

Activity Report 2019

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1. Board

A short message from the president

I had the pleasure and honour to act as the president of the SGGF and to work with the members of the board for the past year. Truly said, this was a year of important changes: We started the year with a workshop convening the Board where we defined our objectives for the upcoming years. The conference in September was a big success, both in terms of number of participants and of interesting, insightful papers, panels, and keynotes. The Brigitte Schnegg prize showed us that there are young scholars doing great work in the realm of gender studies. Further, many new projects and initiatives have been developed thanks to the energy and investment of the board members. This activity report bears witness to many of our successes in 2019.

There are however some challenges ahead of us, and I would like to shortly elaborate on some of them:

Gender studies have always been proponent of critical epistemologies that intend to scrutinize societies: They are designed to question structures, ideologies and identities that are taken for granted; they do so in fundamental ways. Gender studies are helpful for a better understanding of societies and their inequalities. Furthermore, gender studies always have been entangled with social movements – having emerged from the feminist movement, gender studies have a commitment to the visibilisation of protest, contestation and contradictions. In spite of this long-lasting importance of gender studies, Switzerland took a backseat to other countries in the academic institutionalisation of gender studies when considering university-specific creation of gender-related chairs, BA, MA and doctoral programmes, or more general tendencies in higher educational politics and research. During the conference in September, it became clear to me that a new generation of gender scholars has emerged, bringing about new topics, theoretical approaches and contemporary social movements. This generation, one that grew up within university structures offering curricula in gender studies, has benefitted from an institutional approach to gender studies that was almost completely absent in my generation. I am amazed at how much has been done since.

However, we are definitely not done: There is a strong movement of anti-genderism, including in Switzerland; gender scholars are often targets of hate, especially in social media; the institutionalisation of gender studies remains a locus of struggle. The SAGS has an important role to play when it comes to the *sustainable* anchorage and the *perennial* institutionalisation of gender studies in Switzerland: Who else could assume this role of guaranteeing the longitudinal effects of our institutionalisation? It is in the matter of institutional embeddedness that I think we could get better and more efficient in the next years. We are on the way, many initiatives have been launched, but there is a lot of work ahead of us.

This brings me to another point, namely the financial situation of the SAGS: Our secretariat is severely underfunded and we have two communications officers who work on a purely voluntary basis – who invest many hours or weeks into SAGS-related task completion. In other terms, if the SAGS wants to be present and strong, we need more paying members! We defined at our workshop the (over)ambitious goal of reaching 4000 members in the

next 4 years. Though the number may sound far-fetched, we recognize that our main efforts consist in becoming visible, reinforcing student outreach, networking, and overall doing such a good job that people want to become fully-fledged members. To fully assume our role – that is, to promote Gender Studies and their anchorage in Swiss universities and research, to offer expert knowledge for the public, to represent the interest of gender studies in different bodies – we need a *larger* and *more stable* financial 'pool' at our disposal.

Let me conclude with a positive outlook for next year: The SAGS will have from January 2020 onwards its own publication series. It will take over the peer-reviewed and open-access series "Geschlechterfragen/Questions de genre/ Gender Issues", edited by Seismo Press. We constituted a new editing committee with members of the SAGS. This book series unites theoretical and empirical work in the field of Gender Studies in the humanities and the social sciences. The series is open to different disciplines and languages (English, French, German). We hope that many manuscripts will be published – please don't forget to spread the word and/or submit your work!

Janine Dahinden, January 2020, Neuchâtel

Members of the Board and Secretariat

The 15 board members represent seven Swiss universities, two language regions, and a wide range of disciplines and positions. The board met four times in 2019. As at December 31, 2019, the SAGS total membership stood at 280 members. This represents an increase of 48 members compared to 2018.

At the end of 2019, Sarah Schneiter left the secretariat of the SAGS. We would like to thank her warmly for her wonderful support over the past few years. At the same time, the secretariat of the SAGS moved from the University of Basel to the University of Neuchâtel. Martine Schaer replaced Sarah Schneiter.

