

## GENDER AND THE LONG POSTWAR: RECONSIDERATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE TWO GERMANYS, 1945–1989

Conference held at the GHI, May 29–31, 2008. Sponsored by the GHI, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the University of Maryland, College Park. Conveners: Karen Hagemann (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Sonya Michel (University of Maryland, College Park), Corinna Unger (GHI). Participants: Richard Bessel (University of York), Steve Estes (Sonoma State University), Jennifer V. Evans (Carleton University), Atina Grossmann (Cooper Union), Donna Harsch (Carnegie Mellon University), Elizabeth Heineman (University of Iowa), Susanne Hilger (University of Düsseldorf), Monika Mattes (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Potsdam), Malia McAndrew (John Carroll University), Myra Marx Ferree (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Laura McEnaney (Whittier College), Joanne Meyerowitz (Yale University), Jennifer Mittelstadt (Pennsylvania State University), Robert Moeller (University of California, Irvine), Kimberly Morgan (George Washington University), Christina Morina (University of Jena), Kathy Peiss (University of Pennsylvania), Joe Perry (Georgia State University), Uta Poiger (Harvard University), Laura M. Puaca (Christopher Newport University), Benita Roth (Binghamton University), Amy Rutenberg (University of Maryland, College Park), Angela Tudico (University of Maryland, College Park), Till van Rahden (University of Montreal), Marjan Schwegman (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation), Nathan Stoltzfus (Florida State University), Ulrike Weckel (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum), Alice Weinreb (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor), Jessica Weiss (California State University, East Bay), Dorothee Wierling (Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg).

Historians have long understood that wars can serve as a catalyst for change. In his recent book *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, Tony Judt argues that “World War II created the conditions for a new Europe.” The possibilities for change during this period were especially apparent in terms of gender relations. In Europe, the immediate aftermath of the war brought with it the need to confront massive death and destruction, continuing privations, dislocations, and, for women, the risk of rape. But at the same time, peace offered the prospect of new opportunities. Both communism and liberal democracy held out the promise of equality for women and well-being for them and their families. Yet the demands of rebuilding nations and restoring social order took immediate precedence.

The tensions between the political and economic needs of nations, the promises of new social orders, women's ongoing struggle for recognition, autonomy, and equality, and men's efforts to recast masculinity in the wake of unprecedented violence constituted the major themes of this conference.

Tony Judt's study implies that conditions for creating "the new" were greater in Europe than in the United States. Was this in fact the case? From the perspective of gender, the war opened up possibilities for women and men on both sides of the Atlantic. But the extent to which those possibilities were realized varied considerably across societies. An international group of forty-five scholars explored this question. Comparing gender developments in the United States and the two Germanys during "the long postwar," they examined the variations and asked how gender developments intersected and were affected by the trajectories of market-democratic and communist regimes as well as the impact of idiosyncratic cultural continuities. By extending the investigation to 1989, the conference was able to trace both continuities and change over a long expanse of gender relations, sorting out the impact of the war itself from other factors that came into play during the period.

The first panel, "Gendering the Aftermath of War," addressed the immediate consequences of the Second World War and their long-term effects. Atina Grossmann examined sexual relations, from rape to consensual sex, between German women and occupying allied armies' male soldiers. Grossmann argued that men used sexuality to enact personal and political domination of German women. At the same time, she asserted that today, too many scholars emphasize the debilitating horror surrounding these events, thus effacing women's agency in the historical record. While not seeking to deny the criminal aspects of these acts, she emphasized that women developed often a "rational" (*sachlich*) strategy to cope with these experiences, which they already had learned in Weimar Germany's discourse on sexuality. Christina Morina discussed how male and a handful of female architects and urban planners in 1940s and 1950s Frankfurt an der Oder and Dresden gendered their building designs. Morina made the case that, by adopting modern, functionalist designs, these professionals developed masculine blueprints for the usage of urban space. Ulrike Weckel illustrated how US and UK occupation forces, particularly military newsreel film crews, gendered Nazi violence. She posited that these crews filmed female perpetrators of atrocities (mostly KZ guards) in a way that detached femininity from genocide. Interviews with film crew members revealed that these men had difficulty accepting the idea that women, too, committed atrocities. Such actions transgressed the crews' traditional assumption about the gender order. Amy Rutenberg looked at American conscientious objectors from

