

# The Necessity of Experience

## Introduction

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Vera Kallenberg, Tomke König & Walter Erhart

Experience taken into the body, breathed-in, so that reality is the completion of experience, and poetry is what is produced. And life is what is produced.

Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry* [1949]

The title of this introduction, echoing Gerda Lerner's programmatic essay *The Necessity of History and the Professional Historian* (1982), has a twofold thrust: firstly, it emphasizes the existential quality of experience (*Erfahrung*). Every person's life is constituted by experiences, from the beginning of their existence to the end. Gender is one of the basic existential experiences that people have. Not only do we experience the world through our gender and being gendered, but experiences themselves are gendered and gendering. Secondly, this existential quality means that we must always approach experience as a phenomenon scientifically, or rather the phenomena addressed by experience, scientifically, conceptually, and methodologically as well as empirically. These complexes of understanding ask about the interrelationships between experience (*Erfahrung*) and experiencing (*Erleben*), experience and memory, testimony and memory, experience and narrative, experience and knowledge, experience and history and, last but not least, experience and knowledge. Furthermore, we need to explore the relationship between experience and action or agency, between experience and subjectivity, and between personal and collective experience. In short, investigating the complexity of experience means engaging with fundamental questions of scientific epistemology. These epistemological question horizons become even more challenging through the inclusion of gender.

This volume is the result of a research and reflection process that has taken place at Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Research (IZG), Bielefeld University, since 2021 in the context of the DFG-funded interdisciplinary Research Training Group *Experiencing Gender. Constitution and Transformation of Social Modes of Existence*. The aim of the chapters that make up this book is to theoretically reconceptualize gender

as an experience. To this end, we place the experiences that people have with their gendered mode of existence in entanglement with other dimensions of existence (class, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, health, age, religion) at the center of empirical research (see Demirović/Maihofer 2013; Knapp 2005; Kallenberg et al. 2013; Lutz/Vivar/Supik 2010). We also explicitly include in these analyses of aesthetic experience and literary knowledge production in the areas of literary and cultural studies.

In doing this, we are picking up a thread that was already of central importance in the earliest days of women's studies and gender studies (Alcoff 2000; Haraway 1988; Mies 1978; Opitz-Belakhal 2018; Vogel 2006). In the 1970s, gendered experience became a double point of reference: On the one hand, the concrete experiences women had in heteronormative patriarchal institutions dominated by men and androcentric ways of thinking played a major role in the formulation of feminist theory and science. On the other hand, these women tried to make visible – synchronically and diachronically – their invisibilized experiences and representations in all areas of social and cultural life. They were concerned with the specifics of their experiences as women and how they related to patriarchal structures (Grant 2015). Vera Kallenberg's contribution on the history of Gerda Lerner's anthology of primary sources *The Female Experience* (1977) and its reception in the USA shows how the concept of *female experience* was introduced into historical scholarship as both a historiographical and feminist-emancipatory category.

Many female scholars have taken their own experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and violence as a starting point to make gender relations visible as a specific, historically, and socio-culturally shaped form of domination and to question the claim to objectivity of androcentric scholarship. The body has played a central role in this. These women were raising the question of self-determination and the liberation of the female body from the constraints of male domination. Furthermore, the concept of *expérience vécue* or lived experience (the title of the second book of *Le deuxième sexe*), introduced by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949, also brought the somatic level of gendered existence into the focus of women's and gender studies. Building on this, a range of theoretical and methodological approaches systematically questioned and reconceptualized the contrast between mind/reason and body/feeling. Later, with the formation of feminisms of color, on the one hand, and the reception of post-structuralist theory and the linguistic turn, on the other, a critique of a naïve, homogenizing, and essentializing understanding of experience began (hooks 1984; Lorde 1979; Walker 1983). Among other things, the self-evident generalization of the experiences of certain feminists (white, Western, middle class, etc.) for all women was challenged, as were the ideological baggage around the notion that experience is an expression of authenticity and the idea that experience can be depicted in an unmediated way. Critiques from the 1990s on also problematized the assumption of a causal relationship between experience and subjectivity or experience and agency, which is entailed by a concept of experience

linked to the idea of an autonomous subject. This criticism was put forward particularly prominently in a widely received essay by the historian Joan W. Scott, *The Evidence of Experience* (1991), which forms a point of reference for many of the texts collected in this volume:

It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced (Scott 1991: 26).