Table 1: Board members in 2019

Name	Function
Janine Dahinden	President
Nathalie Amstutz	Vice-President
Michèle Amacker	University of Berne
Claudia D'Andrea*	Student Representative
Bettina Dennerlein	University of Zurich
Annelise Erismann*	Public Relations
Lilian Fankhauser	University of Bern, Gender equality officer
Sebastian Funke**	Student Representative
Dominique Grisard	University of Basel
Marylène Lieber	University of Geneva
Matthias Luterbach	Cashier
Andrea Maihofer	University of Basel
Katrin Meyer	University of Zurich
Geneva Moser**	FemWiss
Katharina Pelzelmayer*	FemWiss
Regina Wecker	University of Basel
Fleur Weibel	Public Relations

*Started their function during the course of 2019.

**Left their function during the course of 2019.

2. Strategies and Visions of the SAGS

We started the year on February 11 with an extensive workshop where the board members discussed and defined their new goals for the upcoming next four years. In order to be able to properly adopt our role, we decided to focus on three main objectives, creating different working groups.

- **Visibility:** To enhance the visibility of SAGS, a new *Communications Team* was put in place. One of its central objectives is to foster student outreach. It has already launched many new activities (see chapter 4 *Outward communication*).
- **Networking:** One main goal is to anchor the SAGS more deeply in the French-speaking part, which remains heavily underrepresented in terms of board members and members. Another objective is to work more closely and effectively with other stakeholders in the realm of gender studies in Switzerland (e.g. FemWiss, Gender Campus, Netzwerk Gender Studies).
- **Institutionalization/Anchorage of Gender Studies:** The aim is to reinforce our activities regarding the politics of higher education, as well as teaching and research.

The following pages pick upon some of the activities which have been developed in due course of 2019 and which target these three main objectives.



Board members workshop on February 11

3. Scientific Activities

3.1. Biennial Conference: 12-13 September, University of Berne, Violent times, rising Protest

Since 2010, the SAGS has been organizing a conference every second year. This year, 23 panels, 88 papers and two keynotes addressed different forms of violence and their links to gender/sexuality. They also discussed the ways this violence has given rise to protest, resistance and new forms of solidarities.

Obviously, violence is a very important topic to be analysed and theorized by gender scholars. Violence is a persistent element of modern history in past times and today. It is enough to open the newspaper to be confronted with warfare, hate in social media, open racist, sexist and homophobic discrimination against 'others' and 'strangers,' – these are just some examples of the pervasiveness of violence. Violence unveils itself as a central and powerful structuring principle of gender, sexuality, race and class, but it is also part of the fabric of modern societies and structures *all* social relations. In fact, violence forms a constitutive part of most states and societies, their gendered orders, family organizations as much as economic and political systems. It shapes conditions of precarity and migration, as well as the daily exposure to stigma, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. The panels at the conference covered a wide range of these and similar topics.

However, and this is an important point, we had a second part in the title of this year's conference, namely *Rising protests!* It was our deliberate choice to address these issues as well: today's violent times have also politicized and mobilized new groups, generated creative forms of protest and incited a wide range of coalitions and cooperation. We can

think of the women's/feminist strike in Switzerland in June 2019, but there are many other examples: Occupy, Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, or the increasing visibility of trans* rights movements. Many panels focussed on these and other rising forms of protest.

Two keynote speakers gave additional insights into particular aspects of this year's topic. We have been extraordinarily pleased to have had them in Bern:

- Dr Jack Halberstam, from Columbia University, with a talk entitled "*Destitution, Dereliction, Disorder and Dispossession*"
- Dr Noémi Michel, from the University of Geneva. She spoke about "*Unsustainable Inclusion. A Black Feminist Critique of Democracy*"

The detailed report of the conference can be found online in German <https://www.gendercampus.ch/de/blog/post/gewalt-und-protest-ein-nach-und-neudenken> and in French <https://www.gendercampus.ch/fr/blog/post/gewalt-und-protest-ein-nach-und-neudenken/>.

During the conference, we dedicated a session called "Meet the SGGF" to introduce ourselves, our goals and activities to conference attendees, some of whom joined as members in the aftermath of the event.



