Gender hate, a global trend

Special Issue: Women and “the People”

Patriarchy, no thanks!

Feminism across borders

also in this issue

BLACK PROTESTS IN POLAND / #NIUNAMENOS IN ARGENTINA / #METOO IN RUSSIA / MARCH 8 IN TURKEY
**Worlds and words beyond**

Whenever I meet a new reader who is unfamiliar with the journal Baltic Worlds, I have to explain that the journal covers a much bigger area than the title indicates. We include post-socialist countries in Eastern and Central Europe, Russia, the former Soviet states (extending down to the Caucasus), and the former Yugoslavian countries in our area of interest, as well as all countries around the Baltic Sea, and sometimes even Norway. Occasionally the Advisory Scientific Council has discussed re-naming the journal, maybe adding the word “beyond”: Baltic Worlds and beyond. But we restrain ourselves as, to be honest, it is not much more understandable for the presumed new readers.

Also, we do not feel that we can link the critical area studies we support strictly to a geographical area. The fuzzy area we study mirrors thoughts, ideas and actions in the past, and how those are remembered, understood and linked to today’s developments. We even like to examine the void of what never happened in the region, and phantom sentiments of what was interrupted and cut off. The theories we apply further create new perspectives – as for example when we applied Bakhtin theory in a post-colonial reading of comics from India.

HAVING SAID THAT, I would now like to introduce this special issue of Baltic Worlds, that is solely devoted to the study of female resistance and movements and their connections and responses to populism. The theme “Women and the people” and the articles in this issue are more thoroughly introduced by our guest editor Jenny Gunnarsson Payne on the next page.

Baltic Worlds’ alert readership will recognize topics and discussions previously presented in the journal, such as on the idea of gender as a symbolic glue, or on far-right ideology resulting in limitations and threats to academic freedom, in particular gender studies. Here, we aim to go deeper and understand how the rhetoric and the resistance from women as a group is connected in time and space. We want to test how we understand the changes in our area for women and gender, by exploring developments in different parts of the area, but also by comparing those findings to parallel ones in Argentina.

Yes, this is a way of new thinking about area studies that I have noticed getting stronger; we hope to understand our own area by comparing with the development in other regional areas.

**Feminism, protest** and far right populism are therefore discussed in this special issue from the experiences gained in Hungary, Poland, Turkey, Russia, Sweden, and Argentina. The idea for this issue came to life when researchers from those countries met and exchanged research results. Suddenly new perspectives emerged. And this is at the heart of what Baltic Worlds always aims to do: to open up for dynamic processes. Often, we try to do so by inviting multidisciplinary articles – but this time we have made a change and instead take a multi-area-study approach.

*Ninna Mörner*
Introduction.

Conflicts and alliances in a polarized world

Women, gender and “the People”

In their recently published manifesto *Feminism for the 99%*, Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser describe contemporary feminist and queer liberation movements as being “caught between a rock and a hard place” between conservative religious and patriarchal pressure, and those “who would hand us over on a platter for direct predation by capital”.

In this issue, we take a closer look at this tripart transnational constellation of conservative, often illiberal and sometimes even authoritarian anti-gender mobilization, the still powerful yet increasingly contested neoliberal hegemony, and the recent rise of feminist mass-movements. How does the drama between them play out in different national, regional and transnational contexts? Even though the articles can be read separately as reports on these developments in Argentina, Hungary, Sweden, Poland, Russia and Turkey, a main contribution of this issue is how these cases, when read together, tell us something broader about the current transnational polarization around “gender” and the role that it plays for different political projects that claim to speak in the name of “the people”.

Gender and right-wing populism

As David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar have pointed out, the recent success of anti-gender mobilization must be understood in relation to the co-existence of and intersections between conservative Christian mobilization against “gender ideology” and the present surge of right-wing populism in Europe.

Although one cannot and should not be reduced to the other, it is clear that the rise of right-wing populism and the development towards illiberalism and authoritarianism and anti-gender mobilization exist in a “happy marriage”, where the former reinforces the latter and the latter provides further substance to their idea of “a national people”. In nationalist and conservative articulations of “the people”, women are often included foremost in their
reproductive and sexual capacities, as child bearers, mothers and wives in heteronormative nuclear families where gender roles are based on presumed essential biological characteristics, often seen as a ground for gender wars with the political right (see Rainer Graff & David Paternotte (2017); Elzbieta Keskin’s article in this issue). All of these approaches however point to more “actual people”. As such, it has clear totalitarian tendencies.

In contrast, “the feminist people” as constructed by today’s populist mass-movements tend to strive in the opposite direction, by expanding the political demands from below rather than establishing them with reference to an external moral law. Rather, what these movements have in common is that they refuse to acknowledge such Laws. The Black Protests began as a refusal to accept an abortion ban, and the Ni Una Menos refused to accept femicide, and both movements went on to extend their demands far beyond this abject brutality but yet limited political issues to counteract oppressive regimes on both national and transnational levels. Also in the Turkish context, we can see how the feminist struggle is articulated with broader issues of democracy, education, human rights and social rights, not least through the work of solidarity academies (see Darya Keskin’s essay on this issue). All of these examples (and others across the globe) demonstrate how contemporary feminist mobilization plays a crucial role of providing a democratic and progressive alternative to both neoliberalism and illiberal populism, which are one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Dem ocratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In a world where gender tends to be one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Democratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In a world where gender tends to be one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Democratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In a world where gender tends to be one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Democratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In a world where gender tends to be one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Democratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In a world where gender tends to be one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Democratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In a world where gender tends to be one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Democratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In a world where gender tends to be one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Democratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In a world where gender tends to be one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Democratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In a world where gender tends to be one of the key categories through which societies are organized, it should come as no surprise that different constructions are not neutral to one another in the political project is democratic or not. In deed, as Renata Salecl has argued: “Democratic as well as totalitarian power claims to govern in the name of the people”. In

PHOTO: KRZYSZTOF KANIEWSKI/ZUMA WIRE/Alamy Live News

Poland

WOMEN AS “THE PEOPLE”

Reflections on the Black Protests as a counterforce against right-wing and authoritarian populism

by Jenny Gunnarsson Payne
political theorist Chantal Mouffe has argued that Europe today finds itself in a “populist moment” – the outcome of which will be decisive for the future of European democracies. As a result of a neoliberal hegemony that has led to increasing inequalities and a shift of power from democratic to financial actors, an increasing number of political movements and parties who claim to give voice back to “the people” have emerged. In some countries – such as Poland – these political actors have successfully made it into power, and began a deconstructing process to dismantle the fundamental pillars on which modern liberal democracy rests. Indeed, when Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) won the parliamentary election in 2015 they “swiftly began to introduce changes in virtually every sphere of public life, gradually dismantling the basic tenants of liberal democracy.” To describe this type of illiberal democracies, feminist scholars Andrea Petri and Weronika Grzebhalska have coined the term “polypole state,” referring to a parasitic fungus (the polypole) that lives of decaying trees and thereby contributes to their deterioration. They argued already in 2016 that the then “emergent regimes of Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Beata Szydło in Poland do not represent a revival of authoritarianism, but a new form of governance” that stems from “the failures of globalisation and neoliberalism” and “which created states that are weak for the strong and strong for the weak.”

MOUFFE CLAIMS THAT A “POPULIST MOMENT” IS characterized by a situation “when under the pressures of political or socio-economic transformation, the dominant hegemony is being destabilized by the multiplication of unsatisfied demands.” This leads to the failure of existing democratic institutions to retain the loyalty of their citizens, and subsequently, as a consequence “the historical role of domain in which a hegemonic formation is being disarticulated and the possibility arises of constructing a new subject of collective action – the people – capable of reconfiguring a social order experienced as unjust”.5

ALTHOUGH MOUFFE adds the caveat that her recent analysis of the present conjuncture shall be limited to Western European contexts, her perspective also speaks to the development towards “illiberal democracy” in Central- and Eastern Europe, where, as is well established, the promises of the transition to a capitalist economy have failed to deliver and lead precisely to the multiplication of unsatisfied demands and the resulting loss of legitimacy in the liberal-democratic project. Following Mouffe, I argue that populism is best understood as a hegemonic strategy rather than a regime, but for the sake of my argument and to acknowledge how these illiberal regimes have raised to power through populist articulations claiming that they represent “the people” as an underdog against an elite or an establishment, I shall in the following refer to this phenomena as “illiberal populism.” In Poland, the waning belief in liberal democracy has left the playing field open to the illiberal political actors, who claim to speak in the name of “ordinary” and “normal” people against a liberal global elite that is said to impose its liberal and “globalist” worldview – including gender equality and multiculturalism – in a manner similar to the Soviet social engineering of the past.6

As part of this illiberal populist project, conservative anti-LGBTQ sentiments have entered Polish politics with a renewed form and force, and made a strong alliance with the current illiberal regime, articulating “gender” as a key element of their construction of an “alien threat to the nation” and making abortion one of the symbolic issues in their “politics of traditional values.”7 In doing so, they have successfully managed to gain wide support for a new illiberal universalism “that replaces democratic and illiberal reforms performed by the current regime.”8 After having followed the movement and its transnational permutations, mostly from afar but also “in situ,” I shall, however, become clear to me that the Black Protests offers one of the most powerful examples of a democratic counter-movement against such illiberal populism to date, not just in Poland but also far beyond, on a transnational level. Specifically, as I shall argue in this essay, one of the main achievements of the Black Protests is that they have not only offered powerful examples of active rejections of the exclusive articulation of “the people” as articulated by the illiberal regime and conservative Christian movements, but also an alternative collective identity – another, feminist and transnational version of “the people” – that has proven effective in mobilizing broadly nationally and transnationally on democratic issues far beyond sexual and reproductive rights.9

“THE WANING BELIEF IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY HAS LEFT THE PLAYING FIELD OPEN TO THE ILLIBERAL POLITICAL ACTORS, WHO CLAIM TO SPEAK IN THE NAME OF ‘ORDINARY’ AND ‘NORMAL’ PEOPLE AGAINST A LIBERAL GLOBAL ELITE.”

