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GENDER AND THE PERSONAL IN POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

Observations from a Dutch Perspective

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This article explores the differential meanings of “personal life” in political biographies of men and women, mainly based upon Dutch examples, but making use of international literature. Though there has been a tendency to use personal detail only as a means to advertise and popularize old-fashioned political biography, under the influence of the feminist slogan “the personal is political” serious historical biographies of male politicians have become enriched with all sorts of information on their private lives: their hobbies and habits, political tastes, and to some extent also their family life. In contrast, mainstream biographies of female politicians still suffer from an overpersonalization of public women in the past and the present. Serious biographical texts as well as biographical television documentaries on prominent female politicians (and professionals) still focus too easily on women’s civil status or their relation to men and family (married or not married, with or without children). This state of affairs makes gender sensitive historians aware of the pitfalls of writing about the private lives of their female political protagonists, and several intended biographies of prominent Dutch women even remain unwritten.

In November 2004, the Digital Women’s Lexicon (Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon, or DVN) of the Netherlands officially started with a working conference at the Royal Library in The Hague.¹ There the project leadership initiated a dialogue with the professional community of (women’s) historians regarding the principles of writing women’s lives. What were the criteria for inclusion in the women’s lexicon? What “claims to fame” or key terms should be considered in the case of women’s often “different” or “un-standardized” lives, for instance as mother, sisters, or mistresses of other women or men? What can be done with often gendered patterns of narration in which women’s appearances are overemphasized or childlessness, while perhaps a significant life event for individual women, is not addressed? And, in considering the historical legacy of individual women, to what extent should biographers contradict the gendering of reputations by which women who were courageous exceptions to the rules were turned into “hysterics”?²

As a long-time member of the editorial board of the Dutch Dictionary of Biography (Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland, or BWN), I was

invited to reflect on such issues, and offered a discussion of the many biographical fallacies in women's and men's biographies that resulted from the double standard regarding men's and women's lives.³ My argument drew in part on examples from my editorial work for the BWN, and in part from my avid, but not systematic, reading of book-length biographies and gender theory, which resulted in a series of "do's and don'ts." Under the admonishment "Do avoid an asymmetrical emphasis on the relation between the public person and the private personality in the lives of men and women," I explained how as an editor of the BWN I had often needed all my power to convince authors that it would be a good idea for lemmas of men to at least mention marriage and children, while for women such "details" were too often treated as major life events and had to be discouraged in my view. Another, and perhaps more important, "do" was formulated as an admonishment to avoid explanations in terms of the "actual destination of women," which locate the causes of women's public success in their (sublimated) lack of (sexual) love or motherhood. Here I gestured to the biographical treatments of such women as Dorothy Sayers, whose intellectual accomplishments biographer James Brabazon has attributed to her lack of normal and emotionally satisfying relationships, and Aletta Jacobs, whose work for women's suffrage Dutch feminist filmmaker Nouschka van Brakel has suggested was the result of the loss of her one-day-old baby.⁴

Several of the examples for both admonishments I drew from the prominent Dutch publicist and professor of literary criticism Elsbeth Etty's biography of the Dutch radical socialist and poet Henriette Roland Holst-van der Schalk.⁵ Though there is much to admire in this biography, from a gender perspective there are points of critique to be made.⁶ In particular, I took issue with Etty's unifying "thesis" that explained Roland Holst's political drive with Freud's sublimation theory. Thus the title of the book *Liefde is heel het leven niet* (Love is not the essence of life) refers to the unconsummated marriage that made Roland Holst into the passionate socialist she became.⁷ When some time later both Etty and I were invited to a conference on "Private Life in Political Biography" at the University of Groningen, Etty took up my criticisms in her keynote lecture, "No Privacy for the Dead."⁸ She agreed that biographies of men were hardly ever criticized for having too little of the "private person," and she demanded more of the personal in male biography, but stopped short of calling for less of the personal in female biography. She admitted to especially loving academic biographies "in which every fact is verifiable, but whoever feels too high-minded to peep through the keyhole and does not like to search indiscreetly for facts that have been kept secret for whatever reason, should not become a biographer." The examples she gave of secret but telling "facts" (even if often only based on rumors), however, revealed that it were

mainly “aberrant” sexual details that were on her mind: homosexuality, S&M activities, extramarital sex, “aberrant” of course only in the eye of the “normal” heterosexual beholder.

In this she concurred with the organizers of the conference, literary critic and biographer Hans Renders and political historian Gerrit Voerman. According to them the tendency to increasingly include private details about family life, including hobbies, personal habits, and (secret) preferences—if not sex—in political biography, grew out of the feminist adage that “the personal is the political” in the 1960s and 1970s and the successive “personalization of politics” from the 1980s. This tendency, in their eyes, clearly represented a new norm for academic biography. Renders, in the conference’s opening speech, remarked, “The biographer has to prove that someone’s personal background influenced his public deeds. If that does not happen, one had better refrain from writing a biography.”⁹ Renders especially associated personal details with personal defects or psychological tensions that allow biographers to see subjects as human beings with all their imperfections and flaws. “Virtue is killing,” he approvingly quoted Queen Wilhelmina’s biographer Cees Fasseur. Renders then explained what he considered good applications of the new norm in political biography. Such life stories reveal the “intrigue” of a person, or the “hidden” or “secret trauma,” that can explain a person’s political or public life. Personal detail lends flavor to the story, and it allows for the deconstruction of “the myths” that have for so long plagued serious biography.

In my view more than appropriate degrees of the private are at issue. The biographer’s approach to a life is bound up with conceptions of what constitutes the essence of personhood, how the individual and the collective, self and society, are interconnected or not, and what relevance gender has as a social and analytical category for the formation of individual identities and vice versa. It depends on such conceptions whether we agree, for instance, with the still quite common view that sexuality, as one of the most private parts of lives, is also the most personal. Or whether we think, conversely, that sexuality is bound up more with social norms and discursive formations than with individual (subconscious) experiences or even traumas that in a Freudian framework “explain” a person. Such conceptions determine whether the personal is best approached with the help of ahistorical psychological theories or with a more hermeneutical reading of the subject’s actions and self-explanatory texts in relation to the historical context.

This article grew out of the challenge that “The Private in Political Biography” conference posed for me as a gender historian. In this article I want to explore this new biographical norm that “political biography” (the biography of a politician) should be a combination of life and work, political and private life. What does this norm actually mean and where does it come

from? For decades feminist theorists have been encouraging biographers to connect the public and the private in biography. And yet, I am unhappy with the way this norm has been conceptualized and explained by such prominent Dutch biographers as Elsbeth Etty and Hans Renders under the feminist legacy of "the personal is political." Is this norm really just as applicable to biographies of men as to those of women, as Etty claims? And do we therefore really need what she—not without irony—refers to as "equal treatment of men and women" in this respect? And, finally, if I disagree with such views, is that due to their lack of a profound understanding of gender and, therefore, the basics of such terms as "personal" and "political," or is it also a disciplinary and/or wider cultural-political clash?