In the following decades, the combination of theoretical developments and turns and the focus on socio-cultural, historical, and discursive mediation and the processuality of experience gave rise to a series of questions not limited to gender studies (Diezinger 1994; Bos 2004). Key areas in which they have been tackled include auto/biography research and *life-writing studies* (Smith/Watson 1998; Hof 2008), and auto/ethnography and transnational and transcultural historiography on interwoven, shared, and global histories (Conrad 2016; Conrad/Randeria 2002; Subrahmanyam 1997; Anderson 2012; Davos 2011; Banerjee 2020). Major questions formulated following this strand of critique concern the process of producing experience (how is experience constituted?); the question of who is legitimized to speak about (which/whose) experiences; when, at what point in time (which/whose) experiences (in literature, in archives, in scientific research) come into focus; how individual experiences become intelligible, and under what conditions they can be collectively shared and represented. Where does the search for shared experiences reach its limits? And who can recognize and name which limits?

While the criticism of an unanalyzed concept of experience worked initially as a productive irritation for feminist research, experience increasingly turned into a “dirty word” (Grosz 1993: 40). Certain topics that were analyzed under the keyword *experience* have since been examined in the social and historical sciences using praxeological approaches, for example gendered (body) practices or practices of gender (Graft/Ideler/Klinger 2013; Brockmeyer et al. 2018; Grittmann et al. 2018; Zettelbauer et al. 2017). At the same time, the study of gendered experience and the lived experience of gender has been marginalized by gender theory or – as in the case of phenomenologically oriented gender research (Landweer/Marcinski 2016) – marginalized altogether. Silvia Stoller’s diagnosis in 2010 that “the phenomenological concept of experience in the context of feminist philosophy had not yet been rehabilitated by the post-structuralist critique” (Stoller 2010: 111, author’s translation) still applies thirteen years later – to feminist philosophy as well as, with a few

modifications, to feminist sociology, literature, and history.<sup>1</sup> “Feminist theory,” as Linda Martín Alcoff puts it, “moved from one extreme, taking personal experience as the basis of knowledge, to the other extreme, discrediting experience as a product of phallogocentrism” (Alcoff 1997: 233, author’s translation).

This volume seeks new ways of approaching the relationships among discourse/language, experience, and gender. We are guided by the question of how we can include in our research both the significance of the bodily experience that people have of their gender and the discursive determinacy of possible experiences. One focus is the connection between body, language, and situation in different historical and socio-cultural constellations. We see potential for inspiration in those approaches that seek to mediate deconstructivist and phenomenological or materialist approaches to gender studies and to bridge the gap between them in the long term (Alcoff 1997; Maihofer 1995; Daniel 2004; Jäger 2014; Lindemann 2011; Rubin 1998; Shotwell 2021; Stoller 2010; Stoller/Vetter 1997). We continue to understand gender as historically and socio-culturally variable, as a continuously and interactively produced process, and as an inescapable, historically specific materiality. However, we also consider that people have a bodily *mode of existence* (Maihofer 1995), sense (themselves) and feel, and can also produce and (co-)constitute, but also question a fundamental implicit knowledge about their own gender practice (Ahmed 2006; Moi 2015). We want to break down the distinction between language and bodily experience. Or rather: the categorical separation of language and body seems to us to be a doxa that needs to be questioned. The process of speaking, of raising one’s voice, of giving voice to experience does not stand outside of bodily experience; rather, we must assume a “Leibsprache” (König/Wolf 2024). This “Leibsprache” is itself an experience and thus part of how we experience being gendered and gendering ourselves. In doing so, we cannot stop at questioning the self-evident binary separation of body and language/discourse and the theoretical re-foundation of the concept of experience. Rather, the volume also aims to encourage the implementation of this new conceptualization in research practice. Our research thus aims to fill the gap between the paradigm of the primacy of language/discourse in deconstructivist approaches, the insight into the materialistic and domination-shaped structural binding of gender on the part of *older* feminist women’s and gender studies, and the approach of the body as “a place of possible deviations” (Jäger 2004: 222, author’s translation) within the framework of more recent phenomenological approaches. Our considerations focus on the question of

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1 The volume *Politik-Theorie-Erfahrung: 30 Jahre feministische Geschichtswissenschaft im Gespräch* (Bauer/Hämmerle/Opitz-Belakhal 2020) offers insights into the experiences of gender history, but not a reflection on the concept of experience. Our series *Gender as Experience* aims to provide a platform for new approaches in this area; see the research by Box (2023) in the field of literary studies.

how the material and phenomenal dimension of gender can be addressed without falling back into the traps of earlier uses of experience and, not least, essentialist assumptions of a natural determination of gendered bodies.