MUFTFF PROVIDES A KEY EXAMPLE OF how the movement over a very short time managed mobilize transnationally, playing a crucial part for the construction of a feminist global struggle united in solidarity across their differences. How to capture the transnational echoes of a movement Notes on a “messy ethnography” My “messy ethnography” of the Black Protests started in April 2016, when I took part in the Warsaw demonstration against the new law proposal. Since then, I have continued to relentlessly trying to follow the developments of the Black Protests and its transnational resonance, for example in the form of other national Black Protests, in expressions of solidarity with the Polish movement, or in the form of other feminist movements explicitly expressing some kind of connection to the Polish Black Protests. A great deal of this has taken part online. “Liking” and thereby following Facebook pages turned out to be particularly useful for understanding how political messages, slogans, images and videos circulate online. In addition to offering information about the specific group administering the page in question, these Facebook pages also functioned as forums for expressing solidarity between groups and movements in different countries, and for sharing links about likeminded protests taking place in other parts of the world. Although much information has been available in English (many of the relevant Facebook pages and websites are bi- or trilingual), I have also followed some pages in languages that I do not master. With limited language skills but patient friends speaking the languages

• their unprecedented example of how the movement over a very short time managed mobilize transnationally, playing a crucial part for the construction of a feminist global struggle united in solidarity across their differences.

Activists in favor of the legal abortion react in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on August 9, 2018 to the voting by the Argentine Senate against the bill that legalize the procedure in the country.

PHOTO: MARIANA TERRILE
and a good deal of Google-translating, I have tried to trace the events online and in conversation also in other languages (notably Polish and Spanish). I have also spoken to activists who have been involved in the struggle to learn about ongoing events, given a speech on a solidarity manifestation outside the Black Protests’ locales, and spoken on television. I have interviewed three activists in Argentina to investigate any potential transnational connections between the movements (Buenos Aires, December 2016). In this paper I have tried no means been a “detached observ- er.” Rather, I have been moving between positions: sometimes I have followed the developments as an activist and advocate of women’s rights and of reproductive and sexual rights, some- times mainly as a researcher, and always as a feminist ally, and a friend in solidarity. I have been emotionally attached, squealing with excitement when I have witnessed videos clips of big marches and speeches online (sometimes without understand- ing much of what is said in the video!), and reacted with anger, political fatigue, or even fear, when reading about the rise in anti- abortion and authoritarian anti gender sentiments in Poland and beyond.

Following transnational feminist echoes: Some methodological remarks

Admittedly, any attempt to draw a picture of the transnational resonance of a movement will necessarily have to do so using large brushstrokes. In trying to capture some of the transnational "echoes" (a term, as we shall see, I have borrowed from feminist historian Joan Scott) of the Black Protests it is impossible to avoid missing out on local organizational complexities and em- bodied experiences of political mobilization. The political fatigue, or even fear, when reading about the rise in anti-abortion and authoritarian anti gender sentiments in Poland and beyond.

The making sense of political passions Reading the Black Protests through a populistic and psychoanalytic lens

In her recent book Far A Left Populism (2016), Mouffe6 puts her hope for the task of saving European democracy in the creation of a left populism of the type that has been practiced by parties and movements such as Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece and the Momentum movement in the UK, and, I assume without it being mentioned in the book, the Polish Partia Razem. What this type of populist projects seeks to do is “to recover democracy to deepen and extend it.” Their strategy to do so, according to Mouffe:

[...].

This linking together of a variety of political demands under a common “name” that names the struggle of an “underdog” against an oppressive regime (an elite) follows what both Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau has called a populistic logic. Importantly, “a movement is not populist because in its politics or ideology it presents actual contents identifiable as [populist], but because it shows a particular logic of articulation of those contents—what political economists call ’narrative’—that is relevant for the political mobilization.”36 In this essay, I shall argue that the Black Protests and the transnational feminist movement that emerged in its aftermath follows this kind of logic to create a broader social subjectivity of what Graziela di Marco has called a “libidinal economy.”

afirma TIONS ARE TO exert any political influence, however they need to be “constantly repeated” (emphasis added).37 It is by way of repetition that affirmations become “embedded” in the minds of the individ- uals that are exposed to them. The psychoanalytic implication of this is that repetitions or proclamations work on “those profound regions of our unconscious selves in which the motives of our actions are forged,”38 and over time come to be experienced as true.24 The affective grip of a movement is determined by its ability to “mo- bilize affect,” to “move” the feelings of a great enough number of subjects to the extent that they come to identify with a political cause. Thus, repetition is also imperative for constructing a feminist collective identity, and for such collectivity to be extended so as to include an increasing number of subjects to become part of the same struggle and to identify with a cause. Indeed, as I have argued before, it is “through repetition subjects involved in diverse struggles recognize the same ‘enemy’ despite disparate [potentially] antagonistic experiences” and it is only through that repetition that a political identity is necessary for the creation of an affective collectivity can be sus- tained over time.49 If we are to understand both how the Black Protests managed to mobilize such a broad spectrum of the Pol- ish population, and how it managed to mobilize across national and cultural contexts, however, we consider need that repeti- tion is ever a “pure” repetition of the “same”.

Feminist identity and fantasy echo

A crucial part of “sharing and bonding” is to create fantastic narratives that, in feminist historian Joan Scott’s words, “en- able identifications that transcend[s] history and national specificity.”50 In feminist mobilization, this often happens through references to different feminist “foremothers”, who sometimes have lived and acted in radically different historical times and national and political contexts. In the Black Protests, the articulations of a “feminist us” have allowed a feminist pre- history from the start: the use of the symbolic coat hangers alone repeats a syndrome of previous struggles for accessible and safe abortion, and puts it within a historical context where such items have already been used to self-induce abor- tion.

In this context, what is crucial to understand is that the po- litical acts of creating and repeating affectively laden fantastic nar- ratives about the pre-history of the moment: how our contempor- ary national and transnational struggles are in themselves crucial in creating a “feminist us” with which an even earlier identity. Following Scott, I argue that fantasy is crucial in un- derstanding any successful political mobilization. For an intense affective attachment to a political cause to be formed, it is neces- sary for a feminist subject to take themselves as fantasy figures taking part, and begin identifying with – this is precisely where fantasy comes in. Fantasy “enables individu- als and groups to give themselves histories.”51 The reference to past protests, thus, should not be read as simple reiterations of past events, but rather in terms of what Scott has referred to as fantasy echo.

It is precisely by filling the empty categories of self and other with recognizable representations that fantasy works to secure identity. In my use of, echo is not so
another future is possible.
In time and national territorial borders serves a crucial function

In other words, the operation to repeatedly articulating links

sense and comments on it as well. “35
include words, “the return of partial phrases alters the original
meaning and intelligibility”. When the sounds that are echoed
mented or otherwise distorted, it necessarily creates “gaps of
sound but always incomplete, frag-
complete repetition of an original
never a

“spans large gaps of space (sound re-
berates between distant points)

echoes, Scott writes, is that they are
delayed returns of a sound” and as
much “incomplete reproductions, usually giving back only the final
fragments of a phrase”. An echo also

spans large gaps of space (sound re-
verberates between distant points)

It is precisely because they work on
the affective register that such
slogans and visual representations
come to provide a framework of
meaning that makes sense of existing
frustrations by naming the problem
(lack of reproductive rights), pointing out its cause in the form of
a political enemy (the government, patriarchy, the Catholic Church),
and indicating a political solution or goal (bodily au-
nomy or “choice”, the change of regime).

While these affirmations circulating online (in the form of
typed slogans or as photographed placards from the demon-
strations) initially focused almost exclusively on reproductive
rights, soon more political demands were added, using the name
“Black Protest” to name a broader feminist struggle.

Already on October 9, the Facebook group entitled Black Pro-
test International (established by the network Gals4Gals) posted
a link to an article in the Washington Post followed by a call for
women’s sexual rights and autonomy on a global scale:

Sisters and Brothers! An outrageous reminder of how
much there is still to do about women’s rights in the
context of rape culture. We have to reclaim our feel-

In this Facebook group, Gals4Gals also described the abortion
issue as being merely “the tip of an iceberg” and announced that
“there is a lot to do in Poland in order to build a truly equal and
democratic civil society.” The slogan for this protest was “We are
not putting our umbrellas away” indicating that the protest-
ers had no intention to stop their fight against the oppressive
regime.

Solidarity-echoes
The affective construction of
a transnational feminist “people”

“The people united shall always be victorious!” This affirmation
introduced a post in the Facebook group of Black Protest Inter-
national on September 29, 2016, calling for transnational action
and empowerment. Interestingly, the post continued with argu-
ing that “Most of the time we tend to forget about the real power
that each of us possesses”, and contribute these thoughts to the
Afro-American feminist poet Audre Lorde:

Most of the time we tend to forget about the real power
that each of us possesses. Audre Lorde, a great Afro-
American feminist, who happened to be a poet of an ex-
ceptional profoundness and charisma once said, “The
power you don’t use yourself is gonna be used against you”,
Isn’t that true both on an individual (emotional/ psychological) as well as a political level? *

In this quote, the appeal to the affective dimension is explicit,
and it speaks to an “us”, a feminist “people”, and urging anyone
who (potentially) belongs to this “us” to take to the streets to
protest on Monday October 3.

Let’s make use of our power, our energy, our skills,
our hearts, brains and hands! We are embodied, we
are space: we take space, we need it to grow and think.
Bringing our bodies to the streets on BlackMonday means
everything. We hope to find joy and PLEASURE
in being together, supporting each other, creating
bonds, debating our FUTURE!

LONDON-SEFIELD-PARIS-BRUSSELS-OSLO-COPEN-
HAGEN-STOCKHOLM-HESIEN-RUM-SHANGHAI-
BUCHAREST-VANCOUVER-WASHINGTON DC-BUFFALO…

Waiting for YOU to join the fight! <3

Thinking with Le Bon, this call can be read as a hope to make the
website for the Polish Women’s Strike. 13 On the Black Protest In-
ternational Facebook group, the title was reported that:

Today Polish women were demonstrating again –
within 3 weeks a comprehensive list of postulates was for-

malized or otherwise distorted, it necessarily creates “gaps of

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Thinking with Le Bon, this call can be read as a hope to make the
political message contagious, that is, to be so powerful so that it influences not just political views, “but certain modes of feeling as well.” The quoted call includes not only a call for action (taking to the streets), but also for that action to be filled with shared feelings of energy, joy and pleasure and for those feelings to be shared with an increasing number of people who will join the struggle; it is the creation of a common “space” dispersed into different locations on and offline, where subjects can repeatedly “bond” and “share”, and act as if they belong together and share their mutual attachment to the same overarching political cause. Thereby they come to “belong together”. Such creations of belonging necessarily involves subjects engaging “in practices of constructing, confirming and renegotiating images and narratives of how and why they ‘belong’ together”; it is “in and through such encounters that subjects begin talking, writing, chanting, and in other ways representing their struggles in ways that ‘align’ and articulate, with other struggles, and that detach them from others” (emphasis added).8 It is in and through these practices that the mutual belonging to a common movement is being articulated.

