

Winter Semester 2021/2022

SDAC Guest Lecture Series

From Birth Control to Human Rights?
Reproductive Decision-Making in Historical PerspectiveIsabel Heinemann
University of Münster
HistoryWednesday
08.12.21
6-8pm c.t.

Isabel Heinemann is Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Münster, Germany, specializing in the history of Germany, National Socialism and the Holocaust and the history of the American family in the 20th century with a strong focus on gender and reproductive decision-making. She has been the chair of the Emmy Noether Research Group “Family Values and Social Change: The US-American Family in the 20th Century” of the German Science Foundation (2009-2016) and of the Research Project “Reproductive Decision-Making in Germany and the United States in the Second Half of the 20th Century” in the framework of the Collaborative Research Center of the German Science Foundation “Cultures of Decision-Making” (2015-2019). Her current research projects address the global history of racism, the gender history of the Federal Republic of Germany, the transnational history of health feminism on both sides of the iron curtain and the impact of National Socialism on family life across Europe after 1945.

Attempts to curtail women’s reproductive autonomy – especially regarding access to contraceptives and legal abortion – currently make a central part of the agenda of right wing and populist parties all over Europe. However, this mirrors not only a contemporary tendency of anti-women and anti-gender activism, but rather a longer historical trajectory: As a historical analysis demonstrates, women’s (and individual’s) attempts to control their fertility have always been contested. Thus, Dr. Heinemann’s presentation seeks to bridge the gap between contemporary debates on reproductive autonomy on the one hand and historical developments of reproductive decision-making within the context of human rights on the other.

The second half of the 20th century saw unprecedented and rapidly expanding possibilities of reproductive decision-making for individuals and couples due to the availability of contraceptives and the development of reproductive technologies. At the same time, population planners and health experts readily restricted women’s reproductive autonomy, especially when it came to poor women, minority women, or more broadly, women in the Global South. As Dr. Heinemann will argue in her talk, reproductive rights discourses negotiated not only decision-making possibilities, but revealed more fundamental and sometimes conflicting notions of the nuclear family as the foundation of the nation and of reproductive rights as human rights. Dr. Heinemann will thus ask whether the idealization of the small “nuclear family” served to justify coercive interventions into women’s decision-making and whether this changed as a result of a heightened emphasis on “reproductive human rights”. More broadly, the presentation will discuss how notions of human rights intersected with international debates on population control and reproductive rights – while seeking to establish a chronology of shifting priorities in terms of who was granted reproductive autonomy at which point in time.

This event will be held via zoom.
Please contact Prof. Dr. Dominik
Müller to register
(dominik.m.mueller@fau.de).



ELITE MASTER'S PROGRAM
Standards of Decision-Making Across Cultures