Of course, we do not speak with one voice in this book. We have conceived the volume bilingually, also to be able to include and address a range of nationally, and culturally coded academic perspectives. This leads to the difficulty of dealing with different (national) languages, which have coined very different terms for central phenomena. In German, the verbs *erfahren* and *erleben* as well as the nouns *Körper* and *Leib* can be distinguished conceptually. By contrast, other languages need auxiliary constructions and complex compounds. The neologism “Leibsprache” used by König/Wolf (2024) cannot be translated, as such compounds are not provided for in English. *Experiencing gender* is only inadequately translated as *experience* or *experientiability*, as the practical experience connoted in English is not represented. The French *expérience vécue* or the English *lived experience* appears ambiguous; it can be translated into German as *Erleben* or as an individual biographical manifestation of human experience; the common translation *gelebte Erfahrung* sounds rather tautological (its opposite – a *dead experience* – does not exist).

Our contributions take on different perspectives and points of observation. I can speak from my own experience and about the experiences of other people. Some contributions concern the concrete experiences that people have with their gender and as certain genders. Others focus on aspects of gendered existence and experiences of gender that are still difficult to grasp and express. Art and literature are media that allow us to expand the space of what can be said about experience that has not yet been articulated and shared. Simone de Beauvoir already referred to fictional literature as a powerful instrument for overcoming the inescapable separation of isolated subjects and appropriating the experiences of others (“capable de me donner l’indicommunicable”), experiencing and feeling the world in a different way (“capable de me donner le goût d’une autre vie”) and thereby also transcending the situations of a gendered existence that are experienced as singular in each case (Moi 2010: 29). Equally, literature can also express the unspeakable in our own experiences. Fundamental poetic-rhetorical elements such as metaphors, ellipses, assonances, and repetitions try out – even in the context of everyday language – hidden possibilities of expression for pragmatically incomprehensible contents of experience that are initially incomprehensible even to one’s own self and can often be felt bodily (König/Erhart 2023). Poetry and literature can fill those gaps, voids, or *lacunae* that open up beyond and between the boundaries of our gendered modes of existence and indicate the often utopian, unbounded desire of gendered bodies. Gendered experiences are not merely present and given, nor are they merely formed by society and imparted to us. They must and can be translated – into language and consciousness, from the other’s experience into one’s own and vice versa, from the situation of each individual into the form of general modes of experience, which are shared and can

be talked about. Aesthetic experience is not a separate dimension, cut off from other experiences, but an important component of the expressive capacity that accompanies and shapes experiences *per se* (Dewey 1980). As a form of expression and mode of action of gender-specific experiences, the aesthetic therefore harbors a hitherto underutilized potential. Just as the concept of experience consistently served to link different social spheres and theoretical factions in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy and theory (Jay 2004), so too could contemporary gender theory return to a concept of experience that attempts to reconnect the sensual, physical, and aesthetic aspects of gender with critical (social-)theory.

The need for translations in more than just a linguistic sense also arises from the plurality of specialized languages that are unavoidable in our interdisciplinary approach. For those of us who work with a feminist understanding of research and knowledge production – whether framed as social, cultural, or literary studies – experience is always already both gendered and gendering. By contrast, in terms of social theory more generally, experience can initially be thought of independently of gender, as Rainer Schützeichel suggests in his reflections on the sociability of pain experiences.

As academics, we bring with us a specific background of experience that allows us to discuss experience differently depending on the culture of the field where we primarily work (in our case: literary studies, (inter)American studies, sociology, political theory, history, social anthropology, and religious studies). In their contribution to this volume, Magdalena Suerbaum and Heidemarie Winkel show that, in addition to the various ways of thinking and expressing just outlined, further differences and dissonances may arise. They derive these differences from the historical origins of the concept of experience, which, as a European and Western tradition, seems to them to be inextricably interwoven with a (post-)colonial grammar.

This volume attempts to harness the interdisciplinarity of gender studies to expand our understanding of experience by reflecting on contributions made to the topic by the social sciences from a humanities and cultural studies perspective, and vice versa. To do this, we pursue three sets of questions: Since the question of how to conceive of differences between gendered people non-hierarchically is one of the fundamental concerns of feminist research, the first part of the book explores the connections between gendered experience and difference, alterity, otherness. The second part focuses on gendered experience and the physical body. The question of individual gendered bodily experience and its forms of articulation and representation leads us to the question of body politics in connection with collective experiences of subordination and practices of political resistance. Finally, the third part of the volume focuses on the unspoken and unspeakable (in) experience: gaps, voids, lacunae.