Political Radicalism, Radical Feminism, and the Individualization of Politics

To explore the effect of "the personal is political" on political biography, it is necessary to revisit the source of the motto and to situate it within the "New Left" and counter-culture political radicalism of the late 1960s, when new forms of activism developed alongside new lifestyles.¹⁰ Radicals drew on a cocktail of political theory and psychology for their criticisms of a Western society that supposedly alienated people with its all-pervasive consumerism and capitalism, fostering apathy and superficiality. Change was to be expected most notably from people who explored the depths of themselves as individuals. It was precisely by developing an individual lifestyle—a politics of the personal—that one could undermine the "deep structure" of the established order. As a result of this individualization of politics, the conceptualization of politics and the political realm in general became wider and fragmented. Within women's movements of the time, this political radicalism soon spawned the slogan: "the personal is political." Although the slogan has since become the most popular summary of second-wave feminism, it is useful to run through some of its meanings.¹¹

In the best-known meaning of "the personal is political," the personal—construed as the entirety of experiences specific to women or women's lives as lived mostly in the private sphere—is invested with political significance. This most commonsensical interpretation was highlighted by such feminists as Joke Smit, the "Dutch Betty Friedan," who in 1967 in the general magazine *De Gids*, published her wake-up call to the Dutch women's movement.¹² It meant that all kinds of "women's issues" like incest, domestic violence, childcare, and state-subsidized abortion, as well as the wider field of "women's rights," had to be placed on the political agenda. In all its simplicity, this meaning did a lot of important political work and still does so today.

Perhaps more significant, however, is a deeper dualistic meaning that more accurately captures the spirit of the political radicalism of the 1960s. This meaning could be interpreted as both "the political pervades the personal" and "the personal pervades the political." In the first instance, the personal (female identity or femininity, and sexuality or relations between the sexes) was seen as both an effect and an integrated aspect of social, economic, and political structures. For women, this meant that the entire organization of social, economic, and political parameters was designed to condition them to dependency on male breadwinners, heterosexuality, and motherhood. It also corresponded nicely with the (deep psychological) view that techno culture, in the age of the so-called military industrial complex, tended to produce "human robots." Politics had always concerned itself with people's personal lives and private circumstances, not only in all-intrusive dictatorial regimes but in democratic societies too. In the second instance, this insidious political conditioning was offset by a sense of personal empowerment; changes in personal parameters or the way individual women constructed their own femininity, their private lives, sexualities, or the relations between the sexes could be seen to have social and political repercussions. It was above all this recognition that inspired women to develop their own lifestyles and conceptual frameworks, or in the words of the Dutch historian Mieke Aerts to evolve a feminist "politics of the personal" and to set about discovering "themselves" in therapeutic discussion groups. As a result, the concept of the political was widened to include the quest for, and development of, individual modes of cultural expression and lifestyles that would generate a varied and vibrant autonomous women's movement with women's bookstores, printing shops, and publishing houses, as well as bars and cafés. Given the prevailing views on the political significance of sexuality, a preference for lesbian sexuality also came to the fore in this period as the ultimate expression of a feminist politics of "we women."

One final remark in this context is that the diverse interpretations of the slogan were all geared towards undermining the existing hierarchical oppositions between personal/private and political/public, with private circumstances, personal factors, and femininity being seen as inextricably linked. The "personal" was about constructions of femininity and not of individuality or uniqueness per se.

Women's History and "The Personal is Political"

Within women's history, the adage "the personal is political" implied, among other things, that private circumstances and women's experiences were also "part of history" and must not be banished from the domain of

"real" historical events. Together with exponents of labor history, "people's" or "public" history, and the history of mentality, historians of women placed a range of subjects on the historical agenda: the histories of everyday lives, family and housekeeping, intimacy and emotion, motherhood, sexuality, abortion and birth control, and organizational structures surrounding birth and death. But in its "deeper" meaning, too, in which the personal coincides with conditioned femininity, the slogan was translated into historical research. The British historian Anna Davin, in her classic article "Imperialism and Motherhood," explored how British imperialist policies in the early twentieth century had permeated private lives and assigned white women to the role of mothers and educators of the Anglo-Saxon race.¹³ Mieke Aerts in turn explored different historical "politics of the personal" (or constructions of femininity), in a publication that achieved the status of a Dutch classic, of three separate Catholic women's organizations—the (bourgeois) Dutch Catholic Women's Federation (RKV), the (mass) Grail Movement, and De Sleutelbos (The Bunch of Keys), an informal bond of Catholic university women who devised a "third way" between marriage and the convent as unmarried Catholic women professionals.¹⁴ Aerts focused on these interbellum societies' forms and stylistic characteristics: the vibrant, colorful mass theatricality of the Grail Movement, the stiff prudishness of the RKV, and the "stylelessness" of the Catholic women's friendship network De Sleutelbos.

Biography was not immediately embraced by the first purveyors of women's and gender history, which was struggling to acquire some degree of recognition and institutional form as an academic discipline at this time.¹⁵ Biography did not have an established academic reputation, and was seen as too literary and too subjective and—in the case of feminist and socialist biography—even hagiographic. Moreover, feminists also regarded biography with a certain suspicion because this genre was preeminently expressive and perhaps even constitutive of the modern emphasis on "autonomous man" who had won his spurs in public life. Given the strong historical link between women and private life, sexuality and social context, did women's biographies not, by definition, confirm women in their status as the second sex—representing them either as (ahistorical) exceptions to the rule or as exemplary of their "species"?

Such hesitations, happily, have not prevented the further development of biography as an academic genre or as a mode of writing women's and gender history. As the writing of feminist biography was not self-evident, biographical activity went hand in hand with intense theoretical reflection. Thus in the Netherlands a fascinating volume of essays on feminist biography, *Naar het leven* (From Life), came out in 1988, in which the contributors discussed approaches to biography or life stories.¹⁶ In retrospect one can

read it as a rather critical and definitely not too enthusiastic appraisal of the genre; only four of the contributors dealt with full-blown feminist historical biography, and only one, Marjan Schwegman, was actually engaged in writing a feminist biography. Historian Ulla Jansz explained that she had decided to cease writing a biography of the socialist and feminist Heleen Ankersmit (1869–1944) because she was afraid she had lost proper distance from her subject and lifted her out of her historical context. She already had a precursor in another feminist historian who broke off her biography of early socialist, feminist, and spiritualist Nellie van Kol (1851–1930) on much the same grounds. Mieke Aerts, likewise, though on different grounds, explained that she could not write a biography of the Catholic founder of De Sleutelbos, Jacqueline Hillen, for reasons I will explore below. For a more international readership, one could mention the volume *Between Women*, in which a diverse group of biographers reflected on their work on women; the more historical oriented volume *The Challenge of Feminist Biography*; and the 1990 special issue of *Gender and History* on “Modern English Auto/Biography.” In the same year one of the contributors to this issue, Liz Stanley, published a monograph on the subject of auto/biography.¹⁷