The citation of Audre Lorde in the aforementioned quote is another example of a historical articulation that “aligns” the Black Protests with the struggle of Lorde, thereby writing itself into a transnational feminist history by letting the “echo” of her voice be heard alongside their. As we shall see, referring to this as “fantasmatic” does in no way mean that it is “fake”; in fact, all movements need a fantasmatistic dimension in order to achieve collective identification. Following Scott, I argue that seeing such articulations of feminist history as “fantasy echoes”, we can “deepen our appreciation of how some political movements use history to solidify identity and thereby build constituencies across the boundaries of difference that separate physical females from one another within cultures, between cultures, and across time”.

SNAPSHOT: The solidarity manifestations that were organized in multiple countries across the world, and not least in Europe, can best be described as “solidarity echoes” that echoed the demands of the Polish Black Protests, but also, like echoes do, part transformed the very demands that they echoed, and thereby both inscribing their own protests into a larger feminist “us” and extending this common struggle further both geographically to other parts of the globe, and temporally to historical events and into the future. A commonly repeated element in the descriptions of the solidarity manifestations is the explicit inspiration from the historical women’s strike in Iceland in 1975. One piece of text that was used in several Facebook events for solidarity manifestations (and in Facebook statuses where individuals distributed information about these manifestations) was repeated word by word from Gals for gals website: “Just like the brave women of Iceland, who paralyzed their country 41 years ago, on October 3, 2016, Polish women are going on a nationwide warning strike to fight for their basic rights.”

This was, for example, the case in the Facebook group for the Black Protest in Buenos Aires (UK) where it is followed by stating that the “#BlackProtest (#CzarnyProtest) is happening not only in Poland, but in many places around the world.” Alluding to the classical feminist trope of sisterhood, they write that “We would like to join our Polish sisters in the strike, spread awareness and show our solidarity”, and extends this gesture of sisterhood by referring also to the abortion struggles in Ireland, as well as appealing to European women more generally: “This is also a great moment to think about our Polish sisters, who fight to repeal theirs. European women must stand strong, together!”

The same text initiated the description of the call for solidarity manifestations in London and Birmingham (UK). The former was organized by the London based group Polish Feminists, a group that describes themselves as “working and collaborating with international feminist groups” to “spread understanding about feminism and Polish Feminism” under the parole of “stronger together.” The latter was “come them as well as anyone else to join us. We are wearing black to express our solidarity and our support them as much as we can and so this Saturday, by side downtown Reykjavik to protest the new polish abortion law” and that members of parliament from all Icelandic parties sent their polish counterparts protests as well in support of #blackprotest”.

Like in several other cities outside of Poland, the solidarity manifestation in Berlin was explicitly organised by Polish activists living abroad — in this case Berlin based activists of DziewuchyDziewuchom. The group describes their reasons to organize a solidarity protest in the Facebook event:

Why do we organize Black Monday in Berlin? We are Polish women and have families and friends living in Poland. But most of all we want to support those, who are being threatened of their rights to be taken away. We say NO to lack of respect for our lives.69

In the call for the solidarity manifestation in Berlin, another transnational symbolism is added in their choice of place for the event. The place of the protest was Warschauer Straße — “Wall street” — and this choice is described as being motivated by the name of the street itself referring to the capital city of Poland, as well as its symbolically charged location in between East and West: “We are going to stand in the middle and ask for your support. Your presence matters!” The ambition of a broad solidarity protest, symbolically and concretely, was further emphasized by the message being posted — echoed — in three languages, Polish, German and English. In addition to the numerous solidarity manifestations, some echoes came back in the form of some countries organizing their own Black Protests, in other parts of the world. In the Facebook group Black Protest International, a link to Black Protest Russia was shared on October 8:

blackprotest in Russia! Several members of the government and of the church promote an initiative to ban abortions. We must stop it! Polish women have been an example for Russian women! Sisters unite!”

Another message circulating on Facebook a couple of weeks later, on October 17, announced that now also women in South Korea had taken to the streets under the parale of the Black Protest. A post by the Polish left wing party Partia Razem, argued that “#BlackProtest happens everywhere where women’s rights are endangered”, explaining how in the last few days also South Korean women had dressed in black and taken to the streets to protest against the country’s restrictive abortion laws. It explained how the South Korean law is even stricter than the Polish law, allowing for termination only if “the mother or her spouse has a genetic mental disorder or physical ailment; the mother has a specific infectious disease; the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest; or when the pregnancy is seriously detrimental to the mother’s health”, explaining also that women who had an abortion may be charged with a prison sentence for a year. The message also adds some contextualization of the South Korean situation by pointing out that “contrary to what the Korean government says, further restrictions will not increase the birth rate – they will only increase the amount of pain and suffering”, and ends with the statement “We express our solidarity with Korean women!” (PartiaRazem, Facebook group).
Echoes across the Atlantic

From the Black Protests and Ni Una Menos to the International Women’s Strike

As I was following the development from afar – admittedly rather selectively – by following the Black protests spurred by the Black Lives Matter movement, and as I had been following the political situation in Argentina about what was going on in Latin America. Excited by what seemed to me a global feminist uprising, I began to follow this development and realized it was being explicitly limited by distance and lack of language skills as I had been with the Polish case, but again greatly helped by translation web tools and patient Spanish speaking friends.

In Argentina, I learnt, the Ni Una Menos movement (meaning “not one [woman] less”) had mobilized since 2015, using the hashtag #NiUnaMenos to protest against the commonly occurring violence toward women. The first demonstration is reported to have taken place in Buenos Aires on June 3, 2015 after the brutal murder of a pregnant 14 year-old girl who had been beaten and killed by her boyfriend had been revealed. Not unlike the Polish Black Protests, it quickly went viral also to other countries on the continent, notably Chile and Uruguay. On the same day a year later, further demonstrations in several cities in Argentina were organized using the slogan and hashtag #VivasNosQueremos (“We want us alive”), and further marches were held in Chile and Uruguay. A Ni Una Menos march that was organized shortly after in Lima in Peru was reported by the press to have been the largest in the history of the country.

Although I had been informed of some of these developments in private conversations, it was not until the Ni Una Menos collective in Argentina organized another big march and strike on October 19, 2016 in Buenos Aires after a femicide that I had been reported that I began to notice some striking similarities between Ni Una Menos and the Black Protests. The event had been named Miércoles Negro (meaning “Black Wednesday”), protestors had been dressed in black, a social media campaign had been announced – and I noticed from the many videos that circulated in my Facebook feed that in Buenos Aires they all seemed to be holding umbrellas, just like the Black protests in the United States. The mention of police repression in the women’s meetings, and the same day there was this terrible femicide of a sixteen year old girl in Mar del Plata perpetrated by drug dealers, so it was narcoviolence, and yeah...[laughter]

In other words, what characterized the time at the October march and strike in 2016 was a combination of factors that spurred the mobilization: police repression in feminism meetings, yet another brutal femicide – and the empowering example of the Black Protests taking place at the other side of the Atlantic. The specific cities of Mar del Plata and Rosario are described as “emblematic” for the political situation against which the Ni Una Menos movement protests, including an assemblage of neo Nazi groups, the far right wing of the Catholic Church and protest government groups: a concatenation of political interests that we, despite many other contexts, are dealing with our specific political differences, indeed do recognize from Poland and other European societies.

So I would say that the strike was fueled not only by the examples of Poland and Korea, but also by the fact that a week before, there was a terrible repression to the women’s movement in Rosario, in the national women’s meeting, and the same day there was this terrible femicide of a sixteen year old girl in Mar del Plata perpetrated by drug dealers, so it was narcoviolence, and yeah...[laughter]

Following the example of Icelandic women in 1975, Polish women went on a day-long strike to halt plans for criminalizing abortion and miscarriage on 3 October 2016. This planned legislation was immediately withdrawn by the government. Similar issues brought Korean women to protest several times in that same month against introduction of higher penalties for doctors performing abortions. In Iceland, after the March on 30 October 2016, Argentinian women reacted with massive one hour long strikes and rallies to an inhumane femicide and brutal repression of police of the Women’s National Meeting. More protests engaged, leading to establishing the International Women’s Strike platform.

On a page of the website explaining the background for the strike on March 8, 2017, it is clear that the mobilization concerns far more than prototypical “women’s issues” and that the feminist struggle is for democracy across the globe. They explain that “What links most of our countries are misogyny and permissiveness by elected leaders and public persons using hate speech, by media negligent of their lawful responsibilities for reliable information and full coverage, and by institutions that should be protecting public safety and enduring justice.” The text argues that women’s demands to “defending their rights” are often overlooked both in their communities and in their homes, and explains that this is why the International Women’s Strike was formed. The very purpose of the International Women’s Strike is to be a national organizing center by and for women who have been marginalized and silenced by decades of neoliberal and authoritarianism. It is organizing a new strike on March 8, 2018 and continues to be a national organizing center by and for women working inside and outside of the home, women of color, Native, dis/differently abled, immigrant, Muslim, lesbian, cis, queer and trans women.

We see our efforts as part of a new international feminist movement that organizes resistance not just against Trump but also against the conditions created by Trump, namely the decades long economic inequality, criminalization and policing, racial and sexual violence, discrimination, immigration policies, and imperial wars abroad.

