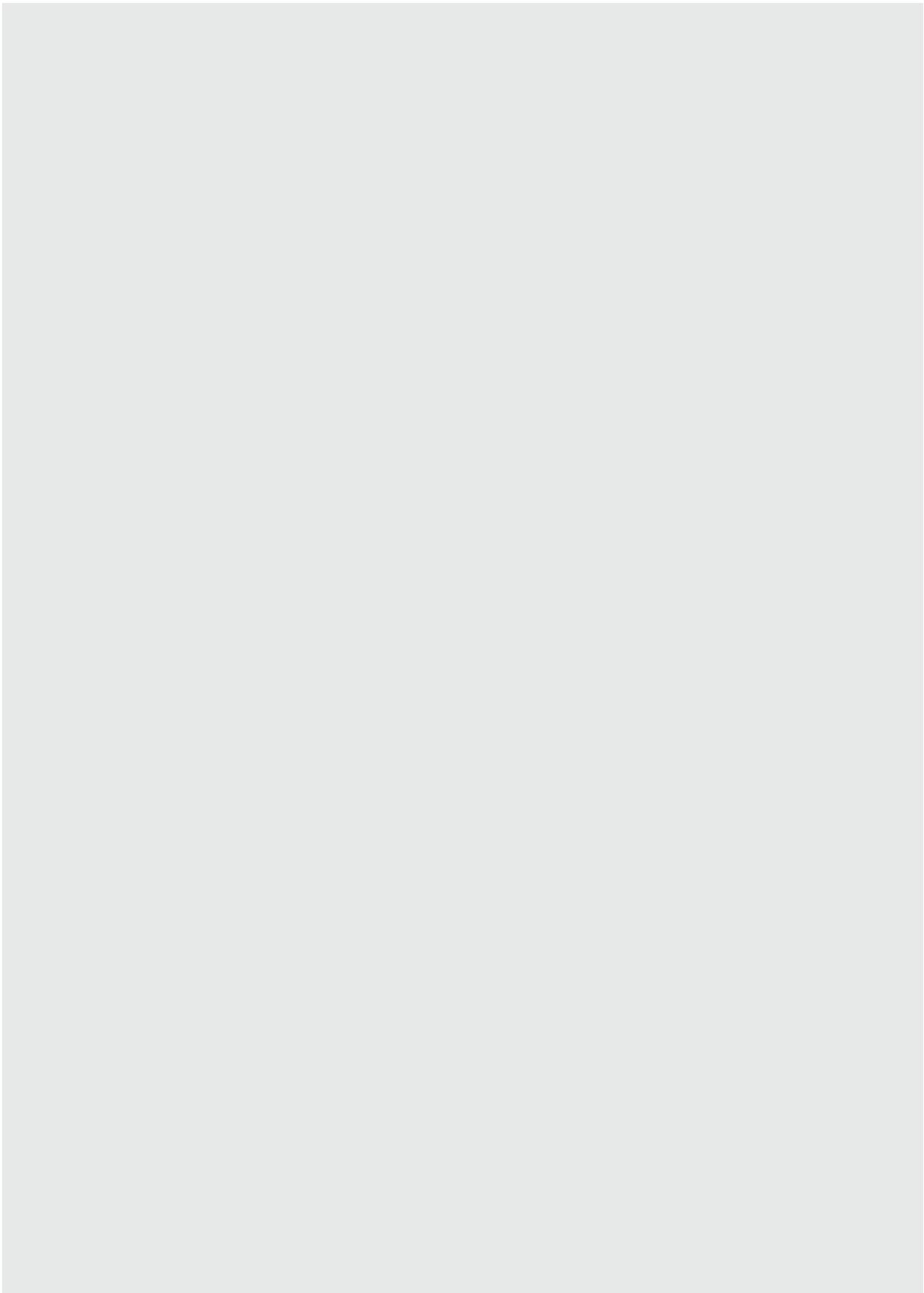




Conference Reports



RECREATING SEPARATE SPHERES ACROSS NOT-SO-SEPARATE WORLDS: GENDER AND REEDUCATION IN JAPAN, GERMANY, AND THE USA AFTER WORLD WAR II

Conference at GHI Pacific Regional Office Berkeley, February 20-21, 2020. Cosponsored by the GHI and the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. Made possible by a grant from the German Research Foundation (DFG). Conveners: Jana Aresin (University of Erlangen-Nürnberg), Heike Paul (University of Erlangen-Nürnberg), Claudia Roesch (GHI Washington). Participants: Nikolai Blaumer (Thomas Mann House, Los Angeles), Katharina Gerund (University of Erlangen-Nürnberg); Sonia Gomez (University of Chicago); Mire Koikari (University of Hawai'i); Akino Oshiro (University of Erlangen-Nürnberg); Tomoyuki Sasaki (William & Mary College); Michiko Takeuchi (California State University, Long Beach); Kathryn Tolbert (*Washington Post*).