One theme that stands out in these discussions is that “the personal is political” maxim drove the desire to understand the way in which gender identity is constituted on an individual level. Biography is seen by most of the biographers as the genre par excellence to study the interconnection between the personal and the political, or the private and the public, especially in respect to gender. It is no coincidence that one of the first feminist biographies, Kathryn Kish Sklar’s *Catharine Beecher*, was subtitled *A Study in American Domesticity*. In her introduction she explained that the “book is the study of an era through the life of one woman. It is also an effort to use the biographical density and motivational impulse of one person to uncover and isolate significant questions about the relationship between women and American society.”¹⁸ Marjan Schwegman, the first Dutch feminist historian to write a book-length biography as her dissertation, was equally interested in nineteenth-century Italian feminist Gualberta Beccari not just as a special or unique individual, but also as a woman and a feminist.¹⁹ Kathleen Barry, who “did” Susan B. Anthony similarly, but in more general terms, declared in a theoretical essay on feminist biography that a feminist-critical approach to biography “redefines biography from the particular study of a unique life to a structural socio-political study that is grounded in the temporality and subjectivity of a life.”²⁰ And the British historian Angela John, who wrote biographies of such women as the British suffrage actress and writer Elizabeth Robins, professes on her website that “in recent years I’ve become fascinated by the creation and structuring of biography and now see myself as a biographical historian, writing about the period alongside

the person: a modern version of 'Life and Times.'"²¹

The desire to connect the individual life to a broader and comparative context, and so to avoid the "spotlight biography" that casts everyone else but the protagonist into the shadows, was not only inspired by the democratic impulse towards "the masses"; it was also inspired by the recognition that the nineteenth-century biographical plot of the linear and unified life was more the product of the author than an aspect of the self that increasingly came to be seen as flexible, decentered, and open.²² This recognition stimulated a search for different plots; Beatrice Webb's life was written in relation to her sisters, instead of to her husband, Sydney, and another "group biography" appeared about the Beecher sisters.²³ Moreover, it encouraged the exploration of ways to make the biographer's constructive activities in the process of portrayal more visible. Here we may mention the experiment in self-reflexivity undertaken by Ann Morley and Liz Stanley to make their historical research an intrinsic part of their biography of the British suffragette Emily Wilding Davison.²⁴ Dutch historian Myriam Everard in her contribution to *Naar het leven* did a similar experiment to convey her fascination (if not her love) for the early feminist Titia van der Tuuk.²⁵

All these reflections on and experiments with the adage "the personal is political" in feminist biography show that what was meant was not to chase hyperindividual (or psychological) detail, but rather the commonalities and shared peculiarities. At first the commonalities were traced especially in the domestic sphere, but later they were also looked for in terms of how gender affected the lives of public women.²⁶

"The Personal is Political" and (Mainstream/Male) Political Biography

The demand for more private life in mainstream and predominantly male political biography, especially under the pretext of "the personal is political" at first glance seems challenging and innovative. But is it really happening, and does it really happen under the influence of the feminist adage "the personal is the political"? In 1990, British historian and political biographer Ben Pimlott pointed out a new emphasis on "domestic privacies" or "minute details of the private life" as the recipe for "new biography." His assessment of this new trend in biography, however, was devastating. "What we have today," he wrote, "is a new species: the warts-and-all hagiography, in which the warts are redefined as engaging quirks or even as beauty spots. Most modern biographers, indeed, for all their revelations of promiscuity and personal disorder, have barely departed from the Victorian, and mediaeval, tradition of praising famous men."²⁷ He added that this was perhaps even more so in "the comparative backwater of political

biography." He argued that the multiple productions of "orthodox lives, spiced with colourful detail, of orthodoxly famous people" that answered to the demands of publishers and "public taste" were incapable of renovating the genre of biography and lifting it from its then state of conservatism and stagnation.²⁸

Most of the contributors to the published volume that emerged from "The Private Life in Political Biography" conference in 2004 were similarly unfavorably disposed toward the new norm. "How can we ever prove a causal relation between happiness or unhappiness in the private sphere and public actions other than with some amateuristic psychological notions," was the question that the psychologist Joop Ellemers posed.²⁹ The majority of historians were skeptical about the claim that the personal could explain the political. And while only two of them did discuss the personal in relation to their (male) politicians explicitly, they did so without taking "the private" and "the political" as fixed categories for granted, suggesting that the boundaries between them are part of societal negotiations, and of the image or the "persona" that is invented by politicians.³⁰ Both speakers, therefore, displayed a critical awareness of the cohesion between private self and public image, without public life being reduced to (or overemphatically linked with) personality or sexuality.

Both authors referred in their contributions to the inspiring work of the Dutch historian of political culture Henk te Velde. In many of his studies we find analyses linking the political actions of men to the embodiment, conception, or experience of masculinity. For instance, he produced an interesting interpretation of the "virile lyrical style" of the nineteenth-century journalist Charles Boissevain and its role in reinvigorating liberal confidence in the nation.³¹ Above all, in his book *Stijlen van leiderschap* (Styles of Leadership), with its series of political portraits, he provided a number of Dutch and international examples of the enmeshment of private and public life, personal and political factors, in diverse constructions of political leadership.³² He discussed the sentimentality of the "family man" Abraham Kuyper, the Dutchman best known as the founder of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, who—in very much the same way as the British statesman W. E. Gladstone—enlisted his entire family in the project of furthering his political ambitions, and the impeccable honesty and modesty of the socialist Willem Drees (Dutch prime minister from 1948 to 1958), who dispensed with the macho image projected by his predecessor and orthodox Calvinist Hendrik Colijn. Both are fascinating examples of the merging of personal and political life.

Te Velde was also involved as one of the editors in the collection of essays *Machtige lichamen* (Powerful Bodies) where the personal and the political came together in the portraits of political figures' "bodies and

brains."³³ The book is a sort of response to the problem of disembodiment in political biography that Virginia Woolf identified in 1920 when she wrote that "One might read the lives of all the Cabinet Ministers since the accession of Queen Victoria without realizing that they had a body between them. To imagine any of the statues in Parliament Square running, climbing, or even in a state of nudity is not only impossible but also unseemly."³⁴ In *Powerful Bodies* diverse aspects of such quintessentially personal features as persons' bodies and physical presences, and the way they dealt with such matters, are invested with political significance. The volume not only includes an essay on Theodore Roosevelt, who was famous for his outdoor activities as a cowboy first and a game hunter later, but also a contribution on the collective image of American presidents as sportsmen, with fishing as their favorite pastime. With the immediate foregrounding of the body, gender becomes a visible part of the political process. It makes clear, for instance, that "having balls" certainly was an asset (if not a prerequisite) for a premodern ruler, and is so today, or that the representation of such female bodies as that of Marie Antoinette, which are involved in sexual acts, are exquisite means to depict the corruption of power.

To answer the question posed at the beginning of this section then, we could say that the challenge to integrate the vision that is couched in "the personal is the political" in political mainstream biography has certainly been taken up by some professional historians writing political biography, though not exactly in the way Renders and Etty called for. A fertile field connecting the personal and the political has been the study of political culture, which has incorporated an awareness of representation and power. It is no coincidence that with such an awareness gender figures more prominently and explicitly in texts and images of political biography.

