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GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN THE STUDY OF ESTONIAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE: CURRENT STATE AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Gender issues have become increasingly compelling for both scholars and the general public in Estonia in the past twenty years. This can, for example, be seen in the March 2022 issue of the Estonian cultural magazine *Vikerkaar* which published a lengthy overview of the history of Estonian feminism (Karro 2022). The overview attempts to show the length of this history and its continuity under different political regimes, refreshing older surveys published by Vera Poska-Grünthal (1936) and Helmi Mäelo (1957 in Sweden, reprinted in Estonia in 1999). Such surveys list notable women and significant milestones, but do not usually delve into the nuances of gender history or feminist thought like in-depth case studies. This more nuanced work has been done in the past seven years by the gender studies research group within the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies. The present article reviews the state of Estonian research, both within the research group and more broadly, and points out the main challenges that scholars face.

Keywords: Estonia, feminism, gender, post-Soviet

INTRODUCTION

Gender has held a complex position in Estonian social and intellectual history. In many ways, women's social position has been relatively good (early access to vote, relatively high levels of education and employment in the 20th century, etc.). Yet – perhaps even because of this public visibility – there has been less of a social demand for feminist activism and gender research. Gender fascinates,

but is simultaneously surrounded by silences, gaps and stereotypes. This article looks into the history of both Estonian feminism and gender research, to place the work done within the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies within a broader context and into a dialogue with other Estonian scholars to show where we stand and what still needs to be done, in terms of subject matter and methodology.

Estonian analyses of gender have moved in two waves, as a result of the complex historical legacies of the country. The first wave of interest in the late 19th century did not lead to a feminist movement or extensive textual production because of the conservative Baltic-German cultural environment and also because of the prioritisation of national self-determination over women's rights among the Estonian intellectual elites of the time (Annuk 2021c; Annuk 2014; Mattheus 2008; Põldsaar 2009). Like in many other countries, women's rights were perceived to be secondary to national sovereignty, and women's role in nation building was seen primarily through their reproductive role as mothers and homemakers (cf. Kivimaa 2009; Annuk 2013a). Estonia gave women the right to vote around the same time as the neighbouring Nordic countries, after declaring its independence in 1918, and women were actively involved in different aspects of social and political life in the brief period of independence between the two world wars (Põldsaar 2006). The Soviet occupation (1940–1941, 1944–1991) disrupted many aspects of life, including the development of local feminism and women's activism. In fact, many women activists (for example Social Democrat Alma Ostra-Oinas) faced repressions under Soviet occupation, despite the gender equality rhetoric of the regime. Thus, while the second wave of feminism developed in the West, Estonia was behind the Iron Curtain that at best only let through vague echoes of feminist ideas. In the Soviet Union, the equality between men and women was supposed to have been achieved, and thus officially the obvious gender inequalities of Soviet society could not be analysed academically and all civic society was channelled into a very narrow, state-sanctioned channel (cf. Ruthchild 1983). The Soviet state needed women in the workforce and working was defined as a duty to the state. Therefore, women could be and were actively involved in the labour force and the public sphere, but not in positions of power. Perhaps even more importantly, gender inequalities persisted in the private sphere, despite state paternalism that seemed to provide ample public services, such as free health care and childcare services. Thus, seemingly, there was gender equality by many measures, but very limited critical discussion of the meanings of gender, gender relations or sexuality (indeed, male homosexuality was criminalised in the Soviet Union and thus also in Soviet Estonia) (Annuk 2015). Western feminism was introduced in a limited and censored fashion in the media, and although there have been

attempts to find traces of feminist movements in the Soviet sphere of influence (e.g., Grabowska 2012), this state-sanctioned feminism had a limited scope, especially within the confines of the Soviet Union. Many gender scholars have called the Soviet Union a patriarchal society (Miroiu 2007).

Thus, gender equality and feminism gained renewed attention in Estonia only in the 1990s, when the country assertively turned itself towards the West after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While initially viewed with curiosity mixed with suspicion, as being rhetorically too reminiscent of the Soviet equality rhetoric that Estonia was eager to forget, integration into the European Union and its legal frameworks normalised the discussion of many gender issues, from the gender pay gap to life-work balance (Marling 2010). This period also made gender into an object of academic study. Today there are already two generations of academic gender studies scholars and a new generation of feminist activism that challenges the nationalist, pronatalist and homophobic policies of populist and conservative parties (Marling & Koobak 2014). The initial cautious curiosity has become an intense engagement with and involvement in international research and activist networks.