After stating that their aim is to “build relationships of solidarity between diverse organizations of women, and all of those who
seek to build a global feminist, working class movement’, they state that everyone involved come from different political traditions but are organized around a set of common principles and goals. An end to gender violence, reproductive justice for all, labor rights, full social provisioning, for an antiracist and anti-imperialist feminism, and environmental justice for all. Like on the other website, the text is published in both English and Spanish. In an interview in the Jacobin Magazine the Argen- tinian feminist scholar Verónica Gago comments that what we are witnessing is not just an increase in popular feminism. ‘She points out that although the tradition of feminism has much to offer this new movement in terms of guidance, it has often been academic, elitist or even corporate and adds that “what we are now witnessing is a new kind of feminism, a feminism of the masses’’. As I shall discuss in the conclusion, the political potential of this new transnational femi- nist movement to serve as a counterforce to the global surge of illiberal populism lies precisely in the fact that it has managed to articulate itself as “a feminism of the masses” that offers a popu- lar feminist collective identity against authoritarianism, social con- servative and neoliberal religious, economic and political elites.

“A global feminism of the masses” Lessons from the Black Protests and beyond

To conclude, it is impossible not to see the importance that the Black Protests, managed to politicize also people who have not previously identified as feminist. At a time when au- thoritarian, iliberal and anti-gender (these do, as we have seen, tend to go hand in hand) movements and parties are expanding their power and influence across the globe, this emergence of a “feminism of the masses” mobilizing a “feminist people” is most certainly one of our greatest hopes today – and for the progressive democratic movements to learn from. As mentioned initially, what is at stake in this “populist moment” – that, dare I say, far exceeds Europe – is, after all, democracy.

For, as Mouffe and others have argued, the only thing that can offer a powerful enough counter-hegemonic force against illib- eral politics and authoritarianism is popular mobilization. Popular success constitutes a serious threat to democracy, is the emerg- ence of other popular identities – other, more inclusionary ver- sions of the “people” – and such collective identities can only be formed through discursive practices that can mobilize affect in such a way that the subjects identifying itself begin to desire a deep- ening of the two democratic ideas of freedom and equality and put spelt into action to for this. For this to happen, more anti-populist strategies (that in the current conjuncture are to be located at or near the centre of the policy spectrum) simply will not make it. Neither will simple strategies of “fact checking” and rational reasoning. As mentioned before, while such strategies certainly have their place, facts and rational argumentation in themselves, without the affective component, will not create any mass movements that can save, restore, and deepen democracy.

What the movements of the Black Protests and Ni Una Menos have shown is how to create mass movements around urgent national and regional issues (e.g. abortion, femicide) to other progressive demands that are claimed in global events such as the mobilization of the Polish Black Protests served as an inspiration for the actions leading up to their victory. Simi- larly, the lower house of congress approved a bill to liberalize abortion rights, managed to pressure the government to release about 150 inmates and adds that “what we are now witnessing is a new kind of feminism, a feminism of the masses”. She points out that although the tradition of feminism has much to offer this new movement in terms of guidance, it has often been academic, elitist or even corporate and adds that “what we are now witnessing is a new kind of feminism, a feminism of the masses’’. As I shall discuss in the conclusion, the political potential of this new transnational femi- nist movement to serve as a counterforce to the global surge of illiberal populism lies precisely in the fact that it has managed to articulate itself as “a feminism of the masses” that offers a popu- lar feminist collective identity against authoritarianism, social con- servative and neoliberal religious, economic and political elites.

In 2018, the “populist moment” in Europe — and elsewhere — is still very much a political reality. As the neoliberal project has failed to live up to its promises and thereby left the playing field open to illiberal, authoritarian and right wing populist move- ments threatening democracy in Europe and beyond, the Polish Woman’s Strike and the International Women’s Strike have already demonstrated that a progressive transnational “feminism of the masses” is not only possible but can also influence political decisions. To most significant contribution so far is not only to provide a powerful example for other progress- ive movements to learn from and to join in with the “solidarity echoes” – but, perhaps more importantly, the trans- formative effect it has had on the progressive political landscape across the Atlantic. At this juncture, the outcome of the Euro- pean (and indeed global) “populist moment” remains unsure. Indeed, to turn the disillusioning development towards illiberalism and authoritarianism we are now witnessing to one... and elsewhere, we need more movements like the Women’s Strike — movements that are able to mobilize broadly, and manage to build alliances with other movements, workers’ unions and progressive political parties within and across national borders in order to establish a new hegemony that can not only save, but deepen and radicalize democracy.

These exist feminist traditions have offered valuable insights and inspiration for this move- ment, and, I would argue, have provided a necessary narrative of a fantastic feminist “us” that has functioned as a “surface of inscription” for the demands raised by these movements. Existing feminist narratives provided the frame for a collective identity that has in turn been able to establish itself in very different social and cultural contexts, and with different and very different experiences to begin convinc- ing each other as part of an “us”. The repeated “echoing” of both previous and contemporary feminist ideas, slogans and symbols and additional, often hard fought, and political and social gains that are claimed in global events such as the mobilization of the Polish Black Protests served as an inspiration for the actions leading up to their victory.

By READING the process of affirmation repetition contagion with Scott’s notion of “fantasy echo”, we can see that what made broader alliances, both transnationally in the different local/ national/regional contexts between groups from different politi- cal traditions possible is precisely that each repeated “echoing” slightly transformed, while retaining some trace of the original “utterance”. This way, each affirmation opens up for an echo that comes back saying that: “we hear you, we stand in solidar- ity with you” while also continuously adding new demands and contextual interpretations of the struggle. It is the cacophony of solidarity echoes across the globe that formed the starting point for the International Women’s Strike. This partial openness of the messages, therefore, are crucial for building alliances both between feminist groups and between other political actors, such as movements, unions and political parties.

In 2020, the “populist moment” in Europe — and elsewhere – is still very much a political reality. As the neoliberal project has failed to live up to its promises and thereby left the playing field open to illiberal, authoritarian and right wing populist move- ments threatening democracy in Europe and beyond, the Polish Woman’s Strike and the International Women’s Strike have already demonstrated that a progressive transnational “feminism of the masses” is not only possible but can also influence political decisions. To most significant contribution so far is not only to provide a powerful example for other progress- ive movements to learn from and to join in with the “solidarity echoes” – but, perhaps more importantly, the trans- formative effect it has had on the progressive political landscape across the Atlantic. At this juncture, the outcome of the Euro- pean (and indeed global) “populist moment” remains unsure. Indeed, to turn the disillusioning development towards illiberalism and authoritarianism we are now witnessing to one... and elsewhere, we need more movements like the Women’s Strike — movements that are able to mobilize broadly, and manage to build alliances with other movements, workers’ unions and progressive political parties within and across national borders in order to establish a new hegemony that can not only save, but deepen and radicalize democracy.

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Note: This essay is a lightly edited version of the original, also by Jenny Gunnarsson Payne, but published 2019 in Polish: Kobiety jako ‘lud’. Czarno- białe, Kulturalne, anty-imperialistyczne i anty-krasowe oblicze polityki publicznej w perspektywie transnarodowej, in: Koorzic Elżbieta, Kowalska Beata, Ramme Jennifer and Claudia Snocchioso-González (eds), Unblack: Kobiety, Czarno Prosty i Strajk Kobiet: Europäische Kapitalism (European Solidarity Centre), Gdańsk.

references
11. Jenny Gunnarsson Payne is Full Professor in Ethnicity at the Department for Historical and Contemporary Studies, Södertörn University.


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essay

I agree with her that this in no way discredits feminism, but rather that... See Scott 2001: 289—290.


“Polish Feminists – Stronger Together! London based group working and collaborating with international feminist groups. We aim to spread understanding about Feminism and Polish Feminism. We organize and take part in actions, marches, protests and events promoting feminism and its goals. Feminism — we are not afraid of this word and we work towards education of women (and men) on it and breaking the stereotypes attached to the concept. We come from different backgrounds and theoretical perspectives, but we believe we develop through it – by respecting, listening and learning from each other we become stronger, together!” (https://www.facebook.com/pg/PolishFeminists/about/?ref=page_internal)

https://www.facebook.com/events/192392014525826/?active_tab=about

Although, interestingly, I have not been able to detect any references to the historic strike made on the English-language Icelandic news site RÚV as being an inspiration for the Polish protests.

http://pressphotos.biz/thumbnails.php?album=2884

Available: https://www.facebook.com/events/1666165643698900/

https://www.facebook.com/events/348181902196361/

https://www.facebook.com/partiarazem/posts/675554642612595:0

[Picture: A photo in the backgrounds shows Korean women during a protest, clad in black and holding transparents with slogans in Korean and with feminist symbols. The text on the picture says: “#CzarnyProtest w KoreiPłd.!” which means: “#BlackProtest in South Korea!”. Right under it there is text in Korean: “한국여성들과함께결속하여”, which means: “Solidarity with Korean women!”.]


The figure is reported on the website for the US section of the International Women’s Strike. LINK?

http://parodemujeres.com/about-us-acerca-de/movement/


https://www.womenstrikeus.org/


Santomaso & Gago, 2017.
STIGMATIZATION OF FEMINISM

Gender Studies as “Gender Ideology” in right-wing populist political discourse in Hungary

by Erzsébet Barát

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n my reading, the most salient characteristic feature of contemporary right-wing populist political discourse in Hungary is the fact that hate speech has become the daily routine of communication. It is a grave situation in which hate speech passes by unnoticed, mobilizing a series of danger-
ous statements; I believe this objective can be useful for studying other ideologies as well. I think the ultimate point of banalisa-
tion is reached at the moment when the normalization of hate speech unites a number of disparate political agendas, serving a particular regime’s interest in positioning themselves as the powerful bearer of anything in opposition to whatever comes to be associated with “the enemy”. In contemporary Hungary, the boundary of hot/banal statements has been reconfigured in the government’s political rhetoric to the point where hate speech is taken for granted and considered desirable by the majority of the citizenry. The process started in 2010, the year that marks the beginning of the third term of the Orbán regime today.1