To a certain extent the different ways in which Renders and Etty, on the one hand, and professional historians, on the other hand, think about the importance of the personal in explaining the political can perhaps be explained by disciplinary differences. Renders and Etty have both been trained as literary scholars who turned into professional journalists. Both wrote literary rather than political biographies; and writers may have a different relation to the public and private than politicians. Both overemphasize the personal—even, arguably, understanding it as something psychological. And both are literary critics who write for a mass audience in national newspapers, which perhaps has cultivated a preference in their writing for "strong narrative," if not "debunking" (and sex is still always good for that). In contrast, professional historians generally seem quite consistent in their refusal to (in their terms) "reduce" a person's life to "secrets" or "abnormal preferences" that have especial meaning in a psychological or psychoanalytic framework.³⁵ But do historians do so equally for men and for

women? Here, in my opinion, political (and professional) women's private lives, including their sexualities, have posed a serious challenge that has not always been properly met, precisely because the private is still most often seen as something personal only, instead of also social and political.

The Personal in Public Women's Biographies: Lesbian Secrets

It is a well-known fact that the majority of the early generations of political and professional women did not marry. In the "short" twentieth century (roughly until the second wave of feminism), women and public achievements were an uneasy combination, and the balance was, in any case, precarious. Women had to be "masculine" in their political and other public activities, while at the same time take care not to lose the mysterious and unstable (and unreliable) quality of "femininity." Being visible as wives or mothers could make them too feminine for public office (and of course, as *personae miserabilis*, they were strictly speaking not even accountable), but being visible as independent women could change the balance into "unhealthy" masculinity. And here professional women's quite aberrant private lives, living with family members, alone, or in the company of other women, or even loving other women, could turn into liabilities for their public careers. Here, also, their biographies became problematic.

The question of whether these women had lesbian relationships may well have hung in the air around these independent women, and it may have been implicit in negative comments about political or professional women's supposed masculinity or their unmarried status. The first historical interpretation of British suffrage militancy in 1935, for instance, linked the suffragettes to the "homosexual movement" and interpreted their actions as a form of "prewar lesbianism," when women became suddenly aware of their "long-neglected masculinity."³⁶ While in this case "lesbianism" is projected on politically active women, in other cases, biographers, sometimes to their own (unpleasant) surprise, discovered their protagonists to have had what very much looked like lesbian relationships. Thus Anna Mary Wells, in the introduction to a biographical treatment of the long-time president of Mount Holyoke, Miss Woolley, after she came to understand Miss Woolley's intimate relationship with Miss Marks, frankly confessed that "she found [herself] less tolerant of sexual deviance than [she] had supposed."³⁷

Gender historians had less difficulty in dealing with women couples. When reflecting on her biography of New Deal politician Molly Dewson, who lived with her friend Polly for more than fifty years, historian Susan Ware remarked that such partnerships as theirs were certainly not uncommon in this period. "Molly and Polly started their relationship in the 1910s,"

Ware wrote, "when long-standing and intense female friendships were still a socially accepted vehicle to a full personal and professional life without the constraints of marriage, especially for privileged educated daughters of the middle class. Families and friends welcomed such couples as an alternative to what was seen as a life of lonely spinsterhood."³⁸ Also Blanche Wiesen Cook's biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's study of M. Carey Thomas, and Estelle B. Freedman's biography of Miriam van Waters are good examples of how to write sensibly about public women's private lives.³⁹ All of them had to come to terms with their protagonists' untraditional relationships, their actual loves and friendships with women, or accusations of homosexuality. At the same time John d'Emilio presented us with a sensitive example of how to include homosexuality in the biography of a black male politician, Bayard Rustin, so as to illuminate the significance of the personal and sexual for the political, without reducing one to the other.⁴⁰

Although in the Netherlands the number of biographical studies of prominent public women is growing, it seems that the question of their sexual (or asexual) orientation is still often framed in rather restrictive terms that rely on either/or choices and essences.⁴¹ Thus, Anneke Linders, the late biographer of Radical Democratic League Member of Parliament Corry Tendeloo (1897-1956), tried to answer the question as to why Tendeloo had never married.⁴² In so doing she broached the possibility of a "lesbian secret." The very fact that Linders was unable to find out anything about Tendeloo's sexual life led her to posit that the politician was probably a lesbian; after all, publicly known homosexuality would have been completely incompatible with her career.⁴³ In a delightful double biography of two publishers, Tine van Klooster and Koos Schregardus, who ran a literary press in Amsterdam between 1926 and 1942, the author Inge de Wilde on the same basis of "absence of proof" came to the opposite conclusion: "nowhere does it become clear that these two women friends, who in all aspects shared their lives, probably also had an intimate relationship."⁴⁴ In both cases the conclusions are rather obligatory and have no further function for the narrative, while the meaning of sexuality is reduced to a label.

Another example of the difficulties of writing about the supposed lesbianism of a prominent political and professional woman is the recent biography of Gezina van der Molen (1892-1978) by political historian Gert van Klinken.⁴⁵ Van der Molen grew up in an orthodox Calvinist family with strong ties to the Anti-Revolutionary Party. When neither teaching nor nursing satisfied her or provided an outlet for her ambitions, she started on a journalistic career and became active in the Protestant women's movement. In 1924 she decided to take up the study of law at the Protestant Vrije Universiteit (Free University) in Amsterdam. After her doctoral promotion

she had wanted to play a role in the Anti-Revolutionary Party—but she was never even admitted to full membership. Nevertheless, she identified with its politics, supporting its proposed law to prohibit married women's labor in 1938, which set her apart from many of her female friends and allies. During World War II she was one of the first in her Protestant political milieu to understand that they had to fight the Nazi regime and accordingly became one of the most prominent members of the resistance. In 1947 she became the first woman professor at the Protestant Free University in Amsterdam.

Van Klinken's research is solid.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, his interpretation of her private life, which she shared for more than forty years with the Catholic teacher of classical languages, Maria Nolte, is problematic. He does not label her a lesbian outright; he does, however, allow the label to persist via contemporary citations, while he euphemistically writes about her "*seksuele geaardheid*" (sexual orientation). It definitely reminded me of the pointed review Sarah Churchwell wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement* of the recent biography of Katherine Hepburn by William J. Mann. "Mann's early acknowledgement that sexuality can be 'fluid,' and his promise that 'there will be no labeling in this book,' initially seem welcome and (generically speaking) overdue," Churchwell wrote. "True to his word, Mann never does use the word 'bisexual' to describe Hepburn. Pretty soon, however, the virtues in labels come rushing back to mind: brevity is one. . . . [And] one begins to hear the sound of an axe grinding in the background, especially as the narrative treats stories of Hepburn's heterosexuality with consistent skepticism or diminution, while lingering over homosexual affairs, without truly being able to substantiate either."⁴⁷

The biographies of Van der Molen and Hepburn both reduce their protagonists to Freudian subjects. In Hepburn's case, confusion about her own sexual identity defined her "truest self" and doomed her to failed relationships with repressed homosexual men (or rather, as Churchwell good humouredly and somewhat maliciously added, with Irish drunks). In the case of Van der Molen, the (supposed) denial or repression of her "sexual nature" put her under so much pressure that, not only did she quarrel with her father as a young girl, but she also turned into a feminist, however ambiguously.⁴⁸ Although her partnership with Nolte seems to have been a very happy one, only under the exceptional circumstances of living under Nazi occupation and being active in the resistance, argued Van Klinken, was she able to give free reign to her desires, which then resulted in her finest hour, becoming a precious representative of the resistance. The return to normal life brought back the earlier tensions, which then resulted in a failed effort to deal with adopted Jewish children after the war.