Soon after the end of World War II, American occupation forces began to reeducate and democratize the former enemy nations Germany and Japan in order to turn them into allies in the emerging Cold War. Many of these reeducation campaigns were directed towards women. This happened at a time when gender norms within the United States underwent a transformation process as white middle-class women in the U.S. moved *away* from breadwinning jobs and the public sphere into a suburban domesticity.

In order to trace these transformations and their inherent paradoxes, the two-day workshop “Recreating Separate Spheres Across Not-So-Separate Worlds: Gender and Reeducation in Japan, Germany, and the USA after World War II” revisited reeducation programs to investigate their underlying policies through the lens of gender norms and in a comparative perspective. The workshop also focused on different medias of circulation such as magazines, films and literature.

In the first presentation, Mire Koikari discussed different versions of new domestic lifestyles in the English-language *Okinawa Graphic* magazine. The magazine connected Okinawan readers with Okinawa diaspora communities in the United States, Hawaii, Latin America and the Japanese mainland. Koikari discussed a home story of the American high commander and his wife, reports of school lunches that switched from a rice-based to a wheat and milk-based diet, and features on the Japanese Empress Michiko to demonstrate how

images of domesticity strengthened ties to both U.S. occupation forces and mainland Japanese culture.

Following Koikari, Jana Aresin presented her ongoing dissertation project on women's gender norms in American and Japanese women's magazines. She divided women's representations in these magazines into four archetypal roles of women as workers, political activists, consumers, and educators. Women as workers were young and unmarried, while married mothers assumed the role of educators for democracy in their nuclear families. The focus in the magazines, however, was on the role of women as consumers, claiming that women would gain political power through consumerism by learning how to handle money and control their own and their family's finances. Thus, the magazines advocated homemaking as a profession and promoted the concept of modern domesticity that assigned women the roles of homemaker and educator in a compassionate marriage while their husbands fulfilled the role of a single breadwinner.

In contrast to Aresin, Michiko Takeuchi focused on transnational networks of working women in Japan and the U.S. Tracing the similarities between postwar Japanese declarations on women's work and American communist women's demands for working women in the interwar period, she was able to illustrate networks of Japanese and American social reformers since before World War Two. Japanese women activists were especially active in the International Labor Organization and formed networks with international reformers there. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Tokyo became a networking hub to bring U.S. reformers like Jane Addams, Margaret Sanger and Alice Paul to Japan. Some of these activists, who visited and worked with Japanese feminists in the interwar years, later became involved with reconstruction and NGOs in postwar Germany.

Switching the focus towards male gender norms in postwar Japan, Tomoyuki Sasaki presented his research on the role of the Japanese army in the postwar society. He showed that the army acted as an agent of the Japanese welfare state as it offered job opportunities for unemployed and uneducated men in rural areas who were left behind by Japan's postwar urban industrial boom. By bringing men from overpopulated Kyushu to underpopulated Hokkaido, the Japanese army became an agent of local welfare and development. On Hokkaido, enlisted men engaged in civil engineering projects, provided fire services and disaster relief, and helped farmers who had lost sons with the harvest. Therefore, the army, perhaps inadvertently, became

a well-appreciated civil society institution in postwar Japan. At the same time, the politics of displacement also produced negative effects and led to tensions between soldiers and the local population.

In the first day's final presentation, Heike Paul focused on postwar Germany and the negotiations of women's role and domesticity there. She investigated postwar literary work by progressive author Irmgard Keun, who had praised the "New Woman" in the late Weimar Republic in her best-known novels and spent the war years in exile. Her postwar short story "Nur noch Frauen" (1954), set in a dystopian landscape where only women and one man have survived, emphasizes feelings of alienation on the part of feminists in early postwar Germany: In an economy of scarcity — including that of men — the female majority is not liberated from both Nazis and men, but rather still revolves around men as necessary partners in reproduction. An interpretation of the story suggests that Keun criticizes how women covered up their complicity in the Nazi state by retreating to domestic lifestyles and to their kitchens, a space which the Nazi regime had propagated as the appropriate place for women. Paul then contrasts this form of domesticity as retreat to the U.S. version of domesticity epitomized in Richard Nixon's kitchen debate with Nikita Khrushchev and in Hollywood films such as *Pillow Talk* with Doris Day and Rock Hudson. She concluded that the American version of domesticity also, to some extent, followed the logic of reeducation through informal social change and popular culture that promised access to modern consumer goods and romantic happiness.