However, gender studies as a discipline has existed in a somewhat marginalised position: there are no departments or degree programmes and the work is being conducted by enthusiasts within their disciplines. This means that the gendered aspects of Estonian society have been studied unevenly: while there is a rich array of important studies in the context of folklore, art and literature, there is as yet relatively little work in history or linguistics, to give but two examples.

There has also been little systematic research into the history of gender and feminism. This gap can also be explained by the scarcity of parallel studies of Estonian social and intellectual history. After all, the study of the history of feminism requires a good command of the ideas circulating in society in any given period, to grasp the interplay of international influences and local strategies of adaptation. There are attempts, such as Karro (2022), to show the length of the history of Estonian feminism and its continuity across different political regimes. However, these studies have tended to limit themselves to listing prominent women and their achievements, instead of problematising the construction and meaning of gender in different periods and gender's complex intertwining with surrounding discourses, especially religion, nationalism and socialism.

One can often also see terminological inconsistencies around even basic terms like sex and gender (the two are not clearly distinguished in Estonian), as well as the terminology surrounding sexuality. While the terminology has been debated for over two decades, we are far from a public consensus even

on relatively simple topics like the existence of multiple masculinities and femininities, not to mention complex issues (for example terminology on queer, trans and cis identities, on which new research is expected at the time of this writing). There should be more dialogue between activist communities and scholars on this topic.

This is the context into which our research group stepped. When the Centre of Excellence started, it proposed gender as one of the transversal axes that could connect the different research projects and scholars who gathered under the aegis of the Centre. Several of the projects already had a gender angle, some developed it within the Centre of Excellence.

In view of the relatively short time span and limitations of staff, we tried to provide insights into topics that are important from a gender perspective but that have remained under-researched in Estonia thus far, as well as to suggest new methodological and theoretical approaches through seminars, conferences and research publications in English and in Estonian. The seminars highlighted under-researched topics in Estonian gender research, such as theatre, music, the cultural meanings of motherhood and sexual minorities. Work continued on the gendered aspects of national identity as well as the history of Estonian feminism and the work of first feminist authors such as writer and educator Lilli Suburg (1841–1923) and teacher and politician Marie Reisik (1887–1941). Members of the group also published on contemporary fiction and social tensions, for example the gendered dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the thematic seminars, the research group also systematically worked to expand the methodological basis of Estonian gender studies. Alongside traditional humanities methods like archival research and text analysis, our seminars tackled the possibility of applying discourse and affect theories, as well as postcolonial approaches in the study of culture. The post- and decolonial perspective in particular has not been fully integrated into the study of Estonian culture, despite its usefulness in interpreting the presence of many foreign powers in Estonia and the complex process of borrowing from them and adopting their influences into the local culture. This translation process, in the broadest sense of the word, has also played a critical role in gender issues.

The seven-year period has allowed us to shed light on some corners of Estonian gender history. Our work has created the basis for writing a nuanced history that does not limit itself to listing notable women but also maps out the network of gendered cultural practices.

WHAT IS ESTONIAN FEMINISM?

The first challenge one has to tackle in studying the history of Estonian feminism is the question of what constitutes Estonian feminism. Does it mean the history of women's movements, the history of gender-focused intellectual debate, the history of women's achievements or only the history of activism explicitly aligned with feminism? Does the history of feminism mean the history of women or should it also include queer history and the history of sexual and gender minorities? Does the history of Estonian feminism concern only women of Estonian origin or women of other ethnicities who lived and worked in Estonia (above all, Baltic Germans or different Russian-speaking minorities)? What about the role of diaspora communities in Sweden, the USA, Canada and Australia? The chosen perspective determines what will be highlighted and how.

Traditionally, the beginning of Estonian feminism has been dated to the work of Estonia's first feminist, journalist, writer and educator Lilli Suburg (1841–1923) in the last decades of the 19th century (Annuk 2013b, 2016, 2018, 2021b, 2021c). Suburg, however, remained alone at that time and we can speak of the beginning of the women's movement as a form of social activism only at the beginning of the 20th century, in connection with the events of the 1905 revolution and the spread of socialist ideas (cf. Kirss 2015). Educated women such as Marie Reisik (Annuk 2019b), educator and feminist politician Emma Asson-Peterson (1889–1965; Sakova 2005/2006), politician and feminist Minni Kurs-Olesk (1879–1940) and attorney and politician Alma Ostra-Oinas (1886–1960, attorney, politician) played the central role in this process. It is worth repeating that there were nine women in the first parliament of the newly independent Estonia, and that two women (Kurs-Olesk and Asson) participated in drafting Estonia's constitution (Hillermaa & Viljamaa 2020). While far from formal equality, this is remarkable when we compare these numbers to those in many other countries at the time. The creation of a new state allowed Estonia to establish new institutions, taking into consideration the best practices of the time.

