

Call For Papers

Gender and Money : Historical Approaches

A Research Workshop

19-20 June 2025 : Université de Paris - Cité

Introduction

The control and use of money are clearly perceived as a gender issue in the present day. In France, the possibility for a married woman to open a savings account in her own name dates to 1881, to control her own salary to 1907, and the right open a current account to 1965: so many milestones on the road to emancipation. As a pessimistic counterpoint, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, published in 1985, Margaret Atwood imagined a dystopian future in which the brutal suppression of access to money was the first marker of the enslavement of women. Historians, however, have not yet fully taken up this theme, which makes it difficult to understand developments over the long term and from a comparative perspective. Specialists in the literature have been more active, tracing, for example, the conceptual link between the corruption brought about by money and the corruption brought about by women. Women's work, too, has been and still is a well-established theme in historical research. Yet money itself - its management and control, the way it can be used as a tool of domination or as a lever for action, the question of who owns it and who controls it - has rarely been posed as an independent long-term historical question. Although the question of gender and money has emerged peripherally in many fields of study, it has never been taken on as an issue in its own right.

One of the main reasons for this relative neglect is the difficulty of defining what money is over a very long period and in a wide variety of historical societies. This polysemous term refers both to wealth (income and assets, in stock or in flow, which can be accounted for abstractly through accounts, tables or balance sheets) and to the materiality of money in circulation (cash, coins and banknotes, as well as the alternative currencies studied, for example, by the sociologist Viviana Zelizer). Sociologists and anthropologists have helped to distinguish money - which is a social, political and moral fact - from currency, a more limited concept used in economics to designate the instrument of exchange. Money encompasses, but is not limited to, cash, because it takes on its meaning through the prism of the social context, but also of affects, values, mores, beliefs, the collective imagination and, more generally, the symbolic order that underpins them (Baumann *et alii*, 2008). This definition invites us to look at the gendered aspects of relationships with money: money is a concrete means of ensuring masculine domination, but it can also be a tool used by women to create room for manoeuvre. This broad understanding of money is also a welcome invitation to historians: highly variable from one era to the next, money becomes a powerful indicator of gender norms and social relations between men and women.

To open up this field of study, still largely unexplored in history, we are propose this call for papers for a two-day research workshop to analyse the many interactions between money and gender from the early Middle Ages to the present day. The approach is open chronologically and geographically, based on historical case studies, where gender is not reduced to the history of women, but also takes into account masculinities and the structuring role of money in relations between men and women. Thus the issues of possession, management and control of

money will be central to the contributions to this workshop, as will the question of money as a useful lever of domination or of agency.

I. Norms and Language

The first area to be explored in this workshop will be gendered conceptions of money over the long term. The relationship between gender norms and money, from the perspective of cultural history or of representations, could be explored in dialogue with literary studies and art history in particular. How does the gender order of a given period and society determine our relationship with money? Jeanne Lazarus (2021) notes that women's relationship to money is seen as less legitimate than that of men, and is marked by a triple suspicion. Firstly, there is the suspicion of impurity, inherited from Christian exegesis: women are considered impure if they possess money, which is always implicitly linked to a suspicion of prostitution. Secondly, there is the suspicion of incompetence, as women are considered frivolous and wasteful, and always less rational than men. Finally, there is the suspicion of dependence, which leads women to be seen only as financially protected by their husbands, families, communities or the state. These general observations can be illustrated or qualified by case studies. Men, on the other hand, are thought to be on the side of rationality, forecasting and money management. But can we distinguish between economic masculinities that vary in time and space? Are there hegemonic and subordinate masculinities in the financial sphere, depending on the era? The distinction between the capitalist (a powerful decision-maker) and his accountant (a figure of submission and execution), for example, provides some clues as to how to nuance masculine representations of money. Since the work of R.W. Connell, it has been clear that 'middle-class masculinity' can be hegemonic or subordinate in the contemporary world (Connell 2005 [1995]). How can this tension be historicised?