“The Personal is Political” and the Impossibility of Political/Public Women’s Biography

In my view Van Klinken failed to understand the difficult feminist politics in which Van der Molen was engaged in trying to change gender patterns within the conservative limits of political orthodox Protestantism without breaking away from it. His reproach of Christian rigidity and ambiguity on the basis of her (public) stance on the issue of married women’s labor is strained. To characterize her as rigid and to attribute this to her “highly personal—but never explicitly uttered—problematic” seems inconsistent with her openly lived life with a Catholic woman in the thoroughly pillarized organization of Dutch politics and society.⁴⁹ Moreover, he also failed to recognize the social and political significance of their relationship. Nolte may not herself have been a member of the educated Catholic women’s club, De Sleutelbos, but her more famous sister Agnes Nolte, who in 1953 became the first woman state secretary in the Netherlands, was. Central to this women’s “friendship league” was the idea that, between family and convent, there was a space for unmarried lay women professionals active in politics and society. This can be seen as a Catholic translation of ideas that such liberal (suffrage) feminists as historian Johanna Naber had developed about the crucial role of celibate and unmarried women and men in all important historical movements.⁵⁰ Gezina van der Molen knew and admired Johanna Naber, and their correspondence testifies to the fact that Van der Molen also identified as a professional woman who saw her unmarried life as valuable and an asset to society. Women’s friendships were an indivisible part of that life.

Van Klinken was not able to recognize the political dimension of these women’s private lives together and therefore fell into the trap of reductive psychological explanation. Mieke Aerts feared precisely this trap and therefore decided against writing the biography of De Sleutelbos founder and Catholic politician Jacqueline Hillen. In her contribution to *Naar het Leven*, Aerts explained how her biographical fascination with Hillen had resulted in an “antibiographical” effect. Hillen had scrupulously tied her personal identity to her circle of consciously unmarried, academically trained, and professionally working Catholic women friends in De Sleutelbos and protected her personal life from the public in local and provincial politics. For that reason Aerts had decided that Hillen’s proto-feminist “politics of the personal” was incompatible with the writing of her biography.

Aerts’s later analysis of Jacqueline Hillen and Marga Klompé, the first cabinet minister in the Netherlands—in the context of a wider PhD research project on “Gender and the Politics of Catholic Emancipation”—again highlighted the problematic relationship between femininity, private

life, and politics for these politicians.⁵¹ Klompé, in particular, had done her utmost to make her private life invisible in the pursuit of her political career. Aerts accordingly entitled the chapter on Klompé "Politics as an Impersonal Project." In Klompé's largely self-orchestrated and vigilantly guarded public persona, private life and femininity receded ever further into the background. How she did that can be followed almost daily in the 1950s by albums kept by her mother, which are full of newspaper cuttings with interviews and reports. The process of banishment started with her appointment as minister of social affairs, when she held a press conference after a flood of reports discussing her femininity (or lack of it) in terms ranging from her humaneness to her bossiness, and from her idealism to her image as stern mistress and virago. She calmly declared to a packed auditorium that the only difference between a male and a female minister was that the latter might *possibly* have a powder compact somewhere among her possessions. Competence was the only thing that mattered; she wished to be judged by this criterion alone. In the meantime, she nourished her public image by commenting that public and private life existed in a continuum, and by referring to her qualities as "human" and, therefore, gender neutral: "The worst thing that could happen to me would be having someone come to see me to talk about women's rights. I would have to be thinking constantly: 'Remember, you're speaking as a woman here.'"⁵²

Although gender historian and women's biographer Marjan Schwegman knew all about Klompé's "politics of the impersonal," it was only after accepting a commission from the Prince Bernhard Culture Foundation—which she later returned—to write Klompé's biography did she also experience the "antibiographical" effect. In the *Biografie Bulletin*, Schwegman explained that her decision was a response to, on the one hand, Klompé's own desire to shield her private life from scrutiny and, on the other, the lack of documentary sources that resulted from her efforts.⁵³ It brings the number of abandoned biographies of prominent Dutch women, who were all in different ways active in politics, to four: Nellie van Kol, Heleen Ankersmit, Jacqueline Hillen, and Marga Klompé.

Aerts's and Schwegman's arguments are understandable and to a certain extent also convincing. However, they seem simultaneously to testify to a perhaps overanxious ethical and methodological responsibility for their subjects and their feminist scholarship. "She wouldn't have wanted me to do so," is the short-hand summary of Aerts's antibiographical reaction to Hillen. But is it not true that politicians in general, but also other professionals such as scientists, as part of a dominant liberal tradition, and I would like to add, as the result of a co-construction of masculinity and (public) professionalism, until recently were very reluctant in "exhibiting" the personal and the private sides of their public lives? Thus Te Velde sees

as the most important trend in political autobiography in the Dutch historical context “posthumous memoirs” that mixed modesty and propriety and revealed little of the private. The modesty frame seems to have been widespread historically, which explains the well-known (and I would say partly gendered) complaints of the “widow” and her role in guarding the deceased husband’s legacy. Ben Pimlott, in the case of John Maynard Keynes, even detected many “widows,” real and metaphoric, who from all different perspectives have an interest in protecting his image.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it hardly ever prevented biographers from writing (mostly male) politician’s lives even without more than a hint to personal matters without ever having been taken to task for it.

I am convinced that women politicians guarded their privacy even more jealously than men and that they did so indeed for other reasons than just the creation of a modest persona. Many women who played a visible role in the public arena in the period between, approximately, 1920 and 1980—not just in politics, but equally in the academic world, government bodies, or education—erased, as much as possible, all traces of their personal lives to the detriment of their historical legacy.⁵⁵ This is true for the Netherlands and elsewhere. Even when they had not done so themselves, their colleagues or surviving relatives often did it for them, either unthinkingly or out of ignorance, frequently justifying their silence by invoking the reticence or modesty of the “dominant aunt” in question or even her difficult personality.⁵⁶ In these cases nieces and nephews, sons and daughters—rather than widows—watched over the historical record. Many of us will remember how in the seventies and eighties feminist scholars started to question the way in which Virginia Woolf’s memory was framed by her nephew Quentin Bell and her niece Angelica Garnett who held the rights to all her papers.⁵⁷ In her biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, Blanche Wiesen Cook similarly complained, in somewhat veiled terms, that “if her heirs followed [ER’s] lead and honored her discretionary code [in the autobiography *You Learn by Living*], they can hardly be faulted. But the continual almost hysterical reactions to the intimate life revealed in her correspondence (a correspondence she carefully preserved for the historical record) suggests another pattern: Our generation is as prudish as our ‘Victorian’ forebears when faced with the real lives of historically significant women.”⁵⁸

In 1998, Mieke Aerts returned to this issue. She wrote an amusing and imaginary, but theoretically sober essay in the form of a fax that Klompé had written to her from the “here-after” to discuss the decision of the Prince Bernhard Culture Foundation to have her biography written. In this essay Aerts hinted at the fact that her decision not to write the biography of Klompé was certainly also related to her refusal to enlist Klompé in the historical group that feminist historians often too enthusiastically have

labeled as "lesbian." In the fax Klompé complimented "Miss Aerts" with her suggestion that Klompé had indeed carefully constructed her public and private image as one, so that she had (supposedly) nothing to hide from the journalists. Nonetheless, whenever she was provoked in telling journalists such a personal detail as that her inspiration came from her religious experience, they had always looked sullen and completely at a loss. And now, she complained, she had to watch how one biographer after another disregarded her opinions altogether and came up with psychological explanations for her political accomplishments, including the suggestion that she had sublimated her sexuality. And had not, at "your own very promotion, Miss Aerts," one of the highly learned opponents suggested that Klompé had been a lesbian and therefore such a decisive and emancipated person?

