

Abstract submission: Marie-Gabrielle Verbergt (Ghent University)

**HISTORY & RESPONSIBILITY: DOING HISTORY IN TIMES OF CONFLICTING
POLITICAL DEMANDS**

5th network conference of the International Network for Theory of History, Lisbon (Portugal),
22-24 May 2024

ABSTRACT

This paper does not focus on responsabilizing the writing of history, but on the responsabilization of the funding of historical research. Over the past thirty years, historians across Europe have become increasingly dependent on external or “third party” funding to pursue their research (Raphael 2018; Verbergt 2023). From the 1980s onwards, governments across Europe decreased the share of basic funding allocated to universities, while at the same time exhorting researchers to apply for short-term project funding (Hicks 2012). Because of this, both national and international agencies such as the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the European Research Council, or the Dutch NWO nowadays take central places in historians’ academic careers. These institutions organize national and international research competitions and set “quality standards” that influence the behavior of researchers in the humanities and in other sciences (Lamont and Guetzkow 2016; Müller in press; Charlton 2002).

In this paper, I reflect on historians’ responsibilities as reviewers within this competitive “regime of grantmaking”. A regime of grantmaking, so I argue, can be defined as a set of historically contingent and normative assumptions, values, and practices that manage the relation between funders and grantees (Verbergt 2024). This paper thus focuses on responsibility in relation to only one specific “subject position” historians take within the contemporary social world of academics (Hamann 2019). Besides reviewers, historians are indeed also authors, colleagues, professors, researchers, and teachers, and in each of these positions responsible behavior may look different. As reviewers, however, historians act as gatekeepers, meaning that they have the power to decide who has access to scarce material and symbolic resources (Hoenig 2015). Historians who oversee the allocation of grants within prestigious grant institutions collaboratively decide what and who is “fundable” (Jacobs and Huistra 2019), and thus create significant value hierarchies. This, I argue, comes with specific responsibilities.

To probe how to behave responsibly in contemporary competitive funding settings, I address two questions. First, I ask whether compliance with pre-set funding criteria and procedures is responsible. Considering the significant concentration of resources in so-called “top” institutions, I argue that counter-resistance to pre-set competitive funding logics may be

better for the long-term “health” of the historical discipline, especially but not exclusively in relation to the discipline’s epistemic pluralism. Second, I ask which other ways of funding historians could propose to funding agencies. Here, I reflect on alternative regimes of grantmaking, which are typified by radically different funding norms, values, and procedures.

The reflections proposed here are based on my dissertation research into the history of European funding for historical research (1970-today), which will be defended in the Spring of 2024.

KEYWORDS

performance-based funding, research competition, history of historiography, academic inequality, sociology of (e)valuation, counter-resistance

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Charlton, Bruce G. 2002. “Audit, Accountability, Quality and All That: The Growth of Managerial Technologies in UK Universities.” In *Education! Education! Education! Managerial Ethics and the Law of Unintended Consequences*, edited by Stephen Prickett and Patricia Erskine-Hill. Exeter: Imprint Academic.
- Hicks, Diana. 2012. “Performance-Based University Research Funding Systems.” *Research Policy* 41 (2): 251–61.
- Hoenig, Barbara. 2015. “Gatekeepers in Social Science.” In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, edited by James D. Wright, 618–22. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Jacobs, Noortje, and Pieter Huistra. 2019. “Funding Bodies and Late Modern Science.” *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 7 (1): 887–98.
- Lamont, Michèle, and Joshua Guetzkow. 2016. “How Quality Is Recognized by Peer Review Panels: The Case of the Humanities.” In *Research Assessment in the Humanities*, edited by Michael Ochsner, Sven E. Hug, and Hans-Dieter Daniel, 31–41. Berlin: Springer International Publishing.
- Müller, Klara. in press. “Responsive Research Quality Articulations of the Humanities in the Knowledge Society.” In *Making Universities Matter: Perspectives on Impact, Collaboration and Engagement*, edited by Pauline Mattson, Eugenia Perez Vico, and Linus Salö. Amsterdam: Springer.
- Raphael, Lutz. 2018. “State Authority and Historical Research: Institutional Settings and Trends Since 1945.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of State-Sponsored History after 1945*, edited by Berber Bevernage and Nico Wouters, 209–30. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Verbergt, Marie-Gabrielle. 2023. "Policy-Oriented History for the EU: The Rise of a New Type of Professional Practice for Historians?" In *Professional Historians in Public: Old and New Roles Revisited*, edited by Lutz Raphael and Berber Bevernage, 185–212. The Politics of Historical Thinking 5. De Gruyter Oldenbourg.

Verbergt, Marie-Gabrielle. Forthcoming. *The Price of History: A cultural history of European funding for historical research*, doctoral dissertation, Department of History, Ghent University (Belgium).

BIO

Marie-Gabrielle Verbergt (°1995) is a PhD Student at Ghent University (2018-2023, FWO aspirant) working at the intersection of the history of historiography, the theory of history, the history of European integration, and the sociology of knowledge. She has obtained her BA in History at the University of Leuven (2016), holds an MA in History from Ghent University (2017) and an MA in the Social Sciences from The University of Chicago (2018), where she held a Fulbright Student Grant and B.A.E.F. Baillet Latour Fellowship (2017-2018). Marie-Gabrielle has also been awarded the André Schaepdrijver Prize (2018) and received a Vibeke Sørensen Grant from the European University Institute (2021).

Marie-Gabrielle's general research interests lie in the history of late 20th and 21st century historiography; in short, asking how historians' study of the past has changed over the past seventy years in practice, form, and function. [Her current work](#) touches on those questions by focusing on European Union sponsorship of historical research between 1970 and today. She is especially interested in the production and institutionalization of ideas about valuable knowledge and 'good' and 'bad' ways of knowing the past through peer review and selection mechanisms, as well as the changing relationships between the academy, funding organizations, and the state.