The stigmatization of “gender” as “ideology” has become a key element of this political rhetoric of hate. The concept func-
tions as an empty signifier in Ernesto Laclau’s sense of the term, as if it were a symbolic system of diverse but familiar statements of linguistically mediated injury of hate speech, in the service of manufacturing of what Ruth Wodak calls “ideologemes”. For Wodak, “gender” is not the only effective empty signifier triggering fear but works in a complex relationship with several others, namely the tropes of “Soros”, “Brussels” and the “migrant”. The success of the ideological relationship with several others, namely the tropes of “Soros”, “Brussels” and the “migrant”. The success of the ideological relationship with several others, namely the tropes of “Soros”, “Brussels” and the “migrant”. The success of the ideological relationship with several others, namely the tropes of “Soros”, “Brussels” and the “migrant”. The success of the ideological relationship with several others, namely the tropes of “Soros”, “Brussels” and the “migrant”. 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Hungary this is exactly what has happened to the meaning of
the reflection.14 Given pattern over other patterns of meaning as long as it is
partial inclusion of historically contingent constituent ele-
ments of the “concept”. Conversely, these elements are po-
nant perspective at the intersection of various other vectors
inherently plural and the emerging category of classification
practice of signifying “here and now” is
different locations, moments, and
positions on multiple other practices at
ity. In so far as making sense of the
category then is organized by multiplic-
ating altogether only four of them
voiced by feminist academics and/
or activists. Pressdoc was produced
on a weekly basis by the Parliament Library in the 1990s for MPs
interested in the contents of the political print media. “The 20
mentions were rendered into three conspicuous junctures of
meaning making, all three producing a discrediting and scary
meaning of feminism. The three discourses of gate-keeping
indexes the assumption that “feminism” is not really powerful. It
is not represented as a movement or significant scholarship
but only the harmful activities and ideas of “a few feminists”. Imag
of nationalism that articulates feminism as an “alien im-
portant enough to “recognize” and keep an eye on them. The ac-
stant army” is that of brute aggressive force. As such, it requires
parents’ satisfaction with their life re-centered in the home — as a
happy result of the regime change. By implication, this rhetoric en-
facto legitimizes the assumption that the feminist figure is un-
intelligent or simply too stupid to recognize her situation. Her
ignorant determination to recruit other women into their “mili-
tary army” comes with an aggravated twist. As such, it is that
some equal measures for elimination in the name of “protec-
tion” performed by the political media if “properly” responsible.
At the intersection of the three discourses then, we have the ideologues they call a “lesbian tent” who is “infatuated” feminist women in Hungary did not learn from our
interference of state politics and ideology in all spheres of our
The misogynistic renaming and inversion of “gender” as
“ideology” hinges precisely on the familiarity of the disparag-
ing message of the opposition, which feeds on the point of
escaping critical reflection and working as “common sense”
and unquestionable, obvious “truth”, a category that makes “false”
has the current right-wing populist political regime of
domination hinges on “banalizing” its strategies of mak-
ing meaning, including the acts of stigmatizing the concepts,
including “feminism” as “empty signi-
fiers”. According to critical discourse analysis, discourse is
conceptualized as the intertwined relationship, or the nexus
of partially internalized symbolic practices (text) and material
practices (context) that emerges around a juncture articulated out
of multiple distinctions as an effect of historically specific relations.
ues of the political print media. In the first four years of their government,
the discursive legacy of discreditation — by their devious hatred of men, a disposition
that is argued to be ultimately “responsible” for those men’s
violence against the women (sic). As an inevitable result, this
female figure is expected to be the object of contempt and dis-
identification. Thalidomide is real at stake in the readership.
The second intertwined discourse of anti-communism con-
tributes to the meaning of fear by the connotation that the few but
infatuated” feminist women in Hungary did not learn from our
past experience of communism. They do not understand that the
“women question” on the communist party’s agenda belong to
the failures of the communist past. In state socialism, goes the ar-
gument, in the name of full employment of women, the commu-
nist ideology deprived women of their “real career”, i.e. enjoying
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of right-wing populist discourses is the production of social relations set up between “us” and “them” as two empty signifiers as if in a irremediable radical conflict with each other through the routine use of diverse forms of hate speech. “On the one hand, that logic produces a homogenized “us” around which diverse social movements can align itself: losing their autonomy, their trust in the possibility of transparent political institutions, can conveniently be called upon to come together and re/imag-
Positing male and female as distinct and opposite sexes that are naturally attracted to one another is integral to patriarchal ideology. Women’s position as subordinate other, as “sexual property,” and as exploited laborer depends on patriarchal ideology of heteronormativity and can undermine the charge of “gender.”

In feminist and LGBTQ activism the term “gender” is used in two senses. In the former it is used an analytical category, i.e. social gender in connection with biological gender (i.e. sex), that may grasp the historical specificities of whom one is and what one is identified as. In the latter [LGBTQ activist] usage, social gender is expanded with, or more exactly or, for another meaning, especially in the Anglo-American feminist and LGBTQ activism: there is a growing number of people who identify it with “gender identity,” that is whether one identifies with their biological sex, for example if a female body one identifies as a woman or as a man or non-binary. They understand gender as some internal essential or chosen identity (non-locatable with in a male-female binary.) The left feminist critiques of the later position also call this understanding a gender ideology – without inverted commas – which makes the situation more complex.

Paradoxically, turning to Nancy Fraser for a feminist critique of neoliberalism and the co-optation of contemporary women’s movements, which the call for apolitical feminism, is not seen as the improper application of an “alien other”. “Forigness” in her case is cancelled out by her perceived “radicalism”. The divide between the “left” and the “right” is revealed in a “conceptualization of gender and the internal divide within the “progressive left” needs the legitimation through the power of authorization of “Fraser”.

But what I think is important to reflect on in this debate, is, that one cannot simply and self-comfortingly say that the Right is misunderstanding gender or mis-representing it for the sake of political instrumentalization, and that it has created a straw man without any real world reference, based on the social categories for decades old discourse; or that this is simply old wine in new bottles (misogyny and homophobia). We need to face the internal contradictions within progressive politics. ...it is in our best interest to name and face the ideological conflicts that exist within the progressive camp, otherwise we leave the terrain to the Right. Clarity about the differences of our own concerns is a prerequisite for that.

At the same time the author also formulates that it is dangerous to embrace the discourses of partial distinctions of the sex/gender system and mate- riality and symbolic encoding. Without such a move, the desirable debates within “progressive politics” turn out to be what Lauret Berlant calls “spectatorial sports” of self-destruction among harmed collectives in the public sphere waged in binary distinctions that are set in the first place on the terms of the more powerful: in this case, those of the regime.

It would be then possible to see that social divisions of power also exist at the level of symbolic representation, expressed in images and symbols with each other through the imposition of definitions of gender identity and the relations to do with legislation and rights. Furthermore, regarding the global movement of theories, in different cultural traditions and societies, academic narratives exposing the “critical potential of gender” can be caught in different matrices of power, foregrounding and valorizing different elements of meaning that are subject to ongoing processes of contestation and change. As Nira Yuval-Davis puts it,

What is important to analyze how specific positionings and identities and political values are constructed and interrelate and affect each other in this terrain of local locations and contexts. Similarly important would be an examination of the particular ways in which the different divisions are intermeshed.

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What do “traditional values” really stand for in Russia today? How did respect for “tradition” come to acquire such an important role in the country where, only a few decades ago, in the early 1990s, values of freedom, individualism, and consumerism seemed so strong? The ideas of “traditional values” and “traditional family” are not new phenomena in the Russian media and public discourse, and after the fall of the Soviet Union expectations of “going back” to traditions in order to fill the vacuum left after the end of Communism, to create a new identity, to increase birthrates, and to guarantee economic stability were widespread. Some socially conservative politicians expected that women would “return home” and dedicate more time to children and housework. However, a number of factors – including the economic instability that made women’s incomes important for family budgets, as well as women’s high qualifications and many women’s interest in keeping their work outside of home – meant that these expectations remained unfulfilled.

In recent years, “traditional values,” increasingly articulated in accordance with the Christian Orthodox canon, has moved to the center of Russian official discourse. Indeed, in his speech at the Congress of the Orthodox Church in December 2017 President Vladimir Putin warned that the disappearance of traditional values would risk leading to the degradation of society and the alienation of people. In his inaugural speech on May 7, 2018, Putin also stated the importance of “traditional family values”. Thus, the call for a return to “traditional values” changed from being a way to reclaim Russian identity to becoming a tool of social control, and I argue that today such a call is more predominantly intertwined with political authoritarianism and less so with Russian tradition or religion.

The post-1991 discourse on equality

The move towards “traditional values” as a dominant discourse of Russian politics did not happen suddenly. Rather, such a movement existed for much of the post-1991 period but remained a rather marginal phenomenon. Indeed, during the beginning of the democratic reforms, when Russia opened up the possibilities for a public discussion on citizens’ and minorities’ rights, such a discussion took place in the context of the vivid memory of the Soviet gender contract, according to which work in the state economy was demanded from both men and women and from all ethnic groups. Under the Yeltsin presidency, the “West” was an important source of inspiration for democracy, individual freedoms, and human rights. The period was marked by the formation of many women’s groups and LGBT organizations, as well as by Russia’s cooperation with transnational organizations. It was also a period when many Russian citizens for the first time could travel to the “West” and when many consumer goods, cultural products (like talk-shows and TV series), and words became popular in the country.

Indeed, already at the end of the 1990s, Russia had a well-developed network of women’s crisis centers and NGOs dealing with women’s rights, education, and political participation. Courses on women’s and gender history, sociology, and psychology were taught in most of the universities. The first organizations defending LGBT rights started to appear during the perestroika period. In 1993, the law decriminalizing homosexuality was adopted by the Russian Parliament, and “Treugolnik” (Triangle, the national organization of lesbians, gays and bisexuals) was created in Moscow.
The programs for democracy assistance in Russia frequently included programs aimed to promote gender equality. For example, representatives of the Russian government and several NGOs took part in the Beijing International Women’s Conference (1995), which intensified public discussions on the need to create a national machinery for the protection of women’s rights in Russia. In 1996, a statement on the need for a national machinery for the protection of women’s rights in Russia was adopted by the Russian Parliament. The statement declared the importance of creating national legislation on equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women. One associated problem was that the commonly used categories “traditional values” and “political correctness” were strongly associated with the rhetoric of the pre-1991 period, while at the same time unequal access to health care and childcare facilities remained central obstacles for women’s participation in society.

The growth of traditionalism in the 2000s

In the 2000s, the Russian government increasingly began to define the political and social developments of the 1990s in terms of “chaos” as a way to present the then current situation in Russia in a new and more optimistic way. At the same time, the political situation in Russia was developing towards granting less freedom for independent civic and women’s organizations. Already in 2003, the law on gender equality that was proposed in the Parliament failed to pass. Some discussions on the draft law from 2003 were brought up again in the late 2000s and then once more in 2012, but they did not result in a second proposal. In July 2018, the law was finally rejected by the Parliament.