The following observations and theses, derived from the various contributions to this volume, may be considered the initial results of our research:

1. *Experience/life and science/knowledge are closely interwoven.* This becomes particularly clear in the article *Simone de Beauvoir's grammar of otherness* by Toril Moi. The literary scholar emphasizes that for Beauvoir, philosophy is indistinguishably linked to her own experiences. Philosophy and experience/life are one. Similarly, for Beauvoir there is no separation between philosophy and literature or literature and experience/life. In a fundamental sense, then, she is a thinker and narrator of her own experience, which can always be read as a philosophical project and is woven into a specific life experience. In her article, Moi describes how the experience of otherness becomes a constitutive moment of subjectivation for Beauvoir. Like Beauvoir, the Vienna-born Jewish-American historian and feminist Gerda Lerner does not make a distinction between life and thought (see Kallenberg's contribution in this volume). The rejection of dichotomous thinking does not only apply to feminist classics, as can be seen in Patricia Bollschweiler's literary reflections in her commentary *Thoughts on the Interrelationship of Experiential Gender Research and Literature* on Tomke König's article. Taking up König's interest in methodology and epistemology, Bollschweiler asks how the implicit knowledge of gender can be made explicit and expressed. Following on from Kleist's reflections on experience and experiencing, she emphasizes that this is not a dichotomous relationship of inside versus outside, but rather a matter of complex self-relationships. She sees self-exploration as a means of accessing the implicit, which she illustrates using the example of Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando*. *Orlando* also reminds us that it is not possible to depict experience and that something new always happens in representation—the first thing to do is to endure this oscillation between what is felt and what is said or symbolized.

In his commentary *From Interpretation to Embodied Transformation. Emancipatory Body Practice*, Florian Kappeler, a scholar of German literature, also looks for ways to transcend the dichotomy of body and political discourse. From the perspective of praxeological materialism, the commentary examines and expands on Vanessa Ulrich and Oliver Flügel-Martinsen's reflections on a Marxian body politics, while drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, Laura Quintana, and Eva von Redecker to consider how bodily experiences can become the starting point for political emancipation.

2. *The question of thinking about experience leads to an examination of one's own intellectual biography,* as the commentary by the feminist philosopher and theorist Andrea Maihofer on Moi's article shows. A central moment in Maihofer's contribution *Problems of Recognizing Otherness and Difference* is her examination of French existentialism and its humanist tradition, in which Simone de Beauvoir's thinking is situated. The starting point of this tradition is human existence and the necessity of human relationships. Against the background of her own intellectual biography and her relationship to existentialism, Maihofer explains why she insists on the right to difference and diversity and why she finds the essentialist assumption of a fundamen-



tal hostility of humans towards other humans' problematic. Ultimately, this is also the central reason why she does not place the concept of otherness and alterity in a central position. The sociologist Diana Lengersdorf also follows in her commentary *The Experience of Reading in Retrospect: On Fantasy, Entanglement, and the Freedom of Non-Thematization* the traces of her own intellectual biography when, in her discussion of Kallenberg's article on the concept of experience, she turns to the pioneering feminist historian Gerda Lerner from the perspective of Donna Haraway, a pioneering figure central to Lengersdorf's work.

3. *Reflecting on the concept of experience implies an examination of one's own disciplinary history*, as the articles by Rainer Schützeichel, Vanessa Ulrich and Oliver Flügel-Martinsen make clear. In his theoretical contribution *Pain. Reflections on an Social Theory of Phenomenal Experiences*, Schützeichel addresses the question of how individual experiences can become sociable, i.e. collectivizable. This is a genuinely sociological question. In their contribution *Critique of Body Politics. Experience, Language and Political Emancipation*, political scientists Vanessa Ulrich and Oliver Flügel-Martinsen analyze the significance of physical experience in contemporary social movements and political theory formation. As in Schützeichel's article, this also includes an examination of the history of theoretical concepts within their own discipline, in which the body has long been marginalized. However, their contribution draws on vastly different traditions of theory and thought, dedicated to the goal of political emancipation and combining Marxist foundations with post-structuralist and contemporary currents in critical theory with a focus on injured bodies.