Secondly, how have the languages of law and religion constructed imaginative systems concerning money and created representations of the possible relationships between men and women and wealth since the Middle Ages? For while ecclesiastical language casts suspicion on women's management of and their relationship to material goods since Eve and her original sin, it also opens up areas of legitimacy, particularly for consecrated women who belong to the nobility and head powerful monasteries whose property they administer. Similarly, not all men were recognised as being capable of legitimately administering common funds (of the State, the Church, etc.), but it was men consecrated to God (clerics and monks) who were designated from the early Middle Ages onwards as good administrators, those who knew how to make money work and to ensure collective salvation. At the end of the Middle Ages, this virtuous model was applied to secular society, as the Church pointed to the great merchant as the one who worked for the salvation of society.

Finally, the imaginary world of money has been materialised in legal norms that restrict men's and women's relationship to money, depending on their status (minor or adult) and their place in the family, particularly in the case of women (daughter, wife or widow did not have the same rights). But legal systems are varied (customary law and Roman law do not have the same relationship to the inheritance of daughters and sons or to the dowry, for example) and there are many specific national features (for example, the principle of 'couverture' in English Common Law from the end of the Middle Ages to the Married Women's Property Act of 1882). Papers, potentially in dialogue with legal history, on the legal framing of succession, property or the matrimonial alliance from a gender perspective will be welcome. This normative framework must not be confused with the social practices that may conform to it or, on the contrary,

circumvent it, however: concrete case studies on the ways in which men and women deal with money, with or against the law, are encouraged.

II. Accounting and Control

Counting, consuming, saving, investing: how does the circulation of money within the family, and between the family and institutions, reveal gender relations, between domination and autonomy? Who counts, what is counted and what is not counted? In what way? And in whose interests? This workshop will delve into the question of control over a couple's resources, with studies of ordinary family accounting (in the vein of ethnographic studies of accounting practices, for example). It will also consider the power relationships involved in receiving and rendering accounts, and even in keeping accounts for oneself.

Pioneering historical studies encourage us to look beyond stereotypes and what the law says - admittedly restrictive for wives in France from the time of the Napoleonic Code onwards - to highlight women, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in daily struggle for control of the earnings of the couple and very aware of the property issues at stake within the family (Sohn 1996). At the same time, the revival of interest in accounting and accountability from the central Middle Ages to early modernity has opened the possibility of a hitherto unexplored gender analysis. The women of the elite, as landlords, were accountable, while lower down the social ladder, the women in charge of the laundry, the farmyard or the dairy were accountable. Between the two, however, bookkeeping was mainly a male affair. On the other hand, it is possible that the management of estates or businesses gave some women autonomy over expenditure and investment, and that bookkeeping was, at least in early modern England, a particularly feminine skill. But if bookkeeping was seen as a woman's job, the degree of empowerment can be questioned: was it a thankless and time-consuming task that was delegated to women precisely because it bound them to the domestic sphere? Can the management of money be equated with control of it? The question of education is also key. Gender inequalities can be illuminated by what happens earlier in life, in terms of education in income and asset management. From savings education in the schools of the Third Republic, through domestic economics taught in girls' schools from the inter-war years onwards, to budget education in the technical schools of the 1980s-2000s, has money education been a tool for promoting and maintaining patriarchy, or for providing autonomy and possibilities for individual action to women within the family?

III. Credit, Remuneration and Care

Women's participation in credit markets has been considered in different ways. Is it easier for women to borrow than to lend? Lending can encourage autonomy, but much depends on the legal context and on marital status. However, the focus has been on women's borrowing and, in particular, microcredit, first perceived by development economists as a means of empowering poor women. But this has not always been the case. Who were the women who lent and borrowed? Who did they lend to and who did they borrow from? More broadly, it's a question of questioning the gender of debt. Laurence Fontaine describes the moral economy, structured by the bonds of debt, in terms of vertical links between rich and poor, but a large part of credit, like other forms of solidarity, may well have consisted of horizontal links between relatives and neighbours.