the Korean to the Vietnam War periods and argued that, over time, draft avoiders increasingly saw their resistance to the US federal government as a masculine act. She demonstrated how multiple masculinities developed during this period, with the result that warrior men no longer held a monopoly on masculinity. In her comments, Karen Hagemann suggested that the conference's comparison of the two Germanys and the United States needed to take into account not only the specific economic, social, political, and cultural circumstances and their rapid change, but also the differences that existed between individual and collective, communicative, and cultural memory. She emphasized that gender is a productive analytical tool because gender relations, in particular in the families, were one of the most important fields in which the two Germanys and the United States dealt with the aftermath. Families were supposed to heal the wounds left by war. Gender relations, marriage, and the family thus became private arenas for coping with the aftermath of war.

The second panel, entitled "Role Reversals: Work and Consumption Regendered," dealt with economic, social, and cultural effects of World War II. Susanne Hilger asked whether German pharmaceutical companies served as bellwethers when it came to changing gender norms. She examined how the leading Schering Company introduced the birth control pill in West Germany in the 1960s. Hilger asserted that the company reflected the general conservatism of German society by targeting married women with children and not marketing to single women. Laura Puaca, examining women scientists from the 1950s, noted that these women framed their work as a form of Cold War service and did not perceive this role to be in tension with their domestic responsibilities. Joe Perry examined a coterie of German public opinion research experts during the 1950s and 1960s, showing that to a high degree, these experts gendered consumption as masculine by using masculine language and targeting men with supposedly masculine products such as auto tires and gasoline. Jessica Weiss studied letters written by female homemakers to women's magazines during the 1950s and 1960s. These women objected to Betty Friedan's critique of the American homemaker in her book *The Feminine Mystique*. They saw homemaking as a craft, not a burden, and fused it with femininity as well as ideals of self-sacrifice, non-consumerism, and even anti-communism. Moreover, Weiss used these women's stories to argue that the domestic impulse was not merely a response to feminism, but rather also an undercurrent with a longer history in postwar society. Commentator Kathy Peiss noted that, to a certain degree, all four panelists dealt with the question of postwar conservatism. She recommended that the panelists pursue this angle of analysis further by, for instance, examining whether groups such as homemakers, scientists, and

marketing experts gendered emotion as feminine and rationality as masculine.

The third panel, "New Sexualities," explored questions related to the sexual rhetoric in the public sphere, sexual consumerism, and the criminalization of homosexuality. Joanne Meyerowitz addressed sexuality in the public sphere of the postwar United States by looking at cultural evidence of sexual liberalism. She questioned the dominant interpretation of sexual "containment" offered by Elaine Tyler May, and argued against the dominance of sexual conservatism by showing, for example, how erotic literature flourished, and how Hollywood revised its production code to allow films that depicted abortion, prostitution, and interracial relations. She preferred the concept of a "long sexual revolution," linking the events of the 1950s to the broadening of sexual mores that had developed in the 1920s and those that would take hold in the 1960s and 1970s. Likewise, Elizabeth Heineman posited that West German sexuality must be tied to its Wilhelmine past, suggesting German uniqueness in this area. Focusing on the consumption of sexual wares to explore sexuality in private, and on legislation regarding sexual consumption to examine sexuality in public, she challenged Dagmar Herzog's influential thesis about the link between Nazism and postwar sexuality to argue that postwar West German behavior was not so much a reaction against Nazi permissiveness as it was an extension or completion of the long sexual revolution that was part of modernization. The question of whether a "new sexuality" existed in the postwar period was also up for debate in the papers by Jennifer V. Evans and Robert G. Moeller. Both analyzed how the postwar period failed to usher in dramatic changes for gay men. Evans argued that despite the decriminalization of homosexuality and the lauding of 1920s sexual progressivism, there was still much sexual alienation in key East German institutions. By looking at the experience of homosexual men, she showed how same-sex desire became associated with political opposition, demonstrating the limits of a total sexual revolution in the postwar east. Similarly, Moeller, by looking at how West German experts viewed homosexuality, claimed that homosexual men faced just as much persecution in the postwar period as they did during the war. He asked why laws that the Nazis enforced persisted in the Federal Republic, suggesting a continuous tension between homosexuality and liberalism, especially in public. Uta Poiger stressed in her comment that the papers offer new insights into the links between sexuality, consumption, and social change. She also highlighted the difference between the two Germanys in the postwar period.

