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Conference Report: *Violence against Women: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*

by Hannah Manzur

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Violence against Women: Historical and Comparative Perspectives.

A joint workshop of the Humboldt Foundation Anneliese Maier Award and the German Historical Institute London, held at the GHIL, 14–16 July 2022. Conveners: Christina von Hodenberg and Jane Free-land (GHIL), Sylvia Walby (City, University of London), and Karen Shire (University of Duisburg-Essen).

This interdisciplinary conference brought historians and social scientists together to explore gender-based violence and its variations over time and place through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A particular focus was on British and German contexts, with many papers adding comparisons with other nations, and additional contributions addressed Spain, France, Ghana, Japan, and Mexico. Bridging macro- and micro-level analyses, the conference explored the relationship between changes in gendered violence and the development of variations in gender regimes. It also asked about strategies of feminist resistance, either working autonomously or in alliance with other forces. Papers were delivered on the conceptualization of and relationship between gender regimes and violence, how sexual violence was made (in)visible and responded to in post-conflict contexts, the role of gendered violence in state-making and the governance of violence through gender regimes, the role of feminist strategies and struggles in challenging violence, gendered violence in the legal system and law-making, and comparative global perspectives on sexual violence and injustice.

Sylvia Walby's opening keynote lecture posed four key challenges for approaches to gendered violence: the theory of gender regimes, the concept of violence, their variations across different contexts, and the role of feminist strategies of resistance. She argued that a shared language and conceptual framework needed to be developed in order to both research and reduce gendered violence across diverse contexts. In Walby's macro-level theory of 'domestic' (premodern) and 'public' (modern) gender regimes, these vary historically and geographically across the four institutional domains of the polity, economy, civil society, and violence. 'Public' gender regimes can be further differentiated into neoliberal and social democratic regimes. Walby thus positioned violence not merely as a tool of power but as

an institutional domain in itself. To facilitate interdisciplinary and comparative research on violence, she proposed a shared conceptualization of interpersonal and intergroup physical violence as distinct from wider forms of exploitation and injustice. She also asked what role feminist movements have played in shifting gender and violence regimes, and in particular whether strategies for reducing gendered violence have been more successful through women's autonomous movements or through coalition-building.

The first session addressed national, religious, and socio-political framings of sexual and intimate-partner violence in post-conflict and post-colonial conflict contexts in Germany, Spain, and Ghana in the twentieth century. Anne-Laure Briatte (Sorbonne University) analysed tribunal and clergy records of sexual violence perpetrated by French forces in occupied Germany in 1945 and explored the shaming of victims of sexual violence. Such violence was framed through victim-blaming narratives which identified the nation, not individual women, as the victim of these crimes in the context of a reshifting of the (West) German gender regime. Miguel Alonso Ibarra (UNED) also explored changing gender regimes in authoritarian contexts, focusing on sexual violence and women's survival strategies in Francoist Spain, whereby the regulation of violence shifted from rape as a weapon of war to sexual violence as a repressive mechanism of social control in the new national political environment. The reassertion of a domestic gender regime within a militarized and authoritarian setting saw fascist masculinities and feminized domesticity deployed in tribunal judgements of victims and perpetrators. Gender regimes in transition were also addressed through Stephen Baffour Adjei's (Akenten Appiah-Menka University) proposed conceptual framework for understanding the role of masculinities and communal personhood in intimate-partner violence in Ghana. Adjei compared pre- and post-colonial settings and emphasized the roles of religion and cultural norms in how the dialogue between masculinity and communal personhood justified, incited, restrained, or condemned gendered violence.