Up in heaven, Klompé had met two "really nice young men," the American sociologist (C. Wright) Mills and a passionate French philosopher who had introduced himself as Michel (Foucault). Mills had explained to her that hardly any contemporary biographer understood the historicity of the ways in which people understood and legitimated themselves, and instead imposed their presentist interpretations on historical lives. Michel had immediately concurred and had argued that biographers should not look for "deeper motives" but should try to understand which vocabularies subjects had used to legitimate subject positions, actions, and practices. In the case of Klompé, a biographer should be aware of the fact that being an unmarried politically prominent woman at that time necessitated a constant awareness of certain "impertinent" questions that enforced such women to proactively create a convincing persona. Understanding that, it would become unnecessary for the biographer to look for the deeper personality or to understand the gap between the real and the constructed Klompé.

Though the fax again shows the scrupulousness of Aerts's historical hermeneutical practices, in my eyes, however, the Klompé case is neither wholly unique nor specifically Catholic. Her politics of the personal and the successful collapse of the private in a public persona is recognizable in the lives of many of her female contemporaries. Instead of abandoning biography, therefore, I would say that biography is perhaps the best way to study women's efforts to create personae that are convincing enough to enable them to occupy positions of public visibility and (relative) power. And as with all history, the sources and historical subjects will have to have a good say in the way they are portrayed, but they cannot have the last word. It is in the end always the historian who constructs meaning.

Where Feminist Biographers Fear to Tread

Until biographers begin to digest the way in which Freudian explanations (or the psychiatric persuasion) still dominate their understanding of men and women, and of how women's lives have so long been construed predominantly in gendered terms of their dependency on the love of a man, they will continue to repeat the old views on this subject.⁵⁹ In so doing they will continue to exert an undesirable influence on processes of collective memory that are formed by such popular media as television. Clear examples of this influence can be seen in two recent Dutch TV documentaries about Klompé and Van der Molen.⁶⁰

The first documentary opens with the question of whether Klompé, since she had remained "alone," had also been "lonely."⁶¹ The program-makers seem to suggest that she has gone down in history as an "unmarried woman"—rather than as the Netherlands' first female cabinet minister! This is also what is implied in the summary, which the broadcasting company supplied of its documentary: "Marga Klompé has her own prize, countless streets are named after her, thousands of Dutch women have been inspired by her to make more of their lives, but she never got anywhere in her love life. She was married to society, but remained a Miss."⁶² From the deepest recesses of the archives, or so it suggests, a passionate poem in German by "Dr. W." is retrieved, the inevitable lost lover in so many women's plots, who rescues her from suggestions of inadequacy, if not abnormality. The program-makers also mention that after the notorious kiss that the controversial and highly popular, communist turned Catholic, gay novelist Gerard Reve bestowed on the minister when she presented him with the prestigious P. C. Hooft Prize for Literature, persistent rumors circulated that she was a lesbian.⁶³ It evidently did not occur to them that Klompé may have opted to remain unmarried because she wanted an interesting career and that was the only way to retain her legal independence and to keep her own money, even though Klompé says so herself in one of the film fragments. From childhood she tells us, she had believed that girls should not be raised with a view to marriage. Her political achievements, like the Social Assistance Act, get rather less emphasis, so that the documentary does exactly what Klompé sought so firmly to avoid: it presents an image of her personal life and implicated "femininity" that overshadows her political work. No wonder she complained about it in her fax to Aerts.

The second documentary, about Van der Molen, in the same series is an even better (or rather worse) example of how a special professional woman is portrayed mostly in terms of her (very misapprehended) private life.⁶⁴ Her "lesbianism" is amply commented upon by a strange mixture of spokesmen and women whose authority to speak on her behalf is sometimes

questionable, while the range of comments is so wide and contradictory that the effect is rather confusing. Indeed, one of the men called her his dreaded bad mother, and another praised her for her motherly qualities, while a niece denied anything that suggested a sexual relationship, in the meantime pleasing the documentary makers with an incessant stream of anecdotes about these "highly educated women." Cut through these interviews are fragments of an older TV documentary that dates from 1964. These fragments are all shots in or around the house she shared with Nolte, who also figures quite prominently. In the early documentary, the term lesbianism was of course not mentioned, but more than suggested by such questions as whether she had the time to find a husband or who of the two women was "the master of the house."

Conclusion

"She would not have wanted it," Aerts concluded, defending her "anti-biographical reaction" to Jacqueline Hillen. As a gender historian I would say that our historical protagonists do not have the last word, and that changing views of political and sexual morality have made it unavoidable to discuss the sexuality of women in public life, lesbian or otherwise, as part of the wider exploration of their personal lives. In my view the reaction seems to fit too nicely in the broader impulse of the pioneering generation of women professionals to shield their private lives from public scrutiny. As historians I think that we do not have to repeat that impulse and that we should write prominent women's lives, thereby retrieving from oblivion how they tried to resolve the paradoxes of gender in their personal and public or political aspects.

Of course, this research should be conducted in a soundly constructed, gender-sensitive pattern of interpretation, in which women's personal lives are contextualized rather than psychologized, and in which sexuality and sexual orientation are not seen as purely individual or personal, but also political. This means that living arrangements or sexuality should not only be treated as a purely personal matter, bound up solely with lifestyle or character, but as an issue related to knowledge of gender and sexuality, and power. Thus, although Van der Molen's biographer credits her choice to share her life with Nolte, he reduced it to something personal and psychological, and cannot see their relationship as part of a larger shared cultural repertoire among professional women. For Klompé one could argue that the Catholic women's networks from which she built up her political career did indeed provide her with a "politics of the personal" in which the personal was completely immersed in the political. But that pattern was

not as historically unique and Catholic, nor only reserved for women, as Aerts in her intriguing analysis has argued.