While women were taking increasingly active roles in social life and politics at the beginning of the 20th century, the activism advocating for Estonia's national sovereignty was led by men, with women relegated to the role of the symbolic embodiments of the nation. Indeed, the history of the Estonian national movement has been told from a male-centred perspective that marginalises women, despite the fact that a woman, the poet Lydia Koidula (1843–1896), was a symbol of the national awakening. In fact, the example of Koidula has been used to argue that Estonia does not require feminism, as Koidula was able to achieve prominence without it (Marling & Sepper 2018). The lack of a publicly

visible feminist activism, like that of the suffragettes in the UK, has also been used for the same purpose. The new Estonian republic was progressive for its time,[1] although this did not lead to prominent feminist activism and a wide public discussion of women's roles (misogynist rhetoric can be seen in the media and fiction of the interwar period more than proto-feminist arguments).

The Soviet period also complicates the analysis of the history of gender relations and feminism, as Soviet equality rhetoric hid the reality of patriarchal gender relations (cf. Voronina 1993 on the broader Soviet framework). While women's labour force participation rates were high, they were underpaid, in comparison to men, and scarce in leadership positions, with the exception of some token women. Women's daily lives were characterised by the triple burden of paid work, reproductive work at home and the labour necessary to cope with persistent shortages (queueing for essentials, growing and preserving food, sewing and knitting clothes, etc.). The modernisation of Soviet society did not always reach the level of private residences (for example, many homes even in cities did not have running water, not to mention automatic washing machines). These material limitations increased the burden of domestic work, which affected women's lives and opportunities in a major way (Annuk 2019a). In parallel, the privileged nomenklatura had access to goods and services unavailable to the majority through special shops and trips abroad. This further generated scepticism about the double standards of Soviet society and undermined the credibility of its rhetoric of equality.

The experience of the Soviet (per)version of gender equality has often been used to explain resistance to gender equality in post-socialist Estonia (Pilvre 2002; Marling 2010). This was particularly stark in the 1990s, when society was especially allergic to anything resembling former Soviet practices and eagerly embraced neoliberal economic policies and pronatalist gender norms (Marling 2015, 2017; Velmet 2019). These tensions were especially prominent during the process of accession to the EU, when the adoption of gender equality legislation, a condition of accession, was hotly debated in parliament, revealing the strength of deep-seated essentialist stereotypes. Despite this hurdle, the legislation was adopted and it mainstreamed the discussion of gender not just among activists but also at the level of different government bodies. There has been considerable progress in terms of law and social practice, but the frequent ironic speeches by prominent political leaders continues to show that gender issues and gender equality have not become the self-evident norm. In this sense, Estonia has not really come to resemble its Nordic neighbours but rather faces the same anti-gender tendencies as many other post-socialist East European countries (Marling 2021b). While Estonia managed to adopt and implement gender equality policies, there have been more tensions around LGBTQ rights.

WHY STUDY GENDER?

While the political pressure to engage with gender issues has increased, this has not meant a parallel pressure to research gender. There is an increasing amount of research on media and social media representations and contemporary art, but the historical picture has received much less attention. Yet it is the gender-informed analysis of society and culture, past and present, that allows us to identify and decode gendered practices and thought patterns that continue to shape today's ideas about gender and sexuality. While cultural images do not seem as vital as measurable social problems, like gendered poverty, the gender wage gap or the glass ceiling, we cannot understand those social problems without understanding what has created them: gendered power relations, social roles, privilege and access to resources and their variation across time.

