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Advisor Report for Manon Sarraz-Bournet's Master's Thesis in Gender Studies at Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

Manon Sarraz-Bournet has submitted the thesis entitled, "Constructing Feminist Memory through Grassroots Activism: The Case of the Early Modern Scottish Witch-Hunts," as part of her requirements for the Gender Studies Master's Degree Program at Charles University. As the title suggests, the thesis examines contemporary grassroots movements in Scotland to memorialize the Scottish witch hunts. Manon pays particular attention to feminist grassroots organizations, their memorial projects, and how they seek to remember, what radical feminists have deemed, 'the burning times,' although not all of the projects she analyzes come from feminist organizations. She argues that, through their work, the feminist projects construct physical (and/or virtual) counter-memorials and thus counter-memories of the trials; they seek to revise patriarchal, historical understanding of the trials and memorialize those accused (most often women) and killed. In the process, the feminist organizations wish to bring the trials and their brutal effects to the public's attention (5) and into public discourse. To do this, Manon analyzes seven examples of memorial projects, although many of these seven fall under the same feminist grassroots movement. For example, the tartan and the podcast are projects of the Witches of Scotland, although the organization's main goals are a public apology, a public memorial of the events, and a legal pardon for those accused during the witch trials (42). She concludes that these projects are examples of "witch-hunt memorialization[s]... [which] shed... light on the creative strategies employed by grassroots groups, and the ways in which alternative forms of memorial production might act as a politicized medium able to bypass patriarchal structures of memory," (73). I will return to this decision made by Manon to look at grassroots feminist, and not explicitly feminist, grassroots projects later in this report.

This thesis is rich in historical detail and historical interpretation of the Scottish witch trials and concentrates mainly on feminist research, feminist historical interpretations, and debates within those two fields, yet Manon rightly draws into the discussion, through relevant footnotes, the scholarly works of the 'traditional' historical interpretations of the Scottish witch hunts. This sets the stage for the material she analyzes and grounds well the interpretations of that material which she offers. Despite the debates within feminist interpretations of the witch hunts, Manon remains ambivalent as with whose feminist interpretation she sides, although she does criticize the patriarchal dismissal of most feminist scholarship on witchcraft as ahistorical or too political, which is laudable. It is clear that Manon finds the Scottish feminist memorialization projects worthy of public attention both as memorials and for the ways in which they change the established narratives of the witch trials. Yet, she includes within the thesis two examples of non-feminist origins: the Orkney Witchcraft Memorial and the Maggie Wall memorial. As for the Orkney project, Manon uses the example to illustrate how grassroots commemorative projects are not inherently feminist but must strive to be so. The Maggie Wall memorial on the other hand has become feminist, according to Manon, in the way it does not ignore the brutal history of patriarchal violence against women (although it is not without possible concerns in terms of feminist memory activism) (60). Both of these

organizations and their inclusion in the thesis could have been more clearly compared to the feminist grassroots organizing, which only would have made the thesis more clear in drawing out what it is specifically that feminist grassroots memory activism wishes to accomplish when it comes to witchcraft (which again I will say more about later).

As Manon's advisor, I must commend Manon for taking on this topic. As is clear within the thesis itself, Manon has done extensive research both on the traditional (patriarchal and less so) interpretations of the witch trials and the extensive feminist revisions of such understandings as well as the feminist reclaiming of the word witch and the modern practices of the Feminist Spirituality Movement (FSM). Manon has done much of this work independently, only occasionally asking for an additional FSM source or inquiring as to whether I had access to a particular book or article. We also had many deep conversations as to how to do this material justice, and those discussions and Manon's deep reflection on our discussions show clearly in this thesis. When it comes to feedback on the work, Manon strived to integrate my comments and suggestions. This I find particularly important in the analysis where it is clear that she now has more balance than she previously did between descriptive sections for the purposes of understanding the projects and analytical sections as is fitting a thesis.