*The keynote speakers
Noémi Michel (left) and Jack Halberstam (right)*

3.2. Brigitte Schnegg Award 2019

The Brigitte-Schnegg-Prize was created in honour of Prof Dr Brigitte Schnegg who directed the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Bern until her unexpected death in spring 2014. Brigitte Schnegg was an outstanding historian and gender scholar in Switzerland, and an important promoter of young scholars in gender studies. On a more personal note, she was a dear colleague for a lot of us and we will all remember her for her open, positive and intelligent spirit and good humour. The purpose of the award is to honour outstanding academic work in the field of gender studies in Switzerland that contributes to social and political change.

This was the second time that the SAGS awarded this prize. Fifteen candidates from the German and French speaking parts of Switzerland submitted their work. We received more submissions than in 2017, and we therefore introduced a two-step-procedure in order to evaluate the submissions. A big thanks goes to the jury members for reading and evaluating these submissions. The commission was composed of six members: Annelise Erismann, Lilian Fankhauser, Doris Wastl-Walter and Andrea Maihofer, and was chaired by Janine Dahinden.

The jury decided in favor of a single winner and of attributing a 'honourable' mention for a young scholar:

- The Brigitte-Schnegg Prize was awarded to **Dr Iur Nula Katharina Frei** for her book *"Menschenhandel und Asyl. Die Umsetzung der völkerrechtlichen Vorgaben zum Opferschutz im schweizerischen Asylverfahren"* (Nomos/Stämpfli 2018).

Human trafficking is often perceived as a strongly gendered phenomenon. Public perception, however, regularly reduces trafficking to forced prostitution, neither considering other forms of human trafficking nor the deeper causes of it, despite the fact that there are often based on gender discrimination, as Nula Frei argues. Not least because of its discursive link to moral issues concerning prostitution, human trafficking is often fought less intensively than other forms of organized crime. While these biases have been taken much more seriously by police forces and cantonal migration authorities in recent years, there has so far been no similar process of reflection with regard to asylum procedures. Nula Frei's monograph points to this shortcoming and closes the gap on both a theoretical and a practical level. Her book approaches the topic from a human rights perspective and develops a coherent approach to the protection of potential victims of trafficking in asylum procedures. Her work analyses how the international legal provisions on victim protection should be implemented in the Swiss asylum procedure. She makes concrete propositions of the ways to connect the two frameworks of asylum/refugee law and anti-trafficking law in Swiss practice, both on a substantive and a procedural level.

Methodologically, the book is based on the analysis of case law and literature, but also on expert interviews and the analysis of asylum files of potential victims of human trafficking so as to gain and display a deeper understanding of the hitherto undocumented practice.

The jury was very much convinced by this book which proves to be high quality research through its convincing logical structure and a very well-developed argumentation. Also, it is a real masterpiece of interdisciplinarity. Nula Frei has succeeded in making a theoretical contribution to different fields (international law and asylum), and in rendering her work accessible to a wider audience, beyond experts in the field of law. The jury was convinced of the originality and political relevance of this book for the foreseeable future, not lastly helping to anchor the category of gender in the field of asylum and trafficking research.

- The 'honourable mention' was attributed to **Mathilde Schnegg** for her Master thesis in political science at the University of Geneva, entitled *"Les politiques suisses de contraception: Le fédéralisme à l'épreuve du genre"*.

The jury thought that this master thesis is an extraordinarily successful interdisciplinary work and is characterised by a brilliant line of argument. It is a discussion of feminist reproductive politics in Switzerland and is therefore of high political relevance. The master thesis takes into account the complexity of the political structure of Switzerland, which is

seen in the subsidiarity principle governing the relation between federal government and relatively autonomous cantons. As Mathilde Schnegg shows on behalf of historical examples, cantons used their capabilities mostly to restrict or coerce women's reproductive self-determination. Indeed, the Swiss Federal System is patriarchal and gender inequalities are consistent with it, as she shows. Hence, to refuse a discussion on political questions directly related to women's interests – which is the case – is morally problematic: it sustains a double standard of citizenship between women and men. Mathilde Schnegg argues further that, in turn, the double standard of the Swiss citizenship model could be rebalanced through a feminist national reproduction policy, one that includes the issue of contraception. The jury emphasized the excellent work accomplished by Mathilde Schnegg in explaining these and other nuances of the political context without losing sight of its gendered genesis.



