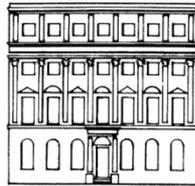


# German Historical Institute London



## BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

Alexandra Fergen, Fiammetta Balestracci, and Christina von  
Hodenberg:  
*An Era of Value Change: The Seventies in Europe*  
Conference Report  
German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 41, No. 2  
(November 2019), pp171-177

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

*An Era of Value Change: The Seventies in Europe.* Conference held at the German Historical Institute London (GHIL), 14–16 March 2019. Conveners: Christina von Hodenberg (London), Fiammetta Balestracci (London), and Martin Baumeister (Rome). Funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft; European Program Horizon 2020: Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions; GHIL; German Historical Institute Rome.

Western historians tend to view the Seventies as a time of significant change in Europe. The decade is widely perceived as the starting point for the present and as a period of discontinuity. The decade's significant cultural and social transformations are believed to have been brought about by changing values across European societies in response to major political, social, and economic crises.

The purpose of the conference, 'An Era of Value Change: The Seventies in Europe' was to deepen and revise our understanding of this period by locating the decade within the Long Twentieth Century and adopting a comparative approach. Historians gathered to discuss changing attitudes toward work, family, politics, economy, gender, and sexuality throughout Europe. It was asked who or what drove the process—individuals, political subjects, or structural changes such as new media and mass tourism—and where and why countries in Eastern and Western Europe diverged.

Following a brief introduction and welcome address by the three co-organizers, Christina von Hodenberg (London), Fiammetta Balestracci (London), and Martin Baumeister (Rome), the conference began with three presentations that centred on the dwindling value of the future in the Long Seventies. The panel examined the way in which actors thought about the future and tried to make sense of the past.

An earlier version of this report was published as 'Tagungsbericht: An Era of Value Change. The Seventies in Europe', *H-Soz-Kult*, 11 May 2019, by Alexandra Fergen, online at <<https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-8237>> Copyright © 2019 by H-NET, Clio-online, H-Soz-Kult, and the author. All rights reserved.

The full conference programme can be found under 'Events and Conferences' on the GHIL's website <[www.ghil.ac.uk](http://www.ghil.ac.uk)>.

Emily Robinson (Sussex) examined political temporalities and nostalgic sentiments in 1970s Britain. She argued that it was the 1970s and 1980s when Thatcherism and moral conservatism, among others, finally shifted contemporaries' understanding of 'progressive politics' from a term describing political optimism and innovation to something typically left wing.

Tobias Becker (London) examined the emerging intellectual discourse of nostalgia in the 1970s. By linking the discourse with events from the 1960s, Becker challenged not only contemporaries' views of the 1970s as an increasingly nostalgic decade, but also the notion of nostalgia itself. He argued that many nostalgic manifestations which contemporaries attributed to the 1970s were, in fact, already present in the 1960s, and that the term 'nostalgia' was often used to discredit re-enactments and other popular forms of engagement with the past.

Ekaterina Emeliantseva Koller (Zurich) explored rural development and narratives about Soviet rural decline since the Long Seventies. She discussed how movements into and from rural areas in north-west Russia encouraged changing values and specific rural-urban lifestyles and practices in this period.

The second panel explored modes of expert knowledge and reconceptualization. Pascal Germann (Berne) examined how a transatlantic movement of social scientists began compiling facts, statistics, and data to help governments improve the quality of life in Western Europe and the USA. Germann concluded that social scientists not only reflected changing values during this period but also played a key role in fostering the rise of new value orientations.

Norbert Goetz (Stockholm) provided insights into his research on the history of humanitarianism by comparing British, French, and German aid campaigns in Biafra in the 1970s. Goetz challenged common attempts at periodization along geopolitical turning points such as 1945 and 1989. He argued that the value change of the 1970s, as a driver for shifting aid practices, began with a move toward 'expressive humanitarianism' during the Biafra conflict.

The presentation by Martin Deuerlein (Tübingen) historicized the transnational discourse of global entanglements and change in the USA and Western Europe in the 1970s by situating it in a longer perspective. He examined contemporaries' views of the changing role of the nation-state. From the mid 1960s social scientists diagnosed a 'crisis of the state' and began to scrutinize the principle of national self-

determination long before debates about globalization widened in the 1990s.