The fourth panel, "The Fluidity of Ethnicity and Race," discussed the contradictions and paradoxes of old and new constructions of collective and individual identities in the aftermath of World War II. Angela Tudico

looked at the transnational migration process through her paper on war brides who attempted to immigrate to the United States after the war. Tudico argued that America's prewar racial distinctions persisted in the postwar period, challenging the notion that World War II was a watershed moment in US race relations. She showed that Greek and Italian war brides faced greater scrutiny than those from northern European nations, including Germany, even as they benefited from new war bride legislation. In fact, these Southern European women were often grouped with North African women, suggesting non-white status. Japanese women continued to be treated as a separate category. Malia McAndrew also explored the intersections of race and gender in her discussion of the United States' cooption of beauty norms in transforming its former enemy into an ally during the occupation of Japan. The US, according to McAndrew, understood that women were essential to this transition. Thus, influencing Japanese beauty culture, which was considered women's realm, became part of the American military's occupying mission. In its attempts to democratize and Americanize women in Japan, the US used cultural milieus like fashion magazines in an attempt to inject ideas of individualism and western ideals of beauty into the minds of Japanese women. Monika Mattes looked specifically at how and why female guest workers were recruited to work in West Germany during the 1960s and 1970s. She argued that the inclusion of women in the guest worker programs aimed for a highly gendered labor market policy. Women were selectively recruited from abroad only to reinforce gender hierarchies in the West German labor market. Therefore, as Steve Estes pointed out in his comment, looking specifically at female workers can shed new light on the dynamics of labor migration, but also extends the traditional economic view of the market to one that included a social space.

The papers presented in the fifth panel, "Politics, Protest, and Civil Society," sought to challenge conventional chronological narratives that present developments in the 1960s as a radical departure from the earlier postwar period. Indeed, the question of whether or not the 1960s represented continuity or discontinuity came up repeatedly throughout the conference. Benita Roth's paper took an explicitly sociological view in examining the development of multiple feminisms in terms of resource mobilization and their creation through networks based on collective activist identity. She found that different feminisms arose among black, Chicana, and white middle-class activist networks due to differences in the resources available to these groups and the necessity for non-white feminists to address issues of inequality beyond those concerned solely with gender. Here she found continuity between the foundational work of the 1950s and the "second-wave feminism." Till van Rahden argued that the recognition that family life and democracy were intimately re-

lated was not a product of the 1960s, but rather arose in the immediate postwar period. As scholars like Robert Moeller have shown, the family was seen as a “way station” between Nazism and democracy—a training ground for political participation—and as such it was necessary that it become more egalitarian. Dorothee Wierling examined a different aspect of the relationship between personal history and political involvement. Using oral history interviews of women in established management positions in East Germany that she had collected in 1987, Wierling found that, although women in the GDR may have had better opportunities for professional advancement than their West German counterparts, most were still restricted to cultural and social occupations. She found that women in this society often demanded more from their lives than state policy delivered, and that on subtle levels they resisted the narrow version of success that the government attempted to project. The groundwork for these women’s professional success in the 1960s had been laid in the 1930s, again indicating the importance—common to all three of these papers—of interrogating received chronologies. The comment by Myra Marx Ferree emphasized the relationship between the three nations’ different socialist traditions and the development of feminism. In West Germany, where socialism was an important influence, it was necessary for feminists to “break away” from traditional privileging of the class struggle in order to prioritize gender issues. In the US, she argued, this was not a factor, and for East German women, feminist objectives were dictated by the state, making their task one of fulfilling goals established from above.