From left to right: Mathilde Schnegg, Janine Dahinden, and Nula Frei

4. Outward Communication

Since mid-2019, the SAGS has an official public relations team, composed of Fleur Weibel from the University of Basel and Annelise Erismann from the University of Lausanne.

In addition to the annual membership mailing, the team now sends out a newsletter three times a year to inform SAGS members of our latest events and activities. The aim of the public relations team is to establish communication with the public in order to connect gender studies across language barriers.

The SAGS has also been strengthening its digital strategy by launching accounts on Facebook and Twitter (both now with 201 followers). Our online communication takes place now more than ever through our social media presence.

To optimize our online strategy, we are grateful to count on the existing informal networks within and across gender studies departments at Swiss universities. We have been working

together with what we call 'institutional liaisons', namely key persons interested in SAGS's work or members who support us with events advertisement by using internal communication channels of their respective departments or universities.

5. Cooperations, Networking & Anchoring of Gender Studies

One of the SAGS's priorities is to better anchor Gender Studies in Swiss universities in order to expand specific areas or at least maintain the status quo. To this end, cooperation with existing networks was intensified, with the aim of clarifying roles, bundling activities and fostering visibility of the SAGS's activities.

- **On June 19, a first Meeting** with the current networks and groups took place in Bern with the goal to clarify task, goals and activities. The invited networks were: Think Tank Gender & Diversity, Netzwerk Gender Studies, Gender Campus, Femwiss, Kofrah, SAGS. This networking will be followed up in January 2020 by another meeting.
 - **Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences (SAGW):** The SAGS is a (still new) member of the SAGW. The preparations to represent the SAGS on the SAGW's 'Fachportal Sektion 4' are completed. The SAGS has been included into the "Cultures and Societies Portal": <https://www.cult-soc.ch/en/fachportal.html>.
 - **Letter to the SNSF:** On the initiative of Patricia Purtschert, University of Berne, the SAGS joined a group of authors with a letter to the SNSF. The aim of the letter was to address the challenges that arise from the structural position of Gender Studies at the SNSF when applying for research foundations. Gender Studies are to be regarded as a separate discipline within the SNSF. At the same time, Gender Studies is interdisciplinary, which presents a challenge for the evaluation of project applications. This requires evaluators to have different disciplinary knowledge and specific expertise in gender studies. In order to support this process, the authors propose to make gender studies visible as a discipline in the SNSF and to compile a list of evaluators with the corresponding work priorities. This constructive dialogue with the SNSF and the involved networks is still ongoing.
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6. Working Groups

The SAGS hosts working groups. For the moment being, two are active. It is up to members to launch new working groups, in which case they should refer to the secretariat.

6.1. Working group *Affects, Feelings and Emotions*

Debates surrounding emotions, emotional labour, gender and gender competencies in love, romance and intimacy have been central to gender studies since their inception. In the

working group "Affects, Feelings and Emotions", we bring together existing and future research on debates at the intersection of gender, affect, feelings and emotions. In May 2019, the working group had a meeting in Basel to exchange ideas about the participants' current work and projects. In addition, specific collaborations took place, like the joint panel submission to the SGGF conference "Violent times, rising protests", which took place at the University of Bern in September.

Sophie Bürgi for the working group

6.2. Research group Transformation of Masculinities (TransforMen)

The research group "Transformations of Masculinities (TransforMen)" is an interdisciplinary and cross-institutional research group, independent of location, with the aim of strengthening critical studies on men and masculinities in Switzerland and making them more visible. Following the conference "Contemporary analysis of masculinities in Switzerland (Zeitdiagnose Männlichkeiten Schweiz)" in March 2018, the members of the work group have decided to launch a joint book project in order to bring together in one book for the first time in Switzerland a larger collection of current research from various disciplines on the history and present of masculinities in Switzerland. In 2019, several researchers from Switzerland were asked to write a contribution and the TransforMen team has been working on the conception, call for proposals and financing of the book. For the anthology, 13 authors or teams of authors have agreed to contribute. The articles were received at the end of 2019 and are now being discussed in order to report back for revision. The anthology will be supplemented by a joint introduction to be published with Seismo Press in fall 2020 or spring 2021.

Matthias Luterbach for the working group

7. Impressum

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