The third panel explored the rise of new politics and democratization in the 1970s. In his paper on the Dutch political climate in the 1970s, Johan van Merriënboer (Nijmegen) argued that the Netherlands experienced a materialistic turn to the right and the birth of 'Average Joe' ('Jan Modaal' in Dutch) as the result of massive public expenditure and increasingly burdensome social security contributions in the second half of the decade.

Corrado Tornimbeni (Bologna) discussed the relationship between the Italian solidarity network and the independence movement in Mozambique. He argued that Italian politicians and activist networks played a major part in helping Mozambique's anti-colonial fight for independence.

Patricia Hertel (Basel) emphasized the relationship between mass tourism, social behaviour, and value change, taking the examples of West Germany, Portugal, and Spain. According to Hertel, individual behaviour and changing values towards consumerism, pleasure, and quality of life became political. Mass tourism was therefore a vehicle for 'new forms of politics and simultaneous processes of politicization'.

The rise of new social movements and the idea of 'changing the world by changing oneself' lay at the heart of the fourth panel. Inbal Ofer (Tel Aviv) examined Spain's transition to democracy through the lens of urban activism. Neighbourhood associations drove a movement for 'autogestion'. Ofer argued that the Spanish Citizens' Movement played a crucial role in this process by building relationships with professionals and widening access to professional and administrative knowledge.

In her presentation on youth cultures and new religiosities in the Long Seventies, Isabel Richter (Berkeley) emphasized the 'entangled history' behind the growing popularity of meditation in Western popular culture. She argued that Indian gurus, transcultural imports, and increasing numbers of travellers to India played a role in changing religious landscapes in West Germany. For Richter, the 1970s marked a clear era of value change, as 'booming new spiritual practices' offered West Germans, especially teenagers and young adults, 'new forms of self-exploration beyond Western self and beyond classical therapeutic approaches'.

The fifth panel examined the themes of labour and leisure time in the 1970s. Bernhard Dietz (Mainz) explored how West German business leaders reacted to the anti-capitalist climate following 1968 and asked whether the 1970s saw the development of a new concept of leadership. He concluded that growing anti-capitalist criticism by the media and students, pressures for political reform, and generational conflicts within the business world all forced West German managers to flatten hierarchies and adopt new concepts of leadership that centred on self-actualization and co-operation.

Florian Schui (St Gallen) concentrated on the relationship between work and leisure time. According to Schui, the 1970s marked the starting point of a trend towards a rising inequality of leisure in advanced European countries and the USA. The main drivers of this change were an increasing inequality of income and a combination of economic, institutional, and cultural factors such as stagnating wages, inflation, increasing female labour, and individual decisions to work longer hours for additional income.

Christopher Neumaier (Hamburg/Potsdam) compared the difficulties that East and West German women faced in reconciling work with family life in the 1970s. He found that most women in both states considered their role as mothers their main purpose in life, and argued that part-time work provided a way for them to make family and work compatible, which, in turn, strengthened traditional gender roles and family values.

The sixth panel was dedicated to changing ideas of family. By adopting a grassroots perspective, Lisa Dittrich (Munich) was able to show changes in East German marriage culture which, she argued, had already taken shape in the late 1950s. According to Dittrich, the 1970s witnessed trends towards individualization and 'self-realization in the other, in love and in sexuality' on the individual level, and towards support by the state and the public of partnership as a new model of marriage providing ways of self-realization.

Isabel Heinemann (Münster) compared divorce reform debates in West Germany and the USA in the 1970s. Heinemann argued that attitudes towards divorce reform in both countries did not change in a homogenous and linear fashion but, influenced by their respective national and regional differences, were subject to conflicting processes of negotiation. Heinemann's research revealed the gendered nature of these debates, as feminists' efforts to expand women's rights con-

flicted with the wishes of many men to maintain their interests in divorce proceedings.