The suggestion by the organizers of the conference "Private Life in Political Biography" that there is or should be an increasing focus on the personal in biographies of politicians lacks precision. First, the suggestion that more and more biographers try to explain the politician's life from his (or her) personal traumas or inner wounds is not confirmed, at least not for professional historians. What my analysis makes clear in the second place is that the question of the role of private matters in political biography very much depends on the protagonist's sex/gender and the way in which gender is taken seriously as a category of analysis. The good news is that among professional historians who focus on the study of political culture the adage "the personal is political" has been taken up so as to also understand the gender aspects of male politician's lives, as well as the historical dimension of such concepts as public and private, and personal and political. The bad news is that for Dutch women active in politics there has been a tendency to either refrain from writing their biography, or to write a biography and then overemphasize the personal, but now in the form of a (too) frank inquiry into their sexuality as a fixed category of personal identity. The examples of the documentaries as well as of the biographies of Van der Molen and Klompé show that their (supposed) lesbianism attracts a lot of attention. In my opinion these examples demonstrate that perhaps it remains easier to reduce women to "inner wounds" and "traumas" than to do so with men.

I do agree with the nice young men Klompé met in the hereafter, Wright Mills and Michel Foucault, that as historians we have the obligation to really try and understand the past as different from the present, but we should not reify the past or be dictated to by its languages. As historians we have the power of perspective and so may be able not to just repeat the past, but to distance ourselves from it at the same time as we re-create it. If we do not develop the new biographical stories we want to listen to, others will repeat the old ones.

NOTES

¹The Digital Women's Lexicon (DVN) was founded in 2003 by historian Els Kloek. See <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/DVN>.

²*Duizend en één vrouwen in de Nederlandse geschiedenis*. Documentatiemap Werkconferentie (reader of the working conference *Duizend en één vrouwen*), 26 November 2004.

³Mineke Bosch, "Zonder vrouwelijke doden geen onsterfelijke vrouwen. Pleidooi voor een Nieuw Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland," *Biografisch Bulletin* 15, no. 3 (2005): 37–51.

⁴James Brabazon, *Dorothy L. Sayers* (London: Gollancz, 1988). For an interpretation of this book, see Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988; repr., New York: Routledge, 2008), chap. 2. For this interpretation of Aletta Jacobs, see the documentary *Het hoogste streven: Aletta Jacobs*, directed by Nouschka van Brakel (Amsterdam: Elly Klaassen en Stienette Bosklopper, 1995).

⁵Elsbeth Etty, *Liefde is heel het leven niet. Henriette Roland Holst 1869–1952* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1996).

⁶See Agnes Sneller and Agnes Verbiest, "Roland Holst en Henriëtte: taal en gender in IJkpunt 1900," in "De IJkpunten geijkt . . ." ed. Mineke Bosch and Marieke Hellevoort, special issue, *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 29, no. 1 (2003): 64–68.

⁷Etty, *Liefde is heel het leven niet*, 213–14.

⁸Etty published her lecture "Geen Privacy voor de doden" in the national newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, 7 April 2006; and my response, "Biografie en ongelijkheid," appeared one week later in *NRC Handelsblad*, 14 April 2006. Elaborate versions appeared in the conference volume. See, Elsbeth Etty, "Doden hebben geen privacy—Het persoonlijke in de politieke biografie," in *Privé in de politieke biografie*, ed. Hans Renders and Gerrit Voerman (Amsterdam: Boom, 2007), 97–107; and Mineke Bosch, "Het persoonlijke is politiek: dilemma's van gelijke behandeling in de biografie," in Renders and Voerman, *Privé in de politieke biografie*, 49–65. There is a link with the reception of my own biography of the Dutch feminist Aletta Jacobs, but I leave that aside in this article.

⁹Hans Renders, "Privé in de politieke biografie," in Renders and Voerman, *Privé in de politieke biografie*, 9.

¹⁰For this explanation, I am indebted to Mieke Aerts, *De politiek van de katholieke vrouwenemancipatie. Van Marga Klompé tot Jacqueline Hillen* (Amsterdam: SUA, 1994), 9–10.

¹¹The standard Dutch work on the concept "the personal is political" and second-wave feminism is Irene Costera Meijer, *Het persoonlijke wordt politiek. Feministische bewustwording in Nederland, 1965–1980* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1996).

¹²J. E. Kool-Smit, "Het onbehagen bij de vrouw," *De Gids* 130, nos. 9–10 (1967): 267–81. The term "onbehagen" (discontent) refers to Sigmund Freud's essay *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1930).

¹³Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop Journal* 5, no. 1 (1978): 9–66.

¹⁴Mieke Aerts, "Catholic Constructions of Femininity: Three Dutch Women's Organizations in Search of a Politics of the Personal," in *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change*, ed. Judith Friedlander et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 256–68.

¹⁵See Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle, and Nancy Schrom Dye, "The Problem of Women's History," in *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays*, ed. Berenice Carroll (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 79–80.

¹⁶Mieke Aerts, "Vriendschap voor Jacqueline Hillen of de antibiografische effecten van het biografisch sentiment," in *Naar het leven. Feminisme & biografisch onderzoek*, ed. Aerts et al. (Amsterdam: SUA, 1988), 117–27.

¹⁷Carol Asscher, Louise DeSalvo, and Sara Ruddick, eds., *Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write about their Work on Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); Sara Alpern, et al., eds., *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); *Modern English Auto/Biography and Gender*, special issue, *Gender and History* 2, no. 1 (1990); and Liz Stanley, *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

¹⁸Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: Norton, 1973), xv.

¹⁹Marjan Schwegman, *Feminisme als boetedoening. Biografie van de Italiaanse schrijfster en feministe Gualberta Alaide Beccari, 1868–1906* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1988), 484–98; and Schwegman, "Ziekte en feminisme. De levensgeschiedenis van Gualberta Alaide Beccari, 1842–1906," in Aerts et al., *Naar het leven*, 91–102.

²⁰Kathleen Barry, "The New Historical Synthesis: Women's Biography," *Journal of Women's History* 1, no. 3 (1990): 75; and Barry, "Postscript: On Women's Biography," in *Susan B. Anthony: A Biography of a Singular Feminist* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 359–72.

²¹Angela V. John, "My Own Biography," <http://www.angelavjohn.com/aboutme.php> (accessed 21 May 2008); and John, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life, 1862–1952* (London: Routledge, 1995).

²²Liz Stanley refers to Victoria Glendinning when she uses the term "spotlight biography" in her article "Is There a Feminist Auto/Biography?" *Gender and History* 2, no. 1 (1990): 61.

²³Barbara Caine, *Destined to Be Wives: The Sisters of Beatrice Webb* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Caine, "Feminist Biography and Feminist History," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 247–60; and Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

²⁴Liz Stanley with Ann Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison* (London: The Women's Press, 1986).

²⁵Myriam Everard, "Drie geschiedenissen van liefde. Enige grepen uit het leven van Titia van der Tuuk," in Aerts et al., *Naar het leven*, 103–16.

²⁶Kay Ferres, "Gender, Biography and the Public Sphere," in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St. Clair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 303–19.

²⁷Ben Pimlott, "The Future of Political Biography," *The Political Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (1990): 214–24, 219.

²⁸Kay Ferres mentions John Rickard's "warmly received" family biography of Australia's second prime minister Alfred Deakin as an example of how in the public lives of men the private has been integrated lately. Kay Ferres, "Gender, Biography and the Public Sphere," in France and Clair, *Mapping Lives*, 303–19.