Historian Joan W. Scott in 1986 proposed that gender should be used as an analytical category in history research to highlight the role of women in history and also the social and cultural conditions that affect this role (Scott 2008). This allows us to take a fresh look at old problems or to redefine old questions to make women more visible as agents of history (Scott 2008: 133). It is this perspective that is still missing in Estonia. While we know about prominent women in Estonia's past, we are still missing research that takes an in-depth view of, for example, how the historically divergent understandings of the body or reproduction have shaped women's ability to act on their bodies. This type of research requires focus on the practices of Estonian peasants, filtered through the rigid sexual morals of the Baltic-German elites who left the extant written records. In later centuries, the deep German cultural substratum in Estonian culture (where even nationalist intellectuals habitually spoke German as their everyday language of communication) shapes interactions with Russian and later Soviet culture. The latter's sexual puritanism, in turn, explains the persistence of homophobia and suspicion of female sexuality in today's neoliberal Estonia. Research that places gender within a complex web of cultural influences, is sorely needed to move beyond simplified stereotypes that persist about gender and feminism in the daily press and social media. Research into such stereotypes contributes to dispelling misleading beliefs. In Estonian cultural mythology one stereotype that has failed to disappear is that Estonian men and women have been equal across history and that thus Estonia does not need gender equality campaigns or feminism. The latter, especially, is viewed as a foreign import, while only very few realise that it is today's anti-gender campaigns that have clear foreign roots.

We need more in-depth analyses of women's and men's roles and activities in the public and private spheres to map the boundaries of activities across social

classes, ethnic groups and social periods. There may be times and contexts where women had more agency than we imagine (Merili Metsvahi's (2015) research into pre-marital peasant sexuality allows us to think so) and others where they had less than we have come to assume (as different analyses of the Soviet period show). We need to focus on the interplay of influences, as in Johanna Ross's (2018) study of the latent presence of nationalist discourses in the interpretation of women writers from Soviet Estonia that made gendered reading perspectives unlikely. The research of Tiina Kirss and Leena Kurvet-Käosaar has drawn attention to the complex cultural discourses in Estonian life writing (e.g., Kurvet-Käosaar 2020; Kirss & Hinrikus 2021). Mirjam Hinrikus has called attention to the tensions between emancipatory and misogynist attitudes in Estonian modernism and the tensions between gender and nation-building efforts (Hinrikus 2015). Our research group also continued this tradition of research, above all in Eve Annuk's scholarship on nationalism's role in early Estonian feminism and her pioneering research into discourses of motherhood in the Soviet period (Annuk 2021c; Annuk & Seigel 2020). Andreas Kalkun's archival research into the history of Estonian homosexuality opens a new page in Estonian gender history (Kalkun 2018, 2020). Kalkun and also Janika Oras have studied women's traditions within Estonian folk song (Oras 2017).

One must hope that more similarly nuanced analyses will be added, especially in under-studied fields such as theatre, film and music. Theatre, for example, is a powerful shaper of gendered perception as it not only represents gender norms, but also performatively enacts them for audiences. Thus, we are glad that our research group was able to nurture work on theatre and music in our seminars and to encourage two young scholars (Riina Oruaas and Hannaliisa Uusma) in pursuing their PhD degrees on gender-related topics.

The research group was able to bring together the top Estonian researchers from different academic institutions (University of Tartu, Tallinn University, Estonian Literary Museum) to discuss the history of sexual and gender minorities. These meetings resulted in a number of publications on discourses and practices surrounding male homosexuality (Kalkun 2018, 2020) and, more broadly, the complex intra-actions in representations of sexual and gender minorities (Põldsam 2020). These studies are sensitive to local histories and international links, as well as the complexity of analysing gender practices, for which vocabulary was only emerging. Põldsam's work is also attentive to the need to be careful when applying international terminology without critical reflection. These first studies, we hope, will pave the way for a wave of research into this unwritten chapter of Estonian social and cultural history. An encouraging step was taken in the autumn of 2022, with a collection of LGBT+ people's experiences from the Estonia of the 19th and 20th centuries (Põldsam et al. 2022).

These discussions have been enriched by the presence of associated members of the Centre from universities abroad, such as Kai Stahl from the University of Turku and Redi Koobak from the University of Bergen. Debating and testing concepts from the international context allows us to sharpen our local analyses. This active movement between the global and the local has been inspiring across the history of Estonian gender studies.

HOW TO STUDY GENDER?

The challenges facing gender studies are not just those of materials and topics. As gender studies has not yet been institutionalised in Estonia, the value of frameworks like the one provided by the gender studies research group within the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies is immense. Because it brought together scholars from different academic institutions and different disciplines, it formed the basis for the kind of interdisciplinary research that is vital in gender studies. Our group's most active members came from literary research, cultural history, folklore research, art history, and philosophy. People from other fields visited our events, thereby increasing the interdisciplinary mix. The Centre of Excellence also increased the visibility of gender studies, as papers on gender were presented at each of the Centre's annual conferences, as well as many smaller events.