4. *In certain historical and social situations, certain scholarly and political approaches to experience are necessary*. This is particularly evident in the contributions by Vera Kallenberg and Julia Roth. Kallenberg explains how Gerda Lerner's reconstruction of the *female experience* of white women in the USA, initially focused on collecting, sorting, processing, visualizing, compiling, and editing sources of *real* experiences of women in history. Roth considers the examples of the life-writing genre she analyzes as testimony that documents the conditions of violence and modes of existence of the people described in them. Even and especially when sources have to be read *against the grain*, they testify to the existence of real experiences of oppression, suffering, and life.

5. *In both empirical research into experience and its theoretical reflection, methodological considerations are linked to ethical questions*. In Magdalena Suerbaum and Heidemarie Winkel's article *On the Translatability of Gendered Experiences. Socio-Historical, Feminist-Postcolonial, and Phenomenological Reflections*, experience is negotiated both as an empirical category of empirical social research and as a theoretical-historical category. With particular reference to the experiences of motherhood of refugee women in the context of flight, migration, and exile, the focus here is on women's experiences under conditions of existential threat. Suerbaum and Winkel's contribution raises the question of what role the experiences of the researchers and their ideas of ex-



perience play in the research situation, as well as what demands arise from this for research practice and reflection. How can equality in difference be established in concrete encounters?

The response by the German literature scholar Walter Erhart to Schützeichel's sociological article takes up the methodological problem formulated by Ludwig Wittgenstein about how an individual physical experience of pain can be transferable and communicable at all. Specifically, regarding the common experience of a gender-specific difference associated with the sensation of pain, the question arises as to whether and how the expression of pain is always already related to ethical and moral reactions such as sympathy and recognition. Here too, literature and art are prominent media for the relation and relatability of gendered (pain) experiences, which expand knowledge about one's own experiences and modes of existence through the affective adoption of other perspectives.

6. *The question of the translation/translatability of experience into non-Western contexts, initially addressed primarily in postcolonial studies, also proves to be ambivalent regarding gender.* From a postcolonial perspective, the anthropologist Magdalena Suerbaum and the sociologist of religion Heidemarie Winkel question the translatability of the concept of experience developed in the West for non-Western contexts from the perspective of *Middle Eastern studies*. By contrast, Annika Klanke's contribution *On the Translation of Literature and Experience – Reflections with Walter Benjamin* emphasizes, from the perspective of German literature studies, the utopian potential of translating, of moving towards a (common) imaginary place. The task of the *researcher-translator* is thus to understand *research as translation* as a means of dealing with difference, alterity, *foreignness*, but at the same time to trust that it is possible to find a connection in different experiences.

7. *Examination of the gaps, voids, lacunae in the representation and narration of experience and experiencing shows that the different meanings assumed in the process move between invisibilization, denial, and preservation of a utopian moment.* In her article, *Reading the Unspeakable. Emotional Memory and Affective Relationality in Life-Writing Genres*, the cultural and literary scholar Julia Roth focuses on the narration of extreme experiences of violence in the context of racist violence. In American *slave narratives*, the unspeakability and the unspoken, the *silences*, refer to what has been silenced, what has not been heard and what has been made invisible; it must be snatched from oblivion and illuminated. Just as the gaps refer to something that has not (yet) been or is not adequately seen, these empty spaces have negative connotations: They demand to be filled and moved from the margins to the center.

Vera Kallenberg explores shifts and superimpositions of Jewish experience in the conceptualization and treatment of *Women's History* in the USA in the 1970s. Her article "*Women's History*" as an Echo of the Fractured Jewish Experience of the 20th Century. Gerda Lerner's "*The Female Experience*" (1977) examines the concept of experience as an object of historiographical research and reflection in Gerda Lerner's work. At the

same time, it deals with the effects of Lerner's own experience on her thinking of experience. In this, female experience is (re-)constructed by specifically looking for shared experiences and the shared history of women as women. By grouping such shared experiences at the micro level, a collective biography of female experience is constituted. The gaps in Lerner's representation of experiences are also illuminated. Kallenberg interprets the unprocessed experiences and themes as traces of traumatic experiences that (co-)constitute the representation of historical female experience.

In her article *Experiential Gender Research. The Body as a Source of Meaning and Change*, Tomke König shows how speech that gives space to the felt meaning of gender can make visible nuances of gendered modes of existence that (at least temporarily) silence, suspend, or even transgress the paradigm of the hierarchical-heteronormative gender order. However, the explication of implicit meanings is not straightforward. Even if bodily experience is implicitly active in all situations, we usually do not pay attention to this felt dimension. We speak about an experience rather than from the experiencing of this experience. Only when we focus our attention on the experience in the here and now can the meaning that a word, a concept, or even gender has for the person speaking be unfolded at the moment of speaking. In her article, König also makes concrete methodological suggestions as to how we can approach the experience of gender in empirical social research.

