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Introduction: Advances in Theorizing Varieties of Gender Regimes

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This special section advances theorizing of the systems of gender-based inequalities from a macro-perspective by engaging with a broader world regional scope of historical and comparative analyses to reconsider the varieties of gender regimes.

Thinking again as to what is the full range of varieties of gender regimes is key. This discussion of varieties of gender regimes focuses and deepens debates on how macro-level concepts are, and might be, gendered; how to engage with cross-national comparisons, the global horizon; and more generally theorize variations in forms of gender relations. Macro-level concepts capture the global horizon, world systems, and comparisons between countries. They assist analysis of the impact of crisis on society and the processes of development around the world. They are mobilized implicitly or explicitly in cross-national comparisons. They are needed to think about the gender of “scale,” and are part of the return to analyzing structural inequality.

The contributions to this section agree that gender regimes are complex systems of inequality, which vary over time (domestic and public gender regimes) and space. Until recently, however (Walby 2009), gender regime theory has used examples from Europe and the United States in scoping the trajectories of change in public gender regimes (neoliberal and social democratic) and remained silent on varieties of domestic gender regimes. The contributions to this special section advance arguments for new varieties and domains of gender regimes in a broader world regional perspective. The cases covered focus on change in the Muslim world (North Africa and Turkey), on non-European advanced economies (Japan), as well as on European cases with conceptually important historical (Germany) and comparative (Spain) divergences.

A first major question raised by the contributions to this special section by Walby (2020, this section), Shire and Nemoto (2020, this section),

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Moghadam (2020, this section), and Lombardo and Alfonso (2020, this section), and in forthcoming additions by Hearn et al. (2020) and Kocabicak (2020),¹ concerns the historical transformations of gender regimes. Are domestic gender regimes modern (Shire and Nemoto) or premodern (Moghadam), and is the historical analysis too focused on countries with democratic transformations (Moghadam), ignoring conservative and authoritarian modernities (Moghadam; Shire and Nemoto)? In her lead article, Walby makes clear that her concept of domestic gender regime denotes premodern patriarchy, while only the public is modern, underlining the autonomous historical development of systems of gender inequality vis-à-vis class and other systems of inequality. Kocabicak, however, argues that domestic gender regimes in Turkey vary between premodern and modern forms, both over time and by region. From the perspective of the four subsystems of gender regimes she differentiates in her theory, Walby agrees with Kocabicak that gender regimes in a country may be modern and premodern at the same time, but disagrees with Shire and Nemoto, who view domestic and public gender regimes as modern variations.

A second question concerns the scales of historical transformations. Is gender regime theory focused on the nation-state? While recent work has focused considerably on the polity as a domain at variable scales of analysis, and specifically on the European Union as a supranational polity in the regional dynamics of gender regimes (Walby 2004, 2009, 2011, 2015), Lombardo and Alfonso, writing on the Spanish autonomous regions, highlight transformative dynamics across other domains at the subnational level. Walby confirms that it was never her intention to position regimes solely at the national level. In line with her extensive writings on recent European dynamics, Walby views the focus by Lombardo and Alfonso as congruent with her theory, and an important contribution to studying subnational dynamics of gender regime transformations.

These engagements with the historical and transnational dimensions of gender regime theory draw implications for comparative analyses of varieties of public gender regimes. Shire and Nemoto argue that conservative domestic gender regimes transform in path-dependent ways, which are neither neoliberal nor social democratic. Moghadam argues similarly for the Middle East and North Africa region. In both contributions, family law and its reform are seen as the pivotal institution for how these gender regimes transform. Thus in Tunisia, it is the dismantling of sharia family law (through the entry of greater numbers of women into the legal professions and judiciary) that tips the gender regime in a more public direction, while in Germany and Japan, the enactment of constitutional equality, reforms of family law, and the women's movement initiated a transition to a more democratic, but still conservative public gender regime, with new family policies reinforcing rather than changing the gendered division of labor. Moghadam goes a step further to argue that the family should be conceptualized as a domain of systems of gender inequality. Walby's concern, however, is to argue that gender cannot be reduced to the family, and

instead, that what constitutes a family is dispersed across the institutional domains of gender regimes. Thus, family policies are part of the political domain, and the unpaid family labor of women is part of the economy.

A reconsideration of the domains of gender regimes and their relative importance for transforming gender inequalities is a common theme across the contributions to this collection of papers. Lombardo and Alfonso show how the economy and coercion over women can develop in the direction of a neoliberal gender regime, as occurred when the autonomous Spanish regions were forced to adopt EU austerity measures in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. A neoliberal swing is also evident when abortion rights are challenged by the central government. Yet, the polity at the level of autonomous regions and in social movements within the domain of civil society continues to form sites of struggle for defending Spain's more social democratic gender regime. Moghadam similarly shows how developments across the domains unfold in asynchronous and often contradictory ways, to yield intraregional differences in the varieties of conservative corporatist public gender regimes in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. While the authors differ in how they identify domains and systems, Kocobicak shows the centrality of property for understanding the trajectory from premodern to modern domestic regimes in Turkey, while Shire and Nemoto see transformations in family law and family policy as distinguishing domestic and public conservative gender regimes in Germany and Japan.

Walby states that gender regimes were never intended as a linear theory, and reversals are an integral part of empirical analysis. Moreover, the transition from a domestic to a public gender regime does not mean progress for improving gender equalities. Instead, the question of progress is an empirical and contingent matter. Despite the arguments for viewing Japan and Germany as a third, conservative gender regime, and public gender regimes in the Magreb as conservative corporatist, Walby continues to view the main alternatives for public gender regimes as either neoliberal or social democratic, and prefers to situate the proposed conservative alternative as a stalled or highly uneven change from a domestic to a public gender regime. Kocobicak's designation of the stalled public gender regime in Turkey as neoliberal aligns with Walby's varieties of public gender regimes.

Finally, there is some disagreement with Walby's insistence that violence is an institutional domain of the gender regime. Hearn et al. prefer to theorize violence as its own regime, while Moghadam contests its inclusion as a subsystem. Walby notes that Moghadam engages nonetheless in an empirical analysis of violence in the transformations of gender regimes in the Magreb. Hearn et al., however, argue for a broader conceptualization of violence, which includes less direct, diffused, and dispersed forms of threat and force. Like Walby, they argue for more cross-disciplinary approaches to bring together the study of gendered violence in international relations, sociology, and criminology.

The articles in this special section confirm and extend the contributions of a macro theory of gender regimes for understanding historical and contemporary changes. At the same time, they contribute to further developing the theory and to extending the comparative reach to other world regions.

Overall the contributions to this special section suggest that gender regime theory, and the macro-perspective it develops, constitutes an integral part of the future study of the world system of gender inequalities. The next step will be to test these new distinctions in theories of varieties of gender regimes against a still wider range of cases.

Notes

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1. The forthcoming pieces by Hearn et al. and Kocobicak in this journal were submitted as part of this special section, but will appear in a future issue for space reasons.

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