Yet, Manon has also reworked entire sections of the thesis out of her own volition and to great effect. For example, the original section on the history of the trials was not explicitly only the feminist understandings. It was Manon's own idea to cut out most of the 'traditional' histories and instead focus on feminist interpretations and supplement them with footnotes about 'traditional' sources. This change has given considerable depth to the thesis and illustrates Manon's deep understanding of the trials and their interpretations. This change is a great example of Manon's abilities to think critically about what is important for her own scholarship, and the change allows Manon to dedicate considerable time to what is meant by feminist interpretations of the witchcraft trials. Deciding how one interprets the herstory/history of the trials has significant implications for feminist memory activism, and her choice to specifically highlight different feminist interpretations, that often do not agree, demonstrates further complexities within that feminist memory activism. I commend Manon for the decision to bring complexity to the issue at hand and thereby illustrating the ways in which feminist interpretation is not a monolith even in such what some would say are rather niche topics.

If there was one thing that is still not clear to me, and perhaps it really only struck me upon reading this work as a whole is the inclusion of the not-specifically-feminist grassroots movements and memorials. Clearly, they illustrate how contemporary memorialization projects are not all feminist, but what else they do could have been made clearer. Here, I think a more thorough explanation of how they participate or not in feminist memory activism would be helpful. Manon hints at the ways in which the Orkney project remembers differently, but I think considerably more about how the project remembers differently could have been mentioned. A good way to illustrate this point, that could also strengthen the thesis, would be to have included a summary at the end of the analysis section, bringing together all of the samples and comparing and contrasting their (feminist) memory activism. This summary would also help illustrate the scope of the Witches of Scotland for example in comparison to the Orkney memorial, the Fife path, and the Maggie Wall Memorial. I believe, at the minimum, it would make clearer just how rich and decidedly feminist the Witches of Scotland project is when it comes to memory

activism in comparison to other memorial projects. Finally, it would solve the issue of the analysis section's abrupt end.

In addition, I do have some other more nit-picky question/suggestions regarding the analysis section in which I occasionally yearned for greater clarity and more explanation. For example, on pages 57-59, it is unclear to me if what is said about the memorial are Manon's own thoughts and/or what material comes from the authors she cites (Mitchell and Wagner). I would also like further explanation of the last three sentences before the subheading *The Website* on page 66 and more about how walking the Fife path on page 67 affects memory activism (could it function as something like a labyrinth, which have had their own revival in FSM and other neo-paganisms?). I would also have loved further reflection on the shape of the Fife plaques (62). Does the circle represent something specific? Why a circle? Could it represent the moon or the cyclical nature of time so valued by the FSM movement? Or, something else entirely? Additionally, could the crosses on the Fife plaques depict something other than proper burials? As I read, I keep returning to the fact that many brought to trial on witchcraft suspicions were accused by Christians and often on Christian grounds of devil worship. Do the crosses then reclaim the witches as Christians? (This seems rather problematic, especially if one interprets the witchcraft trials as 'the burning times'.) Could the crosses absolve Christians of their role in the accusations or erase their role? (Again, this seems rather problematic.) How do the crosses square with witchcraft's current grounding in the Feminist Spirituality Movement and other types of neo-paganism? If some feminists yearn to claim witchcraft as their heritage as strong, empowered women and witchcraft memorials as places of remembering systemic patriarchal Christian-supported violence, then why put crosses on the memorials they create? This needs reconciling in my opinion.

Finally, I find the conclusion rather rushed. I would have loved to be reminded what the initial research question was again as a reader. I would also have liked more explanation of how Manon's research could affect French and German feminist research on their witchcraft trials.

I understand that there is rather a lot of material here for discussion. Thus, at the defense, I would ask Manon to focus on how she would more robustly discuss memory activism by drawing comparisons and contrasts between her seven examples. If time permits, she is also welcome to address some of my other concerns. I would particularly find a discussion of the crosses on and the shape of the Fife memorials interesting.

In conclusion, I find this thesis meets all the program requirements and thus is defensible. I recommend a preliminary grade of excellent (1) dependent on the outcome of the defense.

In Prague, 26.5.2025



Ivy Helman, Ph.D.