In gender studies, methods largely depend on how the specific discipline within which gender-oriented research is conducted. For example, in the case of literary history, it continues to be important to do archival research, as in Estonia much of the archive on women and gender remains unexplored. In the case of contemporary fiction, scholars employ text-oriented methods. In both, the addition of the gender perspective allows us to make visible the tacit gendered power relations. This also sheds light on not just fiction written by women or men, but also the historical circumstances within which women and men wrote. Women's limited access to higher education and to the publication infrastructure in the past made it harder for women to be accepted as creators in their own right. In parallel, women's work has tended to be valued less than that of men and this helps to explain women's marginal status within the canon and literary history (Annuk 2017, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). The last event of our research group, a conference at the Literary Museum in October 2022, was dedicated to precisely this attempt to find forgotten women authors in Estonian literary history and to analyse them in the light of both archival research and different theoretical approaches.

Our research group also attempted to expand the methodologies we employ in the study of gender. In the context of our research group's work, it is worth lingering on two directions: postcolonial and decolonial approaches on the one hand, and the combination of discourse and affect theories on the other. Neither of these directions is new in transnational gender studies, but they have been used in a very limited manner in Estonia before the seminars of our research group.

Important work has been done with postcolonial theories in Estonian humanities more broadly, especially in the interpretation of the complexities of Soviet heritage (called socialist colonialism by Epp Annus in her publications (e.g., Ross & Annus 2020)). Yet, when we think about Estonia's geopolitical position and the complex layers of colonial experience in Estonia, the postcolonial and decolonial lens should hold a more prominent position in Estonian humanities research. As can already be seen from the notes above, different waves of colonisation have left a deep mark on gender norms and gender relations. Such historical analyses are still to be written, especially when it comes to Estonia's history and its complex interrelations with Baltic-German elites and the German-language church establishment. Some work has been done by Liina Lukas (2006) and Kairit Kaur (2014) but there is much to be explored from the perspective of gender.

There are more examples of the use of postcolonial methods in the analysis of the gender norms of the Soviet period (also see Annus 2018, 2019). The enforced gender equality of the occupying Soviet regime, as indicated above, created complex forms of resistance and adaptation: compliance in the public sphere, and the simultaneous reinforcement of a patriarchal division of duties in the domestic sphere, were often justified as a form of resistance to imposed Soviet equality ideology. The postcolonial lens would also be productive in the analysis of Soviet and exile biopolitics and discourses of reproduction. Women's rights and autonomy have often become secondary to aspirations for national self-determination. There are also attempts to forge theoretical dialogues between postcolonial and post-socialist experiences (collection edited by Redi Koobak with her colleagues Madina Tlostanova and Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, which also contains one chapter on Estonia (Marling 2021a)).

More recently, Estonian scholars, above all Redi Koobak, have also attempted to bring the decolonial lens to the study of gender in Estonia. While in postcolonial approaches the focus tends to be on hybridity created in postcolonial conditions, decolonial work is more emphatically critical of the institutions and epistemic practices imposed by the colonising power, as Redi Koobak explained in her presentation at one of our research seminars. This is a potentially fertile area of research for semi-peripheral countries like Estonia where centuries of colonisation have assertively overwritten indigenous practices and forms of

knowledge. Another potentially productive direction of analysis is the investigation of the post-socialist countries within the epistemic practices of transnational feminism (Koobak & Marling 2014; Tlostanova et al. 2019). Second-world feminism, as many scholars have observed, is still often viewed in the West as lagging behind or catching up with the international norm, without attention to the fact that this norm tends to be written in English in US and UK academia, excluding many voices. This is particularly vital because Estonian gender studies, too, has tended to apply internationally developed theoretical models to local empirical data instead of critically investigating theories or engaging in theory-building.

The other productive area of research explored in our seminars is the potential of combining discourse and affect theories. Discourse analyses of various kinds have been present in Estonian gender research since the beginning of the 1990s, especially in the analysis of media texts and political discourse (Põldsaar 2005/2006; Marling 2010) to trace the complex processes of reception and domestication of international influences. This work has been crucial in showing how feminism and gender have not been blindly imported from abroad, but have been adapted to local circumstances, in particular in a dialogue with the discourses of Europe and the nation. Another valuable strand of discourse research in gender studies has produced a rich selection of literary analyses, in particular from the period of Estonia's nation building of the early 20th century (for example, Mirjam Hinrikus' work over the past decades).