Panel six, “Gender, States, and Families,” explored the ways in which social policy under both communism and capitalism was fundamentally gendered. At the heart of each paper was the contention that the seemingly “private”—family and gender relations—and the seemingly “public”—government policy—were intimately connected. While Donna Harsch’s and Alice Weinreb’s papers limned the gendered implications of postwar social welfare policy in the two Germanys—the former locating East Germany within a longer history of Stalinism and the latter taking an explicitly comparative look at the two Germanys—Jennifer Mittelstadt focused on the United States and its military welfare state. Harsch analyzed the relation of women, work, and the family in the postwar gendering of the GDR’s welfare dictatorship. She argued that by the 1970s, the social welfare policy of the GDR could tentatively be called maternalist, a term that brought with it implications of a focus on mothers and children and not just on production. By overlooking such developments, Harsch contended, historians have unwittingly perpetuated the neglect of gender and family implicit in Stalinism’s nineteenth-century intellectual heritage. Weinreb explored the gendered ideologies and perceptions of

women's roles as workers or mothers inherent in the decision to provide, in the case of East Germany, or not to continue, in the case of West Germany, lunches for school children. In the west, school lunches were seen as markers of poverty; thus, ending school lunches was an indicator of recovered prosperity and collective identity. In the east, by contrast, school lunches were seen as a marker of "socialist modernity," a feature that allowed women-as-workers to achieve "full socialist development." In both east and west, however, state *rhetoric*—if not state *policy*—dictated that providing nutrition was the mother's role. In her comment, Sonya Michel picked up on Harsch's use of the provocative term maternalism, encouraging attention to the specific historical implications of this term. Mittelstadt's work, she noted, serves as a corrective to another blind spot in historical writing on the welfare state: the failure to identify the social services provided by the military, particularly after the shift to an all-volunteer army in 1973, as a fundamental part of the welfare state. Rather than rewards for service, as under the G.I. Bill, social benefits became enticements for enlistment. Moreover, this development of the military welfare state was fundamentally gendered, attempting to fix the army's image in the wake of Vietnam and prop up the male breadwinner in the face of threats from feminism, the gay rights movement, and economic insecurity. Women, by contrast, received attention from the developing military welfare state largely as wives, not as soldiers. Also significant is the fact that the military welfare state was developing just as the civilian welfare state was being eroded by conservative politicians. While conservatives viewed the latter, along with other aspects of "big government," as destroying family values, they saw the army as an honorable institution protecting the family. As Michel aptly put it in her comment, these developments raise the intriguing question of whether militarism is actually better for the welfare state than communism.

In the final roundtable, Richard Bessel, Steve Estes, Laura McEnaney, Uta Poiger, and Marjan Schwegman brought together the themes of the conference and provided questions for further thought. For them, the conference title, "Gender and the Long Postwar," contained two of the most important concepts linking all of the papers. The *first* was the idea of the postwar, and how it should be both periodized and characterized. The half-century that followed the close of the Second World War is known for its dynamism, and the range of topics presented at the conference reflected a diversity of regional, national, and transnational developments and experiences. Commentators questioned when the postwar period ended, the existence of turning points, and even if it has yet ended. Periodization could not be discussed without also raising questions of causality and continuity vs. change. The first interrogates the extent to which the events of the postwar can be linked to World War II

itself. Or, as McEnaney put it, is there a difference between the postwar and the Cold War? From the papers presented, it seems possible that at certain times and places, especially in the United States, individuals acted and reacted to Cold War policy rather than to conditions stemming directly from World War II. It was also evident from the panels, however, that at times a longer view, one that bridges the periods before and after World War II, is necessary to fully understand the historical trends of the second half of the twentieth century. Several of the participants noted that the postwar period was also a post-*Holocaust* era.

The *second* major theme was, of course, that of gender in all of its guises. Papers explored historical subjects' representations of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality, and their willingness to accept or propose alternatives to existing gender norms. Scholars linked gender to all facets of postwar—demobilization experiences, migration, reconstruction, myth-and memory-making, altered work and family patterns, sexuality, and consumerism, as well as violence and combat—demonstrating persuasively that a gender perspective must be part of any comprehensive account of the period.

*Michael Grutchfield (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill),  
Reid Gustafson, Melissa Kravetz, Christina Larocco,  
and Amy Rutenberg (University of Maryland, College Park)*