The second session explored processes of state-making and implications of policy changes for gendered violence, focusing on Britain's economic and border regimes since the mid twentieth century. Michele

Lloyd (independent) analysed the implications of neoliberal and social democratic welfare regimes after 1945 for how gendered violence was regulated through gendered policy reforms, new models of femininity, and the building and restricting of support services for victims. Contrasting the post-war emergence of a social democratic gender and welfare regime with the increasing entrenchment of a neoliberal gender regime under Thatcher and beyond, Lloyd demonstrated the significance of gender regimes for state approaches to gendered violence through coercive and progressive strategies. Turning to more recent history, Hannah Manzur (City, University of London) examined the impact of 'austerity' and 'hostile environment' policies as gender, economic, and border regimes on the governance of violence in the UK in the early twenty-first century. Using a quantitative analysis of violence prevalence at the intersection of gender and migrant status and repositioning the 'border' as an institutional sub-domain, she showed how neoliberalized gendered economic regimes and hardened gendered border regimes have undermined efforts to reduce inequalities and violence in the United Kingdom.

The papers in session three mapped the development of feminist struggles through European and global comparative studies, investigating practices of legislative change and feminist debates on strategies to tackle gendered violence. Catherine Davies (University of Zurich) explored the politics of coalition-building within the West German anti-rape movement in the 1980s, focusing specifically on progressive feminist debates on the role of the state in reducing violence and inequalities. The internal debates and tensions around lowering the minimum sentence for marital rape were underpinned by deeper ideological stances on whether the coercive power of the state should be used to protect women from sexual violence. Ana María Miranda Mora (National Autonomous University of Mexico) compared Mexico and Germany in regard to the historical and transnational manifestations of femicide. She pointed to the different national and political framings of gender and violence and their intersections with multiple inequalities. In challenging the essentialization and feminization of violence, she critiqued the heteronormative and racialized coding of women as pre-victims and men as pre-perpetrators by contrasting feminist struggles to criminalize and mobilize against femicide. In the

next paper, Julia Spohr (University of Kassel) attempted a historicization of the #MeToo movement, comparing its sentiments and debates with two state-organized conferences in West Germany and France during the 1970s.

Strategies to tackle gendered violence often entail varying forms of legislative change. Session four addressed the role of the legal system and law-making in regulating violence, from domestic abuse in divorce courts to cross-national frameworks of sexual exploitation regulations. Jane Freeland examined how domestic violence was addressed in divorce cases in East German family courts in the 1970s and 1980s. She positioned domestic violence at the boundary of the personal and the political in the context of socialist ideals and shifting gender regimes. Socialist ideals of masculinities, femininities, and the family intertwined with legal reforms regarding domestic violence, yet met with growing challenges as a result of their inconsistencies with the everyday realities of life in the GDR. Next, Ginger Frost (Samford University) investigated references to domestic violence in British divorce cases involving interracial couples in the early twentieth century. She stressed how intersections of race and gender were used to judge both victims and perpetrators in the magistrates' courts. Gendered, racialized, and class-based discourses of shame, morality, and barbarity were embedded in legal practices and sensationalized in the mass media. In contrast to these micro-level analyses of court cases, Karen Shire and Sylvia Walby then discussed a macro-level framework for understanding the regulation of sexual exploitation across historical variations of national gender regimes. They focused on prostitution, but sidestepped the polarized debate on whether this counts as gendered violence or work. Asking which of its components were criminalized and what policy areas and institutions were involved in its regulation, they proposed a model for relating prostitution to distinctive gender regimes.

Session five engaged with gendered violence in conflict settings and its legacies. Juliane Röleke (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) looked at the activism of Northern Irish 'peace women' during the Troubles in the 1970s and 1980s, and its reception by West German feminists. She highlighted practices of scandalizing state violence against women and the tensions between the state-friendly, conservative, maternalist

approaches of the peace women and the anti-imperialistic, state-critical approaches of republican women. Regina Mühlhäuser (Hamburg Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Culture) explored the gendered silences, voices, and (in)visibilities of sexual violence in areas conquered by the German and Japanese armies during the Second World War. She engaged with the ways in which feminist activists, victim-survivors, perpetrators, and political actors navigated, challenged, or entrenched these silences. She also addressed how knowledge of sexual violence was produced, disputed, and used in collective hierarchies of victimhood, and was always dependent on the diversity and specificities of sexual violence in national contexts of war and violence.

