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Conference Report:
Gender Regimes in Modern History

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Gender Regimes in Modern History. Workshop organized by the German Historical Institute London; Royal Holloway, University of London; and the University of Duisburg-Essen. Held at Senate House, London, 18–19 December 2023. Conveners: Sylvia Walby (Royal Holloway, University of London) and Christina von Hodenberg (GHIL). Supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Anneliese Maier Research Award granted to Sylvia Walby.

This workshop brought together a small group of sociologists and historians who are currently working towards a special issue of a journal on the topic of gender regimes in modern history. Sociology theorizes patterns of gender relations and gender inequality as gender regimes, and has linked their change over time to macro-developments such as the rise of modernity, democracy, capitalism, and colonialism. Walby theorizes the transition from a ‘domestic’ gender regime—marked by limited female political participation, gendered public/private spheres, and no regulation of domestic violence—to different varieties of a ‘public’ gender regime, in which women are active members of the paid workforce and politics, and domestic violence is criminalized. History as a field has been relatively slow to put the concept to wider use. The interdisciplinary workshop asked how a focus on gender regimes could change and enrich historical metanarratives and periodizations, and conversely, how the social sciences and their theories of gender regimes might benefit from taking up historical research even more than they currently do.

The two-day interdisciplinary dialogue raised theoretical and methodical questions about different evidence regimes and macro-level narratives in the two disciplines. It was based on pre-circulated contributions—some historical, some sociological, all with a macro-historical perspective—to facilitate in-depth discussion. All papers engaged with case studies in different national or comparative global settings and were theoretically focused on the development of different varieties of public gender regimes (neoliberal, social democratic, or authoritarian) in countries during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and their respective pathways from domestic to public gender regimes. Three contributions dealt with Germany in the twentieth century, one with the United

Kingdom in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, one with the European Union since 1957, and one with a comparative global database from 1975 to 2015.

Sylvia Walby analysed historical changes in the regulation of gendered violence in the United Kingdom's gender regime since the introduction of female suffrage in 1918 and 1928. She traced the intersection of legal changes and feminist projects, including the removal of the marital rape exemption and the extension of welfare support to victims. She proposed using gender regime theory to address historical processes, including critical turning points in path-dependent trajectories and complex spirals of gender restructuring that resulted from civil societal waves. The debate threw up questions of uneven development and the historically typical simultaneous presence of more and less gender-equal practices and norms.

Isabel Heinemann (University of Bayreuth) presented on parliamentary women's networks and the patriarchal family in the early Federal Republic of Germany. She scrutinized how informal parliamentary women's networks and women's political organizations lobbied during the 1950s and 1960s for democratic rights and political participation within a gender regime that privileged male economic and political agency. The transition from domestic to public gender regimes was slow, contradictory, and moved along by actors who would not have called themselves feminists. The discussion centred on the presence of critical turning points, the different meanings of 'emancipation' and 'feminism', and the incremental layering of gains in the four different domains of the gender regime—the polity, the economy, civil society, and violence.

S. Laurel Weldon (Simon Fraser University) based her contribution on her new global dataset, the Feminist Mobilization Index, which goes back to 1975. She explored the relationship between feminism and different varieties of democratic gender regimes in established democracies with advanced industrial economies, contrasting the pathways of neoliberal and social democratic gender regimes. The social democratic gender regimes were stronger at addressing inequality between men and women in general, but weaker in addressing the racialized elements of gender inequality that are of particular concern to intersectionally marginalized groups such as migrant domestic workers.

Again, the role of turning points was discussed – for instance, the turn to carceral feminism, and the rise of anti-feminist movements – as was the question of whether there were specificities to European, including socialist Eastern European, feminisms.

The European Union as an actor moved centre stage in Emanuela Lombardo and Lucrecia Rubio Grundell's (Complutense University of Madrid) paper on transformations in the European Union's gender regime over time. The EU's gender regime has undergone significant changes since its inception in the mid 1950s via Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome, and the organization has made more progress towards gender equality than many national states. Lombardo and Rubio Grundell emphasized the role of historical legacies and turning points, such as EU treaties and global economic crises. Participants in the ensuing debate asked how to integrate decolonization processes, the end of the Cold War, and historiographical narratives and periodizations more broadly into the argument.

Older women's agency in West Germany's gender regime from the 1950s to the 1990s was the topic of Christina von Hodenberg's paper. She challenged assumptions that over-60-year-old women resisted the shift towards public gender regimes and stressed the ways in which single women and married women with children nurtured gains in female autonomy in everyday settings. The audience engaged with the meaning of the terms autonomy, emancipation, and feminism; the intersectional differences among over-60-year-olds; and the ways in which marital status correlated with predictable patterns of attitudes toward modern gender regimes.

The workshop also considered the contribution by Jane Freeland (Queen Mary University of London), even though she could not take part in person. Adopting Walby's theory of different types of gender regimes, Freeland's paper mapped the similarities between gender relations and norms across the various iterations of the German state through the entire twentieth century. Examining the institutional domains of violence, the economy, the polity, and civil society, she considered the extent to which German states transitioned from a 'domestic' to a 'public' gender regime. Arguing that this transition took place not in the 1970s (the era most closely associated with social liberalization and sexual revolution) but rather in the 1990s, she challenged

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periodizations of modern German history that have failed to consider the role of gender and sexuality in societal transformation.

Altogether, the workshop trialled the use of Walby's theory of gender regimes as a tool of historical macro-narratives. It critically engaged with the different varieties, and the four domains, of gender regimes, and the varied pathways of temporal transformation, including non-simultaneity, layering, restructuring, waves, and turning points of development. Particular attention was paid to the link between gender regimes and democracy, dictatorship, violence, and forces of change such as feminist mobilization, activism 'from below', reform 'from above', and generational relations. Participants asked to what extent the micro- and meso-elements of historiographic writing could fit within this framework, and how different types, languages, and intersectional variations of feminism related to it.

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