However, the past twenty years have also seen the international publication of many critiques of discursive approaches, including from within feminist research. The main target of criticism is that discourse analysis prioritises language and power over the living body. This, needless to say, is an issue particularly central to feminist criticism that has, at last starting from the 1980s, been critical of philosophy's lack of attention to and devaluation of the body and emotions, domains habitually associated with women. Thus, affect theory has been taken up keenly in gender research. However, as many feminist critics (e.g. Hemmings 2005) also point out, the tendency towards flat ontologies within affect theory makes it hard to discuss power, a vital concept in feminist analyses. It is therefore important to incorporate elements from discursive approaches into feminist analyses of affect (cf. Wetherell 2013). This was a topic of one of our seminars and has already resulted in some productive analyses of gender and sexuality (e.g. Marling & Põldsam 2022) as well as fiction (Marling & Talviste 2022; Annuk 2021c) and correspondences (e.g. Annuk 2019b, 2021a).

Regardless of the specific methods, Estonian gender research has, over the past ten years, become more intersectional. Since the first systematic introduction of the term (Koobak 2008), it has become habitual not only look at gender

in isolation but also in combination with class, ethnicity, sexuality, age and other identity categories. This has come to characterise analyses commissioned by the state (e.g. in Marling et al. 2021), as well as academic research.

This does not mean that our seminars neglected more traditional methods. For example, the collaboration with autobiography studies enriched our methods. By focusing on the individual as the author of autobiographical texts and the subject of biography, we can look at the gendered aspects of culture through the perspective of the individual, rather than impersonal historical processes. Such micro-level analysis allows us to trace the role of the individual in culture and the links between gender identity and culture, in particular in the private sphere that inevitably shapes the public activities of both men and women. The strong tradition of life writing research at the Estonian Literary Museum has been one of the key strengths of our group.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Many of the investigations began before the project period and will continue after it. However, it is possible to say that after seven years of research we have managed to add nuance to Estonian gender studies analyses, in particular through the systematic incorporation of intersectional and postcolonial approaches. It is important to continue the archival work of finding forgotten women and gender minorities in Estonian history and fleshing out their lives to show the scope of their agency, which has been forgotten in the national narrative. This, however, needs to be combined with critical studies that identify and uncover tacit discourses and their intersections in the life stories and in the national narrative itself. In parallel, we need to move our attention increasingly from published texts to the private sphere as it played a central role in limiting women's access to the public sphere. These investigations need to use as wide a theoretical range as possible, adapting international theories to the local context.

This needs to happen in a wide array of disciplines. We are proud that in addition to the fields where gender research has been traditionally strong in Estonia (literature, art, life writing, folklore, ethnology), our research group was able to build dialogues with theatre research, music scholarship (both the historical tradition of Estonian folk song (Oras 2017) and contemporary pop music (Davidjants & Uusma 2019)). Our seminars were also attended by linguists and this collaboration will continue after the project ends.

The lens of gender also needs be applied not only to the historical heritage and written texts from the past but also to the analysis of contemporary Estonia and its social challenges. During the project period we managed to analyse

gender and urban culture (e.g. graffiti (Annuk & Voolaid 2020)). Our group also participated in the analysis of different gendered aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic in different media outlets (e.g. Marling & Käsper 2022). This research also brought quantitative corpus tools more assertively into our gender studies research. This is an area that is likely to be pursued by others, as the first quantitative analyses of the gendered patterns of the Estonian language were recently published (Kaukonen 2022).

Our research group both continued and expanded Estonian gender research. It is important to continue this work even after the project ends. We believe that the collaboration within the centre has built strong ties between individual scholars and forged new interdisciplinary networks. It is worth noting that many of the members of the group continue to work with PhD students who will carry on the research in different fields ranging from ethnology to linguistics.

Estonian gender studies might not be institutionalised, but it is heterogenous. The work we have done within the Centre of Excellence has helped to highlight the multi-layered presence of gender in many aspects of Estonian cultural history and present cultural reality. The lack of local scholarship has allowed conservative Estonian politicians and public intellectuals to argue that gender awareness and gendered knowledge are not relevant in Estonia. This blindness is increasingly impossible to accept, as new generations of scholars unearth materials from different centuries and analyse it in the light of contemporary theories.

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NOTE

[1] Estonia granted women the right to vote in its first constitution in 1920 without public opposition. The ban on gender discrimination was retained in the constitutions of 1933 and 1938. This ban, however, only covered the public sphere, although the 1938 constitution also extended to women's rights within marriage (Leppik 2017: 346, 350). However, although the constitution guaranteed equal rights, this equality did not manifest itself in reality, as family law kept married women under their husbands' guardianship for most of the Republic of Estonia, despite the efforts of women politicians of the time (Leppik 2017: 357).

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