The law against violence against women was not adopted in Russia, and furthermore, the general law on battery was charged in 2007 in Russia so that non-aggravated battery (where no severe injury occurs) by close relatives was decriminalized. Furthermore, in 2004, after the beginning of the reforms of the state administration, the State Commission for Improvement of the Situation of Women ceased to exist, and its functions were divided between several parliamentary commissions and committees.

Despite the many problems connected to the organizations working for women’s rights, family planning, and LGBT rights as well as issues regarding international cooperation, the idea that these organizations promoted had support in many parts of the population. Therefore, I argue that the new official agenda on “traditional values” could not have developed without strengthening the authoritarian pressure over these actors.

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In 2012 the subject “Foundations of the Christian Orthodox Culture” was introduced in the 4th and 5th year of school as part of a course on ethics. The state also insisted on more patriotic education in schools, a policy that was particularly connected to the commemorative events dedicated to the Second World War. The strategy of education in the Russian Federation to 2025, which was adopted in 2015, states that developing a “high moral personality sharing Russian traditional values” is an important priority of education. Finally, since the 2000s the family, Love, and Faithfulness—July 8 has an official celebration in Russia. This celebration is expected to contribute to strengthening families, decreasing divorce rates, and increasing birth rates.

“Traditional values” as “natural” gender order

“Traditional values” usually refer to a complex and contradictory set of ideas that bring together the nationalist and imperial discourse on Russia’s glorious past with ideas of patriotism, solidarity, and morality. With respect to education and family life, “traditional values” are often connected to the hope of overcoming negative trends in terms of low birth rates and high divorce rates. Despite the communist rhetoric, were inspired by Christian ideas and values. Thus, the development of Soviet history in some parts of Russian society who are experiencing a high level of social, family, and personal success. Nevertheless, such politics seems to be in conflict with prevailing practices of sexual behavior and family life in Russia.

In contrast to the 1990s when ideas about “reestablishing the traditional family” were promoted in the public discourse alongside other ideas including gender equality and LGBTQ (right), the present time shows a drastic reduction in the possibilities of expressing discontent or disbelief in “traditional values”. This is connected to the strengthening of the authoritarian regime and the elimination of independent political actors and media freedom. Indeed, the ideology of “traditional values” corresponds mainly to the interests of the Russian state in union with the Orthodox Church and reflects Russian imperial and authoritarian traditions rather than popular customs and beliefs.

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"Patriarch: vazhno sdelat vse vozmozhno dlia zashchity traditsionnykh values, or the mother's pension. Olga Isupova & Irina Kosterina.


"What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open.”

Did #MeToo skip Russia?

Feminism here has a complicated history laden with paradoxes. Until recently, the average Russian woman – even if she believed in gender equality – treated the word itself with scorn. Many saw it as an aggressive Western attack on femininity and a Russian belief system in which women are encouraged, and expected, to see motherhood as their first priority.3

Nadezhda Azhgikhina, a well-known journalist and writer who specializes on matters concerning gender inequality, states in an article for The Nation magazine that “anti-feminist discourse is part of the state media’s anti-Western narrative – Russians need to resist it and stand up for their rights.”4 She also points out:

The Homo sovieticus mentality is still alive in post-Soviet Russia. Homo sovieticus is not a free human being; he is a slave and resents any attempt to overcome slavery. This syndrome is an inheritance of the Stalinist camps, deeply traumatized and humiliated, an oppressed person

Did #MeToo skip Russia?

by Anna Sedysheva

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This quote opens the interactive #MeToo Rising map created by Google in 2018 in which one can easily see the presence that the #MeToo movement has thus far had in different countries. The largest country in the world by landmass, however, remains in complete darkness on this map. Does this indicate that Russia is not currently a part of the global #MeToo movement?

International media has written several articles either at tempting to understand why Russia has not been touched by the #MeToo movement or why the results of the movement have been modest. Amu Ferris-Rotman, in her article “Putin’s War on Women”, suggests that Russia has a very strong patriarchal culture and is not ready to join the world’s feminist mobilization. Elaborating on the conditions in Russia:

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son looks for another person to humiliate. Throughout history, the other person has been a woman.3

Azhgikhina adds that this Soviet mentality is behind the widespread sexism that exists in Russia and why the Hollywood scan
dragedal triggered by Harvey Weinstein’s behavior did not find much sympathy in Russia.

The context of Russian cultural aspects is quite complicated when looking at the symptoms and negative tendencies can rapid-
ly gain footholds and often reverse themselves in an unpredict-
able manner. The Russian writer Maxim Gorki, in The Birth of a Man, quotes the 19th century writer Nikolay Leskov: “If a person begins to be surprised in Holy Russia, he will be dumbfounded in surprise and become immobilized to the end of his days.”4

This is an ironic statement, but it conveys the notion that sur-
prises are common in Russia and that Russians ought to expect them, and this might be applicable to much of the news report-
ing in modern Russia. Recent practice in the country has been marked by the radicalization of the regime, the increasing role of the Russian Orthodox Church, and a general discourse focused on protecting the sacredness of families (i.e., that families ought not be interfered with, even in case of danger for their members – an issue that will be addressed below). Concurrently, however, the issue of electoral gender quotas has been discussed at the parliamentary level for the first time in 15 years.

AT THE END OF THE Second Eurasian Women’s Forum (St. Petersburg, September 2018), a resolution was put forth that was, as Russian Duma deputy Oksana Pushkina stated, replete with generosities and did not address the discrimination of women in Russian society. Vladimir Putin spoke at this forum, and while not addressing the latter, he did at least acknowledge that a gender gap exists in Russia.3

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This was not the first time that Putin mentioned the problem of the wage gap. In 2017 he stated:

But we have other problems related to the protection of women’s rights. This concerns the level of wages. It is a characteristic notion that if we look at the average monthly income, the average level of monthly income for women is much lower than the average wage for men.

Thus, Putin engaged in his usual manner of moving the audience’s attention from the problem at hand by referring to other countries and denigrating the fact that the wage gap in Russia is very high – around 30%.

In 2017 two especially important issues for women were discussed at the government level – the issue of domestic violence and a 15-year-old law project on quotas after many years. Why did they do so?

Such as The Guardian some forms of domestic violence in foreign press publications were highly criticized for this decision to decriminalize the issue of some forms of domestic violence in foreign press publications. Putin was heavily criticized for this decision to decriminalize some forms of domestic violence in foreign press publications. The fact that the law on domestic violence was actually itself also a possible attempt at improving Russia’s image abroad because the law defined domestic “beatings” as administrative offenses helping to “correct” negative statistics. This is argued to be done because in 2019 the government will have to report on CEDAW’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified by the USSR in 1982.

In a society without any coherent mechanism for protecting family members who need protection, domestic violence against women, children, and other weaker family members remains at an incredibly high level in Russia. It is estimated that 14,000-15,000 women are killed annually.

Among the strong supporters and initiators of the law of 2017 was a woman herself, the State Duma member Elena Mizulina (who in Russia, the situation with domestic violence against women, children, and other weaker family members remains at an incredibly high level in Russia. It is estimated that 14,000-15,000 women are killed annually.) and especially by way of television. In this regard, many television shows that have English titles, as well as the Comedy Club, propagate the sexism of gender stereotypes that marriage ought to be the primary goal for women, often suggesting that even women’s domestic violence victims and those who have been raped perhaps were themselves to blame in some manner. Such commentary is not uncommon on Russian TV and sometimes is also engaged in by traditional Russian media, and such attention proves the importance of social media for shaping public debate. The #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign was able to spread throughout Russia was a surprise in and of itself. The #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign should not be viewed as just Russia’s #MeToo moment, but as a mass political protest.

Women’s hashtag activism

Topics that might have been deemed controversial by traditional media outlets and consequently have not gotten much public airtime have become natural fodder for discussion on social media platforms. Forums such as Twitter, Facebook, and others have provided open and democratic exchanges by expanding the public space due to their ability to facilitate off-the-record discussions of opinions. The global #MeToo movement (popularized in 2017) was not the first such campaign in the world utilizing these public exchange forums, but it might be among the most known. This is indicative of the global nature of the problem because the movement led to a new wave of discussions around the world about the prevalence of misogyny, as well as which violations of personal boundaries merit being labeled as sexual harassment bringing back to the forefront similar campaigns that addressed such issues in South Korea in 2015 (#Iamfeminist), in the US in 2014 (#YesAllWomen), and in Britain in 2014 (#EverydaySexism).

A CAMPAIGN AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITHIN RUSSIA also preceded #MeToo. This was the #ЯНеБоюсьСказать (#IamNotScaredToSpeak) campaign that spontaneously developed on Russian-language Facebook in July of 2016. The hashtag was initiated in Ukraine (#ЯНеБоюсьСказать) and was copied within 24 hours by Russian women in Russia, altering the hashtag to make it grammatically Russian. The opening salvo was fired by a relatively little-known Ukrainian activist by the name of Anastasia Melnychenko who shared her own personal story and then declared:

“I want women to speak today. Let us talk about the violence that most of us have experienced. Let us talk to women about our experiences. It is important to make it visible. Please speak. #IamNotScaredToSpeak.”

Like the Ukrainian campaign, the Russian campaign spread rapidly by way of sharing. A multi-collage of women joined the campaign throughout July of 2016 resulting it becoming a topic within traditional media outlets in Russia. Prominent feminist online actions took place for the first time in Russia in 2017 – 2018, but these online actions might not have resonated had it not been for #ЯНеБоюсьСказать and then #MeToo, both of which (the latter pertaining to the former active discourse) helped normalize women’s protests against violence and stimulated debate on previously taboo topical issue of sexual harassment.

It is important to note that the #ЯНеБоюсьСказать campaign was well covered by traditional media outlets, and such attention proves the importance of social media for shaping public debate. The campaign challenged women to share their traumatic experiences and was notable in that it was led by women and thus the narrative was driven by women themselves. This was a grassroots campaign that was spontaneously created and grew from the ground up, and all of this was facilitated by the Internet, which is a formidable tool in the hands of women in societies where the access to conventional forums are limited.

THE ISSUE OF DOMESTIC ACCESS to the public sphere in Russia is not comparable to the access that prevails in countries such as the US and Canada and in much of the rest of Europe. Political rallies and protests of many kinds have been restricted in Russia since 2011, and under such conditions the fact that the #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign was able to spread throughout Russia was a surprise in and of itself. The #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign should not be viewed as just Russia’s #MeToo moment, but as a mass political protest that would not have been possible without the forums provided on the Internet.