In her keynote, '(In)Justice: Global Reflections on Sexual Violence', Joanna Bourke (Birkbeck, University of London) emphasized the diversity of sexual violence in war and peace around the globe. Bourke addressed multiple conceptual and empirical challenges: how can we define and quantify sexual violence in a way that accounts for its breadth, depth, and diversity, without undermining its specificity? How can we recentre victims' voices and experiences while accounting for their diversity, complexities, and vulnerabilities? Strategies for reducing violence vary in their success over time and across countries, but each offer insights into new solutions. Bourke proposed four key tenets for understanding and addressing sexual violence, nestled in the concept of transversalism: that voices and resources should be given to activists at the local level; that justice should be locally relevant, culturally variable, and inclusive of men and boys; that political attempts to address sexual violence must begin with cisgender men; and that we should not apply White, Anglosphere-centred models of feminism to all communities.

In the final discussion, Christina von Hodenberg summarized areas of consensus and contestation, drawing on the depth of discussion throughout the conference. On the one hand, she encouraged historians to attempt macro-level narratives more often, and to enable temporal and spatial comparison by introducing more clearly defined social science terms such as 'gender regime' and 'violence'. On the other hand, she suggested social scientists could engage more deeply with longer historical trajectories, the overlapping layers of temporalities

at any given moment, and the languages and perspectives available to contemporary historical actors. There was consensus among conference participants about the relationship between rising inequalities and increased violence, and also the productivity of intersectional perspectives. The racialization of male perpetrators, the role of class and poverty in making groups vulnerable to violence, and the silencing and exclusion of multiply marginalized victims of gendered violence were common to many of the papers presented. It was also agreed that the concept of 'family' could be detrimental to the understanding of diverse forms of social and familial structures in relation to gender regimes, even more so as the term has historically been used to justify permissive or victim-blaming approaches to domestic and sexual violence. A further recurrent theme of the conference were practices of silencing and speaking out, and the conditions under which victims could communicate either in private or public settings. In this regard, von Hodenberg also linked changing gender regimes to modernity's processes of mediatization and the scientization of the social. She pointed to the role of media (both mass media and feminist counter-media) as well as experts (such as social workers, doctors, bureaucrats, and scientists) in defining, debating, reducing, and persecuting gendered violence.

Throughout the conference, participants engaged with the question of how to understand violence in gender regimes under authoritarian conditions, such as colonial rule, armed conflict, dictatorships, and occupied territories. The suggestion was made to consider the introduction of an 'authoritarian' regime type into Walby's framework in order to emphasize situations of legal uncertainty. It was also discussed whether there was a need to differentiate even more between different variants of modernity, or between domestic gender regimes in premodern, early modern, and modern contexts. Another thread running throughout the conference was the role of agency and resistance in the face of structures of inequality. Successful challenges to the invisibility and inevitability of gendered violence were possible, it was agreed, but historical differences persisted in regard to the role of the state, coalitions and alliances formed around intersecting inequalities, and the strategies and mechanisms for tackling violence through feminist activism. In the final discussion, the need for the further

inclusion of LGBTQI+, non-Eurocentric, and alternative feminist perspectives and studies was noted.

Taken together, sociological perspectives offered macro-level structural frameworks for understanding what violence and gender regimes mean, and how they function in systems of multiple inequalities. In contrast, historical perspectives concentrated on meso- and micro-level analyses of cases of violence rooted in particular historical periods, geographical sites, and gender regimes. In bridging these disciplinary perspectives, this conference laid the ground for future spatial and temporal comparisons of variations in gender regimes and gendered violence, and an interdisciplinary dialogue about ways of countering both the prevalence, invisibility, and portrayed inevitability of gendered violence.

HANNAH MANZUR (City, University of London)