Recognising that money and cash are not the same allows us to take a broader view of what constitutes an economic transaction or a form of income. Olwen Hufton's innovative concept

of the 'makeshift economy' has long recognised the importance to poor households of a range of activities and forms of income other than paid work, including small-scale credit, the use of common rights such as gleaning and access to communal land, embezzlement, smuggling, theft, prostitution, begging, poor relief and mutual aid. Often regarded as criminal activities, they have recently been examined for their economic value by historians. Gleaning could account for up to 10% of household income. Proposals are awaited on the nature of these 'bricolage' activities as forms of income-generating work. How much did sex workers earn in the past? How much income can begging or ragging bring into the household economy?

A recent development in economic history, in the wake of feminist economics and development economics, calls for a monetary value to be placed on *care* activities. The interpersonal and emotional dimensions of care cannot be neglected. However, they have often led to the idea that care work used to be carried out within the family, by women, particularly married women, and without remuneration. However, new studies show that, historically, a large proportion of care work was not carried out within the family and that this work was in fact paid for. Who was paid to provide this care, in what contexts and why? Under what circumstances did households choose to pay for care work, rather than seeing it as a 'natural' part of women's unpaid work? To date, studies of care work from this perspective have attempted to assign monetary values on the basis of cases where it was paid for. However, does assigning a monetary value to care work reproduce masculine categories and values of productivity and efficiency? Is care work priceless? Can we put a price on work that has an emotional dimension? Or is it all the more important to insist on value, in order to avoid the trap of seeing care work as a 'calling' or a 'labour of love'?

IV. Conflicts, Violence and Collective Mobilisation

This workshop will also address conflicts over money and its management. We particularly encourage proposals which consider economic violence: how does this manifest itself in the relationship to money within families and couples? But also how is the control of money one of the means of exerting violence on women and dependents, particularly on minors?

Economic violence is one form of violence within the family. This recent concept refers to all acts designed to deprive the victim of her financial autonomy, increasing her isolation and making it more difficult for her to leave the family unit (deprivation of resources, exclusive management of family income, endangerment of family assets, refusal to pay maintenance). Over the *longue durée*, economic violence has long been considered legal, like other forms of physical violence (paternal or marital correction) or sexual violence (the conjugal debt), because marriage placed wives in a position of legal minority and the management of the family patrimony fell exclusively to the husband. However, more work is needed to refine the spatial, temporal and social patterns of economic violence. Which social groups are most affected by economic violence? Which regions most firmly assert patriarchal domination over resources and which can be seen as more egalitarian?

Furthermore, in practice, there are many conflicts and negotiations over the management of economic resources, which are documented in archives (divorce proceedings, wills, autobiographies, correspondence, etc.). How do women negotiate access to money in patriarchal systems, particularly when resources are limited? Finally, men's domination of money was also challenged collectively. The demand for economic emancipation for married women has been at the heart of European feminist struggles since the nineteenth century, and has been achieved at different rates in different countries. The dismantling by civil law of the

economic guardianship of wives is in fact the fruit of a long process, begun in the nineteenth century and completed in the second half of the twentieth century. Who were the key players in this struggle? Beyond political texts and legislative battles, are these demands for financial autonomy perceptible in women's struggles that focus on other aspects of women's lives (work, control of fertility, etc.)?

Proposals for contributions (abstract of less than 500 words in English or French + brief CV) may cover any historical period, any country or cultural area, with or without a comparative approach. They should specify the sources used and the main bibliographical references.

They should be sent jointly to the organisers of the event: Anais Albert (anais.albert@u-paris.fr); Christopher Fletcher (christopher.fletcher@univ-lille.fr); Julie Marfany (julie.marfany@durham.ac.uk); Marianne Thivend (marianne.thivend@u-paris.fr); and Valentina Toneatto (valentina.toneatto@univ-lyon2.fr) **by 6 January 2024**.

A Very Brief Bibliography

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