In his article on (homo-)sexual experience in the medium of the poem, the literature scholar Benedikt Wolf places male experience and homosexual desire at the center of his analysis. In "Where † wrote". *Utopian Literary Experience in Constantine P. Cavafy's "The Afternoon Sun"*, Wolf analyzes voids and gaps – lacunae – in poetic experience by considering the concrete materiality of text and textual form. For Wolf, gaps and lacunae do not have the character of omission, fading out, invisibilization, and denial, but contain the moment that preserves the utopia.

The commentary *Converting Silences into Possibilities. Applying Lessons from Literary Studies to Ethnographic Knowledge Production* by sociologist and ethnologist Inka Stock picks up on the stimulating potential of this literary studies approach. She reads Wolf's discussion of Cavafy's poem as a reference to the act of writing as a creative process that can create new and specific experiences for the reader. Drawing consequences from this, she suggests using this methodological approach for ethnographic research. Implicitly responding to Suerbaum and Winkel's translation problem, she recommends that ethnographers should consciously create gaps in texts when they are not yet able to name objects, processes, or feelings. This process can point writers to the places where a new framing or perspective is needed or where they need to think further. Stock assumes that this approach could be particularly important in ethnographic research, which often relies heavily on observation and the physical experience of the unknown.

8. The writing of this introduction was overshadowed by Hamas's antisemitic terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, during in the course of which 1,200 (mostly) civilians were murdered on a single day; the subsequent Israel-Hamas war; and the resulting humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip, which has led to the deaths of some 25,000 people and the internal displacement of around two million on the Palestinian side (as of January 17, 2024). The end and outcome of the war, including the cessation of daily rocket fire on Israel by Hamas and Hezbollah, the final casualty figures, the release of all hostages kidnapped as Jews or Jewish collaborators, and the consequences of the catastrophe are currently difficult to foresee. Furthermore, any assessment of Hamas' mass murder of Jewish and other people living in Israel remains provisional. It must consider the widespread use of brutal sexualized violence against women, torture, and the psychological terror of Hamas, who posted images and videos of atrocities committed by the perpetrators they led on digital media. In all of this, we have not yet considered the worldwide responses to the antisemitic massacre on Israeli soil, the war and the dead in Gaza and Israel, especially the dramatic rise in antisemitism and violent antisemitic outbursts worldwide after October 7 (e.g., an increase of around 320% in Germany) but also the increase in attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians in the West Bank or cases of anti-Palestinian violence in the USA. These events draw our attention to *the unique quality and existential dimension of extreme experiences of violence in connection with genocide, war, flight, and other forms of mass violence, and to how people cope with them*. The history of antisemitic persecution is linked to the experience of fundamental rupture, as Kallenberg shows for the Jewish experience in the context of the Shoah, which is now returning in the present. Such experiences of dehumanization appear *unspeakable*, as Roth demonstrates in terms of racist violence, are linked to multiple traumas and the desire for healing among the victims (Roth/Kallenberg), and, as in the context of forced migration, to the need for the creation and expression of empathy among researchers (Suerbaum/Winkel).

The writing of this introduction was also overshadowed by the death of our colleague and friend Rainer Schützeichel. His sociological ingenuity, the friendly and insistent manner with which he accompanied researchers, especially younger researchers, in their projects, contributed to the success of our Research Training Group. He did not live to see the publication of this book. We will miss him very much. This book is dedicated to him.

### Key questions for reflecting on experience in critical gender studies

- What significance do other people have for me to be able to experience myself (as a self)? (= processes of subjectivation)
- What role does difference play in experiences?/What role do differences play in being able to have experiences at all?
- What role does alterity play for experiences/as experience?
- How is difference and/or alterity and/or separateness produced in experience?
- Can my highly subjective experiences be communicated or shared? Which experiences prove to be *shared histories* for whom?
- How can I (as a researcher) understand the experiences of other people (including in the past)? (Research as a work of translation)
- What role can experiences play in the production of academic knowledge?
- What role do the experiences of researchers play in the specific research situation?
- What role do shared experiences of researchers and those who are the subjects of research play in academic knowledge production?
- How can experiences be collectivized? Or: Under what conditions is it possible to recognize equality in difference?

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