The meeting's second day began with Sonia Gomez's presentation on gender norms in U.S. immigration policies towards Japan. In the first part of her presentation, she demonstrated that the Gentlemen's Agreement (1908) between Japan and the U.S. excluded Japanese men from immigrating to the U.S. but allowed Japanese women to enter if they came as wives and not as workers. This gave rise to the figure of the Japanese picture bride, who was married to a Japanese-American man in the U.S. who had only seen her picture — and vice versa. In the second part of her talk, Gomez argued that marriage continued to be a gateway to immigration for Japanese women in the postwar era with the GI Bride Act (1948), which was originally intended for servicemen to bring home their European brides. While the act extended the right of military men to marry whomever they wanted including non-American women, Japanese women only gained access to immigration and American citizenship *through* marriage and

domesticity. Bridal schools by the Red Cross and the YWCA taught Japanese women American styles of homemaking, fashion, and cosmetics along with English, Civics and Government and fostered the concept of citizenship through domesticity. In the end, this immigration policy meant that in both periods far more Japanese women were able to immigrate to the U.S. than men.

Gomez's presentation was followed by a screening of the documentary film *Fall Seven Times, Get Up Eight — The Japanese War Brides*, which introduced three Japanese women who had married U.S. service men and their adult daughters. After the film, one of its directors, Kathryn Tolbert, presented her findings from oral history interviews with other military brides who did not feature in the film. She showed that Japanese women had found themselves in between the American racial lines, especially when they married African American men or lived in the Jim Crow South. Many women ended up in unstable marriages and their husbands eventually left them. Often, they had married men from rural and lower-class backgrounds and were isolated from other Japanese immigrants in rural farm communities, where their wishes to partake in an American consumer lifestyle were not fulfilled. Nevertheless, they continued to stay and raise their children as American citizens.

During the lunch break, three reeducation films from 1948 to 1952 aimed at German audiences were screened. The first advertised the efficiency of the modern kitchen, the second depicted the advantages that electricity had for a Bavarian farmwoman and her husband, and the third explained club life and fundraising by showing how a local women's club in Baden-Württemberg raised money to open a day care center. In her comments on the films, Heike Paul pointed out that these films were part of the second stage of reeducation that did not show cities in rubble or the atrocities of concentration camps, but instead focused on modernization and served to advertise American lifestyles in Germany.

In the final discussion, the question of terminology was raised as German and American sources pertaining to Germany used the term "reeducation" in English or the more negatively connoted *Umerziehung* in German. Sources referring to Japan only used the term "democratization." This led to the observation that reeducation programs made no references to prewar experiences with democracy in either Japan or Weimar Germany. The concept of *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour) after the German capitulation meant a total break from the past. The

Weimar Republic was remembered as unstable with regards to the political system and especially to the permissiveness of fluid gender and sexual norms.

Overall, the different presentations referred to three recurring themes: the postwar ideal of domesticity and its function in different settings, the modernization of homes through consumer goods, and women's participation in civil society. For the U.S. context, the concept of modern domesticity was tied to the nuclear family and the democratic industrial society. In the German context, a similar form of domesticity resonated with backwardness of a different kind and represented a retreat from political participation and taking responsibility for Nazi crimes. In Japan, the teaching of domesticity in bridal schools, magazines and advertisements prepared women for immigration and connected rural and marginalized communities to the rapid industrialization of urban Japanese society.

By bringing together different concepts of gender norms and domesticity in a transnational comparison the workshop went beyond German historiography, which depicts the postwar years as a conservative and inward-looking era, as well as American historiography, which discusses modern domesticity as the home front response to Cold War anxieties. The conference demonstrated that American domesticity had transnational implications beyond the famous Nixon-Khrushchev kitchen debate. In fact, American domesticity promised women in postwar Germany and Japan that a domestic lifestyle would grant them modernization and the benefits of consumerism. These would make their lives easier, their husbands happier, and grant them civic participation. This was the biggest promise that American reeducation campaigns made in the immediate postwar period.

Claudia Roesch (GHI Washington)