²⁹Joop Ellemers, "Sceptische notities over het wetenschappelijke karakter van biografieën," in Renders and Voerman, *Privé in de politieke biografie*, 125–40.

³⁰Jeroen Koch, "'Familieaangelegenheden van hoogst teederen aard'—Abraham Kuyper publiek en privé," in Renders and Voerman, *Privé in de politieke biografie*, 41–48; and Jelle Gaemers, "Willem Drees privé verklaard," in Renders and Voerman, *Privé in de politieke biografie*, 67–82.

³¹Henk te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbesef. Liberalisme en nationalisme in Nederland, 1870–1918* (The Hague: SDU, 1992), 153–61.

³²Henk te Velde, *Stijlen van leiderschap. Persoon en politiek van Thorbecke tot Den Uyl* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2002).

³³Catrien Santing, Henk te Velde, and Margrith Wilke, eds., *Machtige lichamen. Het vingertje van Luns en andere politieke wapenfeiten* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2005).

³⁴Virginia Woolf, "Body and Brain," in *Books and Portraits*, ed. Mary Lyon (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), 250.

³⁵See Klaas van Berkel, "Discussabel en irrelevant. Over de psychoanalyse in de biografie," *Biografie Bulletin* 8, no. 1 (1998): 55–61. At a conference on psychoanalysis and biography, Van Berkel, who wrote a biography of historian of science E. J. Dijksterhuis, called for a break between psychology and biography. He equated the personal with psychology, and thus as irrelevant to scientific biography, it being only a method to analyze the making of a "great work" (58–59).

³⁶George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935; repr., London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966), as quoted in June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

³⁷Anna Mary Wells, *Miss Marks and Miss Woolley* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978).

³⁸Susan Ware, *Partner and I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 59.

³⁹Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, vol. 1, 1884–1933 (New York: Penguin Books, 1992); Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); and Estelle B. Freedman, *Maternal Justice: Miriam van Waters and the Female Reform Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴⁰John d'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

⁴¹The debate on women loving women and/or lesbian women is a long-standing one. Influential was Adrienne Rich, who defined lesbianism in terms of opposition to heterosexual existence rather than in terms of sexuality. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985* (New York: Norton, 1986). In the (lesbian) sexuality debates and among historians of women, however, her views were criticized as too unhistorical.

⁴²Anneke Linders, "*Frappez, frappez toujours*," *Corry Tendeloo en het feminisme in haar tijd* (Hilversum, Netherlands: Verloren, 2003).

⁴³Linders based her study on one contemporary publication, Laura Hutton, *De ongehuwde vrouw. Zielsconflicten en sexuale problemen* (Amsterdam: Blitz, 1937), and one secondary source, Judith Schuijf, *Een stilzwijgende samenzwering. Lesbische vrouwen in Nederland, 1920–1950* (Amsterdam: Stichting IISG, 1974). I do not agree with the verdict "she was lesbian" when there is no trace of self identification as a lesbian. There may be a "lesbian continuum" between single women and lesbians, but there are also distinct lifestyles and networks that deserve to be recognized. For my own treatment of women's friendships in the context of suffrage politics, see Mineke Bosch with Annemarie Kloosterman, *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1902–1943* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990).

⁴⁴Inge de Wilde, *Uitgeverij De Spiegel. Over de uitgeefsters Tine van Klooster en Koos Schregardus* (Eelde, Netherlands: Barhuis Publishing, 2005), 20.

⁴⁵Gert van Klinken, *Strijdbaar en omstreden: Een biografie van de calvinistische verzetsvrouw Gezina van der Molen* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006).

⁴⁶He could, interestingly, make use of a large archival collection that was inventoried by Van der Molen's longtime intimate partner and donated to the Historical Documentation Center of Dutch Protestantism at the Vrije Universiteit.

⁴⁷Sarah Churchwell, "Radiant, glorious queen," review of *Kate: The Woman Who Was Hepburn*, by William J. Mann, *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 December 2006.

⁴⁸In an interesting twist on the idea that feminism leads to "pseudo homosexuality, or homosexuality by necessity," Van Klinken argues that Van der Molen's suppressed homosexuality led to a kind of pseudo feminism.

⁴⁹On Dutch pillarized society, see Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

⁵⁰Maria Grever, *Strijd tegen de stilte. Johanna Naber (1859–1941) en de vrouwenstem in de geschiedenis* (Hilversum, Netherlands: Verloren, 1994).

⁵¹Mieke Aerts, *De politiek van de katholieke vrouwenemancipatie: Van Marga Klompé tot Jacqueline Hillen* (Amsterdam: SUA, 1994), 199.

⁵²*Algemeen Handelsblad*, 15 September 1961, as quoted in Aerts, *De politiek van de katholieke vrouwenemancipatie*, 34.

⁵³Joke Linders, "Van zuurdesem kun je geen biografie schrijven. Waarom Marjan Schwegman onderzoek naar leven en werk van Marga Klompé staakte," *Biografie Bulletin* 12, no. 2 (2002): 114–18.

⁵⁴Pimlott, "The Future of Political Biography," 219–20.

⁵⁵As a historian of women, gender, and science, I have often despaired at the lack of personal archives of women scientists or higher-educated professional women. This rather systematic policy of erasure is in sharp contrast to the way in which suffrage feminists orchestrated their memories.

⁵⁶Mieke Aerts uses the expression "dominant aunt" ("lastige tante") in her book *De politiek van de katholieke vrouwenemancipatie*, 9–10.

⁵⁷See Jane Marcus, "Invisible Mending," in Asscher, DeSalvo, and Ruddick, *Between Women*, 381–96.

⁵⁸Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, 1:10.

⁵⁹Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Psychiatric Persuasion: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁶⁰"Marga Klompé," episode in *Profiel* series, KRO, broadcast on October 11, 2006; and "Gezina van der Molen," episode in *Profiel* series, KRO, broadcast on May 2, 2007.

⁶¹In the spoken introduction and on screen the title is "The life story of Miss (Mejuffrouw) Marga Klompé," which is a dated way of referring to an unmarried woman. I am afraid that it is a bit too emphatic in respect of historical context that this title is used, and that especially in the framing of the documentary (the spoken introduction, the PR material) the documentary makers meant to recall old connotations of the word 'Mejuffrouw'.

⁶²Dirk Schouten and Stijn Fens, "Profiel: Marga Klompé", see KRO-website: http://reporter.kro.nl/uitzendingen/2006/1011_marga_klompe/intro.aspx (accessed 26 May 2008).

⁶³Mineke Bosch, "The Meaning of a Kiss: Different Historiographical Approaches to the Sixties, in *L'Homme*," *Europäisches Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 20, no. 2 (2009).

⁶⁴Marijke Vreeburg, "Profiel: Gezina van der Molen", see KRO-website: http://profiel.kro.nl/2007/0502_van_der_molen/intro.aspx. See also Mineke Bosch, "Van 'bijzonder' mens tot 'abnormale' vrouw: psychoanalyse, gender en de biografie," in *Oude levens, nieuwe kwesties. Dag van de biografie*, ed. Rob Bindels and Ben van Melick (Maastricht: Huis van de Kunsten, 2007).