

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE BOOK

Towards a history of women's self-defence against gender-based violence

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(in collaboration with the Italian Society of Women Historians)

Male violence against women has gained increasing importance in recent decades, both in the public debate and among scholars. Historical research has analysed it since the 1970s, gradually taking into consideration the multiple dimensions and forms of violence and studying long-term continuities and changing factors.

Important insights have been gained into the history of the legal legitimisation of violence, achieved through secular institutions such as the *ius corrigendi*, crime of honour, forced marriage by rape, the discipline of adultery, separations, and female sexuality.

If at an early stage historiography worked mainly on the deep links that violence had and has with gender inequality, family order, patriarchy, more recent strands of study have considered the emotions enlisted in masculine narratives of violence (see *Maschilità e violenza di genere*, ed. Rizzo and L. Schettini, Genesis XVIII, 2019, 2), the variables (of race, class and other social categories) that contribute to the construction of the category of victim, the practices of male support at the scene of violence (from the community to courtrooms, passing through public security offices and domestic space).

Many aspects of the history of male violence against women remain unexplored.

In particular, the history of women's practices of self-defence, individual and collective, organised and spontaneous, against male violence is still to be recounted.

This is the topic on which we are opening a research project and inviting proposals for a collective book to be published in spring 2024 by Italian publisher Viella.

This is a crucial history, which promises to take into consideration new elements useful for a more correct understanding of the issue.

Elsa Dorlin's study (*Self-Defense. A Philosophy of Violence*, 2022, ed. or. 2017) with the various historical examples supporting the author's considerations, is an important first reference for delving into the experiences of reaction to the domination exercised over the body and lives, not only of women. Another study, this time on self-defence and its recognition in court (*La legittima difesa delle donne. Una lettura del diritto penale oltre pregiudizi e stereotipi*, edited by Claudia Pecorella, 2022), offers many insights into the contiguity - but also the different perspectives and limits constituted by the legal institution and judicial proceedings - with self-defence practices and the solutions embraced to escape from violent relationships. At the same time, as closer investigations into women's struggles show, the feminist and women's movements have many times offered tools, languages, symbols and practices of action capable of disrupting the paradigms of the judicial liturgy and subverting pre-established roles (Wendy L. Rouse, *Her Own Hero. The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement*, 2017; Nadia Maria Filippini, *Mai più sole contro la violenza sessuale. Una pagina storica del femminismo degli anni Settanta*, 2022). Original and peculiar self-

defence strategies sometimes imitated, sometimes ignored by movements elsewhere, about which we would like to know more.

These new investigations also make it possible to analyse the secular representation of women as defenceless and passive victims of gender-based violence. A representation that has had and has multiple implications, today increasingly rejected by history and women's movements (Tamar Pitch, *Il malinteso della vittima. Una lettura femminista della cultura punitiva*, 2022). A representation that, above all, fails to account for the multiple ways in which women in the past reacted to male violence and, in general, fought gender-based violence even in legal and cultural systems in which it was fully legitimised.

The aim of this work is therefore primarily to consider gender violence in history by giving prominence to women's agency, in its multiple and sometimes tortuous individual and collective expressions of reaction to brutality, risk and fear.

Secondly, in the wake of the few available studies, we intend to look at the function that the representation of women essentially as victims has historically played in strengthening the culture of violence.

The identification of women as all potential victims has, for instance, on the one hand weakened female role models and, on the other hand, substantiated the stereotype of women as naturally in need of male protection, of men to defend them from 'other' men, who are conveniently represented as foreigners, enemies, immigrants, etc.

In the light of these remarks, we will consider for publication proposals for contributions dealing with experiences of self-defence or reaction to domestic and sexual violence, as well as collective strategies and practices of struggle (support networks, campaigns, actions). Proposals may refer to a broad chronological span, from the Middle Ages to the contemporary age and to different fields (history, popular traditions, history of literature, anthropology, history of art, etc.).

Contributions can be in Italian or English.

In order to encourage documentary research, which is highly recommended given the new topic, the publication process will follow this timetable:

- The **proposal** (title and abstract of max 500 words + brief biographical note), is to be sent to the editors (simona.feci@unipa.it and laura.schettini@unipd.it) by **15 March 2023** (email subject: self-defence proposal).
- **Confirmation** of acceptance or rejection of submitted proposals: **7 April**.
- Selected proposals will be presented at a pre-publication **workshop** in **October/November 2023**.
- The submission of the **full version of contributions** is scheduled for **15 January 2024**.