Barbara Klich-Kluczevska (Cracow) examined growing tensions between the Polish dictatorship's social and gender order policies and the expert discourses around decreasing birth rates, birth control, and family structure. She argued that while the 'experts' turn' brought about a dramatic change in conceptions of divorce, counselling, single motherhood, and domestic violence, they did not weaken the model of the 'modern Polish family', which ultimately contributed to ineffective social policies in the following decade.

The final panel discussed changing attitudes towards gender and sexuality. Jan-Henrik Friedrichs (Hildesheim) showed how changing moral values such as sexual self-determination shaped the West German discourse on paedophilia in the early 1970s, but he also stressed the role of power relations and the 'empirical turn' in the social sciences in facilitating pro-paedophile arguments in contemporary debates.

Roseanna Webster (Cambridge) examined the formation of reproductive rights activism in Spanish *barrios* in the 1970s. She argued that the rise of a local movement was triggered by interactions between several groups who held different ideas about sex and body issues.

Aline Maldener (Saarbrücken) compared juvenile sexuality, gender roles, and their embodiment in German, French, and British teen magazines in the 1960s and 1970s. Stressing the ambivalent and paradoxical nature of sex education coverage, Maldener argued that these magazines became 'European agents of standardization and normalization'.

Kristoff Kerl (Cologne) provided insights into his research on the counter-cultural politics of ecstasy in West Germany by showing how counter-culturists understood ecstasy as a tool for self-transformation and societal change.

In his keynote address, James Mark (Exeter) drew attention to the still much-neglected relevance of the 1970s in Eastern European history. By examining how political elites thought about the positioning of their respective anti-capitalist countries in the world, Mark sought to re-establish the decade and situate 1970s Eastern Europe in the broader global context. Contrary to the common understanding that 1989 marked the 'entry point into the truly global', Mark argued that

Eastern Europe had become globally engaged long before this. According to Mark, global pressures, such as issues of economic independence and crises of national sovereignty in the 1970s forced Eastern European countries to rethink management concepts, Westernization, ideas of rights and Europe, and the individualization of socialist societies.

The conference ended with a roundtable discussion in which Fiammetta Balestracci (London), Gerd-Rainer Horn (Paris), Martin Baumeister (Rome), and Claudia Kraft (Vienna) discussed their observations. The aim of the conference was to zoom in on the 1970s from a comparative perspective in order to understand whether, and if so, to what extent, the period presented an era of value change across all of Europe. First on the agenda was the problem of periodization. Baumeister stressed the difficulty of treating the 1970s in a vacuum and pointed to three ways of periodizing the decade: as a period on its own, as a continuation of the long 1960s, and as the beginning of the present time. Second, almost all presentations understood the 1970s as a period of value change from both above and below. The 1970s marked the start of a time when experts and contemporaries began to conceptualize shifts as value change and developed scholarly concepts of value. At the same time, the decade also witnessed the emergence of new subjectivities and a 'new form of self-expressiveness', as individual actors became 'experts of themselves' (Kraft). Third, the conference highlighted the role of feminism and gender norms as crucial drivers of change and fields of negotiation in this decade. Fourth, many papers showed that the 1970s were also a period of transnational encounters, and one in which the global had a significant impact on the national, political, economic, social, cultural, local, regional, and individual levels.

Many panellists portrayed the period as one that was marked by contradictory developments and the tension between progressive movements and conservative backlash. According to Horn, the 1970s forces were a result of 'the energies liberated in the 1960s [which] came to full fruition in the 1970s'. However, he doubted whether value change was truly unique to the 1970s. Balestracci suggested interpreting the value changes as resulting from criticisms of Western rationality and as a consequence of the affluent society of the 1960s. According to Balestracci, 'society was seeking new truths following individual experimentation'. She therefore understood the 1970s as

## AN ERA OF VALUE CHANGE

an era marked by 'post-rationalist values and the individualization of behaviour'.

A publication of the conference proceedings and findings is planned with Oxford University Press, as a peer-reviewed volume co-edited by Fiammetta Balestracci and Christina von Hodenberg as part of the series Studies of the German Historical Institute London (general editor: Christina von Hodenberg). Preparations are already under way.

ALEXANDRA FERGEN (Oxford), FIAMMETTA BALESTRACCI (London),  
CHRISTINA VON HODENBERG (London)