Social media users have been emboldened in the years following this campaign to more explicitly express their opinions, and cases of femicide and domestic violence now appear on Russian social media forums. In the beginning of 2018, social media users in Russia started the campaign #ЯНеБоюсьСказать #IamNotScaredToSpeak expressing their hostility with the attitude propagated by mass media outlets to the murder of a young woman by her ex-boyfriend. The young woman in question had been deemed by the mass media to have been immodest in some of the social media photos that she had posted.

Although the social media protest of 2017-2018 brought attention...
The images shows the online video that DNS Electronics Store released on Men's Day. The video is showing what happens if a man is not satisfied with the gift, using the slogan: "Men's gifts without the risk to life". The video caused a national discussion and the company was accused for sexism.

Another example of how social media users can make a difference can be through their reactions to sexist and misogynist advertisements, which have started to become more visible in Russia. Russian media is Moscow-driven, but one particular advertisement by the DNS electronics store in the far-eastern city of Vladivostok released on February 23 of 2018 (which is Men's Day in Russia) stimulated a national discussion. The store was trying to make fun of the gifts (socks and shaving foam) that men are often given on this day by women. Russian society is generally becoming more sensitive with regard to such advertisements.

Social media platforms have become the democratic platform for discussing such difficult issues as sexism (which still provokes waves of hate speech reactions, but at least some campaigns initiated on these platforms have provoked public debate. However, in Russia social media users did not join Alyssa Milano's call to join the #MeToo movement. Does this indicate that Russian society is not a part of the global fight against sexual harassment and violence against women?

The #MeToo movement in Russia

Searching the Russian segment of Facebook using only "#MeToo" as the search term returns only a few dozen results, and those posts, generally speaking, are not #MeToo posts, but #IamNotScaredToSpeak posts with the addition of the #MeToo hashtag. How can we understand this? Why did Russian social media users not actively join the #MeToo movement?

There are a number of reasons for this. First, the #MeToo movement was not embraced in Russia because Russia already had its own homegrown #MeToo-style movement, so instead of #MeToo hitting Russia hard it only reinforced an already prevailing debate. Another factor concerns the geographical and cultural origins of #IamNotScaredToSpeak and #MeToo. This explains how #IamNotScaredToSpeak spread even further abroad in the former Soviet sphere as well, crossing over into Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. This indicates that former Soviet entities continue to be connected to a significant degree.

One especially relevant example of this concerns Kazakhstan. Dina Smalova, a resident of Kazakhstan, decided to share her story by creating the hashtag #IamNotScaredToSpeak (#Don'tKeepYourSilenceKZ) and utilizing it in conjunction with #IamNotScaredToSpeak. This campaign was soon after followed by its initiator with the creation of an organization providing assistance to victims of sexual violence (#Don'tKeepYourSilenceKazakhstan). In 2017 Dina Smalova was invited as a speaker to a high-level event launching the EU-UN Spotlight initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls. It is noteworthy here as well that Google’s MeToo Rising map recognizes Kazakhstan and gives links to articles about #IamNotScaredToSpeak without recognizing the Russian #IamNotScaredToSpeak movement, even though the latter influenced the creation of the former.

The above connectedness is related not just to the fact that the countries mentioned above were all part of the Soviet Union, but to the continued importance that the Russian language has for the post-Soviet community through which they were connected. Moreover, Russian remains one of the six primary languages of the UN, and the forum provided by the Russian language is large. Russian ranks high in the world’s flow of translated materials, and on the Internet the Russian language ranks #3 in terms of presence. Thus, whereas many countries of the world communicate through English, countries of the former Soviet Union do so through Russian (including on social media).

The aforementioned factors separate Russia from the rest of the world to some extent because its surrounding environs are still connected by the Russian language. “Hollywood values” are regularly castigated in Russia as well, so campaigns originating from the US (especially with political aspects) will be viewed more suspiciously than something from a culturally and linguistically related country such as Ukraine. In addition, Russia traditionally sees itself in opposition to the West. There is an ongoing debate as to whether Russia is even a part of Western civilization, a subject that has been heavily discussed by Russian writers since the 19th century. This societal otherness, or distance from the world to some extent because its surrounding environs are still connected by the Russian language. ‘Hollywood values’ are regularly castigated in Russia as well, so campaigns originating from the US (especially with political aspects) will be viewed more suspiciously than something from a culturally and linguistically related country such as Ukraine. In addition, Russia traditionally sees itself in opposition to the West. There is an ongoing debate as to whether Russia is even a part of Western civilization, a subject that has been heavily discussed by Russian writers since the 19th century. This societal otherness, or distance from the West, is thus a crucial factor for why Russian women did not embrace the #MeToo movement.
The formation of new narratives: #MeToo and Russia

These factors do not mean that Russia skipped the global movement against gender-based violence. The public debate initiated by #AmNotScaredToSpeak developed along with the #MeToo movement, and Russian audiences had the chance to follow #MeToo because it was discussed in various traditional media outlets. Interestingly, a number of Russian media outlets not only compared #AmNotScaredToSpeak, but sometimes even referred to #MeToo as the American version of #AmNotScaredToSpeak. One aspect of the Russian #AmNotScaredToSpeak movement that did differentiate it from #MeToo was that it did not concern men in powerful public positions, at least not before the #MeToo moment itself. This is how the #MeToo campaign influenced Russia, but this influence has limited its effect in reinforcing the #AmNotScaredToSpeak campaign as opposed to giving life to #MeToo in Russia. This could be seen beginning in 2018 when some men of note in Russian society began to be accused of sexual assault. The most prominent person thus accused was Russian State Duma deputy Leonid Slutsky (Duma is the name of Russia’s parliament). This accusation was made by three journalists, and a call by other journalists for an investigation followed. Later, in response, “State Duma deputy from the Liberal Democratic Party Leonid Slutsky congratulated women on March 8. He then apologized to several Democratic Party Leonid Slutsky congratulated women on March 8. He then apologized to Svetlana Prokopyeva for having publicly accused Migunov, Fedorova noted, was her way of starting to become part of the groundswell initiated by Anastasia Melnychenko’s initial call.”

The #AmNotScaredToSpeak campaign, which began in 2016, was designed by many, predicting that it would die out rather quickly. However, it has remained a part of the discourse in Russia. Several media outlets have expressed solidarity with women, and the previously taboo topic of sexual harassment is now regularly and publicly discussed and debated. Part of the reason for this, I believe, is connected to the origin of the campaign. #MeToo was greatly spurred by the involvement of celebrities. The #AmNotScaredToSpeak was more spontaneously driven in comparison and was driven by regular people in various places throughout Russia. This suggests that, despite few public successes, as is seen by #AmNotScaredToSpeak and media attention in the West, the groundswell initiated by Anastasia Melnychenko’s initial call for “women to speak today” remains a force within Russia even as individual Russian women continue to declare, “I am not scared to speak!”

Conclusion

One might argue that the #AmNotScaredToSpeak campaign has not been as successful as #MeToo because it has not led to similar results such as the latter movement has had in some Western countries. Google’s #MeToo Rising map does not recognize Russia as a part of the global #MeToo movement or the #AmNotScaredToSpeak campaign that preceded #MeToo. Nevertheless, an article on CBC News by Chris Brown, written in reaction to the scandal with the deputy Slutsky, suggests that there is hope for Russia.

The #MeToo movement has struggled to gain traction in Russia, but a couple of modest victories offer women some hope that their hostility faced by those who complain about sexual harassment might be ebbing even sooner.

Brown, in addition, quotes Ekaterina Kotrikadze, who now works at a Russian-language TV station in New York, and who was one of four women accusing bluntly of sexual harassment: “In Canada, a limited analogy like Slutsky’s wouldn’t help a politician save his job, but in Russia it amounts to progress.” Kotrikadze then acknowledged that for Russia it was still a success, as the title of the article itself suggested: “#MeToo scores modest win in Russia.” It would have been more correct, however, to have it read, “#MeToo helps #AmNotScaredToSpeak to remain at the forefront of Russian discourse.”

#FEMINOLGI WAS CONCEIVED AS A SUPPORT GROUP THAT WOULD HOLD EVENTS ORGANIZED FOR WOMEN AND WOULD PROTECT THEIR INTERESTS.

Far East, Siberia, and southern Russia with 2 million monthly visits to its online website. Although largely supported by Russian media in Moscow as well (including, among others, Echo Moscow, Vos- derzhina, Meduza, Svoboda.org), and Yandex News. Migunov then initiated a legal case against Fedorova who, in a subsequent interview, stated:

I was very scared to publish the post. Before [I did this] I consulted my father. He asked: “Are you sure?” I replied: “Yes.” He supported me, and it gave me a little strength. I did not expect that history would be learned outside of Vladivostok, and I certainly didn’t think that Migunov would sue me, but a couple of days after its publication, the national media began to write about me. The accusations began to pour in: people wrote: “I was a journalist from the Western paid media” and that my story was a fabrication from the West.29

Fedorova’s words about Western conspiracy theories refer to her 2018 conversation with Google’s MeToo Rising map and media attention in the West. On the other hand, #AmNotScaredToSpeak was greatly spurred by the involvement of celebrities. The #AmNotScaredToSpeak was more spontaneously driven in comparison and was driven by regular people in various places throughout Russia. This suggests that, despite few public successes, as is seen by #AmNotScaredToSpeak and media attention in the West, the groundswell initiated by Anastasia Melnychenko’s initial call for “women to speak today” remains a force within Russia even as individual Russian women continue to declare, “I am not scared to speak!”

Anna Sedyheva is a PhD candidate at the Polish Academy of Sciences Graduate School for Social Research in Warsaw, Poland.

references

6. I. Yurova, “I don’t believe derzhina is influenced by foreign media, but this influence has limited its effect in reinforcing the #AmNotScaredToSpeak campaign as opposed to giving life to #MeToo in Russia. This could be seen beginning in 2018 when some men of note in Russian society began to be accused of sexual assault. The most prominent person thus accused was Russian State Duma deputy Leonid Slutsky. Duma is the name of Russia’s parliament. This accusation was made by three journalists, and a call by other journalists for an investigation followed. Later, in response, “State Duma deputy from the Liberal Democratic Party Leonid Slutsky congratulated women on March 8. He then apologized to several Democratic Party Leonid Slutsky congratulated women on March 8. He then apologized to Svetlana Prokopyeva for having publicly accused Migunov, Fedorova noted, was her way of starting to become part of the groundswell initiated by Anastasia Melnychenko’s initial call.”

