectual precision, and her refusal to submit to academic fashions make her an exceptional figure—and a role model.

Gisela Bock was a first-rate scholar: precise, original, uncompromising in her thinking, and at the same time a person with humor, depth, and a quiet warmth that one sometimes recognized only on second glance. She leaves behind not only an important body of work but also an example of what it means to practice scholarship uprightly and with intellectual integrity—against conventions, against resistance, and, if necessary, against the zeitgeist itself. That she inspired respect was not due to strictness alone—but to the integrity behind it. And that is perhaps the finest legacy she leaves.

Gisela Bock
by Susan Zimmermann
University Professor
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7 December 2025

Gisela Bock belongs to the generation of women's and gender historians growing up after 1945, who did the bulk of the deeply historically grounded, conceptual, pathbreaking work for our entire field, internationally and in various national contexts. In the 1980s, for me as a young student of women's history in the German-speaking world, Gisela Bock's work was a unique guiding star. In seminars or in the informal Vienna women historians' group, we read and discussed every new article she published, and each one was – for me – an unparalleled intellectual stimulus. Gisela Bock's work stands out for its sharp, complex and critical thinking, her sophisticated contribution to the debates on physiological difference, and the insistence on the key relevance of women's unpaid work for gender and universal history.

Many years later, Gisela accepted an invitation for a visiting professorship at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary. Her presence, teaching, and other contributions during the academic year 2000/2001 provided massive support for the transformation of CEU's Program on Gender and Culture into a full-scale Department of Gender Studies.

Many more years later, during the Covid period, Gisela Bock participated several times online in the General Assembly meetings of the International Conference of Labour and Social History, seated in Austria. During the last years of her life, her interest in the latest, now already historiographic, engagements with the campaign for/against wages for housework remained unbroken. In the 1970s and beyond Gisela Bock – as a leading activist and as a historian – made decisive contributions to the international wages-for-housewives campaign. In an interview conducted by Johanna Gehmacher in 2015, Gisela summarized six key points that "were clarified" in course of the theoretical and practical activities of the wages-for-housewives campaign in the 1970s:

1) The 'housewives', i.e., those women who work in the home, but always also outside the home, provide for the production and reproduction of social labour power, not only in the industrialized countries, but on a global scale. This activity is neither 'feminine nature' nor 'labour of love', but true labour, which consists of an incredible variety of work and includes both hard physical toil and - above all - the quality of life and relationships (nowadays called 'care work', but also sex work), in relation to children and women and men, young and old.

2) It is work, although it is not paid and although (or: because) in modernity or capitalism only that which is paid or remunerated counts as real work. And: it is all the more work because it is not paid. The unpaid nature of women's work becomes the focus of perception and analysis because society could not function without it. In addition, it is ultimately the reason why women in employment are also worse off than men in employment (think of

nursery school teachers, for example), or to use the slogan of the time: ‘Gainful work doesn't make you free either!’

3) From the outset, this type of work was analyzed in global perspective (and the political practice of the [activist] groups similarly was conceived as a global one) and referred to all unpaid work - both in terms of the subsistence economy in the ‘Third World’ and any domestic work possibly done by men.

4) The authors mentioned understood their analysis as a ‘Marxist feminism’ and sharply distinguished themselves from traditional Marxism or from ‘socialist feminism’. In this sense, unpaid, predominantly female labour is the heart of capitalism - in stark contrast to other analyses of capitalism, which see female (domestic) labour as non- or pre-capitalist or locate it outside of capitalism (and still do so today). Not all supporters of the wages-for-housework argument have emphasized this ‘Marxist’ dimension as strongly as the three initiators [Mariarosa] Dalla Costa, [Selma] James and Silvia Federici.

5) The demand for a wage for (or, as it was often called, against) housework results from all of the above, and forms part of the feminist struggle against unpaid housework. ‘Wage’ here meant money, of course (specifically, the demand was about allowances and childcare benefits for women, social benefits, and other elements); yet [the campaign] was not only about this, but also concerned the general economic, social and political recognition of women’s labour. There were wild debates about this demand, among feminists and non-feminists alike, and soon there was hardly an account of the ‘wages for housework’ perspective that did not also include the counterarguments; Louise Toupin does this right at the beginning of her book, and nowadays the internet is full of them, so I don't need to go into it now.

6) It seems essential to me to clarify that the demand for remuneration for housework was not ‘just’ about money in yet another sense. What was at stake was a comprehensive perspective that challenged society as a whole and aimed for radical change … . This repeated emphasis on perspective (or else, the conceptualization of wages for housework as a strategy) had a particular significance for the end of the campaign … There was disagreement, or one came to disagree about whether ‘wages for/against housework’ should be seen as a means of consciousness-raising …, or whether it was a truly material demand that would lead to corresponding political struggles.

The whole interview, conducted by Johanna Gehmacher, and entitled “Acumen and provocation – continuity and discontinuity. And interview with Gisela Bock“ can be found here: Die vielen Biographien der Käthe Schirmacher – eine virtuelle Konferenz, URL: https://schirmacherproject.univie.ac.at/die-vielen-biographiender-kaethe-schirmacher/statements/gisela-bock/ (accessed 7 December 2025). Full information on the vita and publications of Gisela Bock can be found on her website https://gisela-bock.eu