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references


Turkey

ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE and the case of TURKEY

by Alev Özkazanç

abstract
This article explores recent developments in Turkey in the light of the newly emerging literature on anti-gender movements in Europe, with the ultimate aim of assessing the prospects of the emergence of a feminist politics strong enough to challenge the threat. Today, Turkey is one of the leading countries where an authoritarian regime combined with a blatantly anti-gender equality agenda has recently been on the ascendant. The Turkish case displays many characteristics shared by right-wing populisms and strongly illiberal regimes, yet it also represents a particular instance where we don’t see “anti-gender movements” as such. Thus, I argue, it is an interesting case that calls for comparisons with other examples in Europe, especially in the Central and Eastern parts of the region. To this end, I will first summarize the general characteristics of anti-gender movements, mostly drawing on instances in Eastern and Central Europe. Then I will evaluate the Turkish case in the light of the recent literature, making some comparisons with certain East European countries. Lastly, I will discuss the question of feminist politics under the rise of authoritarian right-wing populisms and anti-gender movements.

KEY WORDS: Anti-gender movement, illiberalism, Turkey, masculinism, feminist politics, radical democracy.

Anti-gender movements in Europe
Firstly, I will give a general picture of the anti-gender movements in Europe. A newly emerging literature on these movements has already set the terms for the theoretical and political debate in the field. Until now, the literature on anti-gender movements has mostly focused on Central and Eastern Europe, mainly Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, Germany and France. Although there are some differences between the countries, the term “anti-gender” generally refers to those movements against so-called “gender ideology” or “genderism” that erupted after 2010 and attained massive support around 2012–2014. “Gender ideology” is considered to pose a serious threat to the fabric of society and even to human civilization as such, but most certainly to the nation and national culture defined in terms of “traditional family values” and heteronormative definitions of gender identities. The anti-gender movements target many aspects of gender equality policies but mainly concentrate on reproductive rights, LGBT rights and same-sex marriage, and sex education for children. The very concept of gender itself, together with the discipline of gender studies, feminism and queer theories, are particularly targeted for being non-scientific, ideological or even totalitarian, or at least a version of cultural Marxism. The movements are mainly grassroots- and locally based, usually but not necessarily triggered by the Catholic Church, and conservative intellectuals and some religious (especially evangelical) NGOs. Within a few years, these local initiatives have grown to become robust nationwide movements of a wider alliance including many different right-wing parties and movements from the center right...
to the far right, and even developing crucial transnational con-
nexions between themselves. As for the main political aim and
agenda of these movements, we see that they mostly aim to curb
the power of the EU and what they describe as a “liberal-leftist”
agenda of gender equality which is seen as detrimental to na-
tional culture.

A novel and global phenomenon
The relevant literature mainly regards the anti-gender move-
mements in Europe as part of the global and transnational resur-
ence of illiberal populism. As Gunnarson Payne observes, “gender” has come to play a central role in the construction of
cultural factors in the currently polarized political situation that Chantal Mouffe has called Europe’s “populist moment”.

A number of themes recur in the literature on anti-gender move-
mements in Europe which I will be exploring under three headings.
First, the literature highlights the historical novelty and global
character of the phenomenon. Pointing to its transnational and
global character, it draws our attention to the ever growing orga-
nizational and discursive networks among European right-wing
activists and especially the role of the Vatican and the Catholic
Church in gathering a united religious conservative alliance as a
potent global force to compete with the powers of global actors
such as the EU or UN. As Kuhar and Paternotte observe, “the
proclaimed support of the EU for gender equality is seen as one
element in a wider program of colonization whereby what was
once Marxism is now replaced by gender politics”.

Korolzcuk
and Graff perfectly capture the global importance of the phe-
nomenon in their attempt to analyze “anti-genderism as a coher-
tent ideological construction consciously and effectively used by
right-wing and religious fundamentalists worldwide”. Highlight-
ing that gender is contextualized within an anti-colonial frame
and even likened to “Ebola from Brussels” they write as
follows:

Today’s right-wing opposition to gender equality and feminism
takes the form of a transnational political mobilization – an al-
ternative illiberal civil society – based on an alliance between religious funda-
mentals and illiberal populists. This alliance is facili-
tated by the persistent use of the terms “gender” and
“gender ideology” (aka “genderism”). These terms have
become empty signifiers, flexible synonyms for demor-
alization, abortion, nonnormative sexuality, and sex
confusion (Mayer and Sauer 2017), but they also stand
for the ideology of global (neo)liberal elites (hence the
significance of the anticolonial frame). “Genderism” – a
term that sounds ominous and alien in most cultural
contexts – has replaced “feminism” in global right-wing
rhetoric, strengthening the critique.

Korolzcuk and Graff, together with many others, elucidate the
novel character of this global formation which can no longer be
seen as just a new form of the usual conservative anti-feminism,
but rather as something with much broader ideological articula-
tions and organizational networks culminating in a hegemonic
challenge against both the liberal establishment and neo-liberal
global capitalism. It is essentially based on the populist dichoto-
my of “ordinary people” against the “global elites” of global orga-
nizations and corporations that are held responsible for the dis-
semination and imposition of a liberal world view.

Despite the consensus in the literature on the broader alliance of right-wing
forces against the global powers, there are different views as to
what provides the ideological coherence to this loose coalition of
forces. While Korolzcuk and Graff argue that it is the anticolonial
frame that gives it coherence, others assert that it is “gender”
that acts as a “symbolic glue”.

Gender as symbolic glue
The notion of gender as symbolic glue has been introduced by
some feminist academics from Hungary and Poland. In their
2017 article Grzebalska, Kováts and Peto explain how “gender”
became an umbrella term for the rejection of (neo)liberal order.

They argue against the views that see the rise of illiberalism sim-
ply in terms of a backlash against recent victories of emancipa-
tory politics, achievements of feminism and of sexual minority
rights. Instead they suggest that gender plays a crucial role in
the paradigm shift where liberal democracy is challenged by il-
liberal forces and for which “the concept of gender ideology has
become a metaphor for the insecurity and unfairness produced
by the current socioeconomic system”. There are three ways in
which gender functions as symbolic glue: the first relates the way
gender becomes an umbrella term covering the whole progres-
sive agenda. Thus they write:

“Gender ideology” has come to signify the failure of democratic
representation, and opposition
to this ideology has become a
means of rejecting different fac-
cets of the current socioeconomic
order, from the prioritization of
identity politics over material
issues, and the weakening of
people’s social, cultural and political security, to the de-
tachment of social and political elites and the influence
of transnational institutions and the global economy on
countries’ political
states.”

Second, they point to how gender ideology has been demonized
and deployed as a tool to construct a “new conception of com-
munist ideology for a wide audience: a form of consensus about
what is normal and legitimate”. Here the human rights paradigm is la-

Illustration: Katrin Stobmann

“FEMINISM IS REGARDED
AS A FOREIGN-STEERED
PROJECT BACKED BY THE
EU, LARGE CORPORATIONS,
INTERNATIONAL NGOs AND
DOMESTIC LIBERALS.”
Our analysis underscores the significant role of gender in the transitional dynamics of authoritarian regimes. The anti-gender movements often align with the authoritarian forces, contesting gender equality and diversity. The case of Turkey exemplifies this phenomenon, where the gender regime was transformed into a leading illiberal regime under Erdoğan's rule. The recent initiatives to deport female asylum seekers and the introduction of gender quotas in the military are indicative of this trend. Even the civil society actors have been implicated in these processes, as they are either co-opted or silenced. The Case of Turkey: A Leading Illiberal Regime The case of Turkey under Erdoğan's rule is a vivid example of the transformation of the gender regime from liberal to authoritarian. The gender quotas in the military, the deportation of female asylum seekers, and the introduction of gender discrimination in the civil service are all manifestations of this trend. These measures not only serve to reinforce the patriarchal system but also to undermine the rights and freedoms of women. The authoritarian slide of the regime became more reckless and severely militarist, culminating in the declaration of a state of emergency after an attempted coup d'état by its former ruling coalition partner in 2016.
its neo-liberal populist economic policy basically on the social aid delivered to families but it also turned this family-based local constituency into its main electoral and political power base. Familism has also been promoted and supported on various different levels and by multiple means such as the promotion of a strong family and the reinforcement of familial values in recent Turkish history, by directly attacking reproductive rights, encouraging marriages or even early marriages, introducing new laws to make divorce more difficult, packaging the entire family policy in an overly moralistic and ideologically and institutionally, with the primary aim of preventing divorce.19

Alongside pro-family policies, assaults on various aspects of gender equality and feminists have been business as usual for government circles, both at the level of central figures as well as local politicians and religious leaders, although with differing degrees of severity. In his speeches Erdogan often opposes the concept of “gender equality” together with the basic natural/feminine differences and instead suggests the term “gender justice”.

In his infamous 2014 speech, he declared that “women and men cannot be equal because they are different by nature”, suggesting instead that “they should have equal worth or equity”. Also he occasionally mentioned feminists, saying that “feminists wouldn’t understand his reverence for mothers as they have trouble with mothering” and also because they are “alienated from our civilization”.20 The use of “gender justice” in more elaborated pro-official discourse contexts is more of case of re-appropriating UN gender equality terminology by privileging the utmost importance of “the family as the founding element of society”, the domestic responsibilities of women and above all by an intense insistence on the different qualities and characters of men and women. Yet, side by side with this apparently “reasonable” conservative stance lie the more blatant forms of misogynist and discrimi- natory attitudes regarding the looks and manners of women shown by local party people, and a great deal of Islamic-fascist intervention in daily life by local officers, police forces and civil- inations.

In fact, after the state of emergency regime in 2016, assaults on various aspects of domestic and familialism has been the strengthening of heteronormativity and also the centrality for the new right-wing masculinity as well as its centrality for the new right-wing masculinity, as some writers observe. Korolczuk and Graff write “Moral panics around the alleged destabilization of natural gen- der roles link anxieties about depopulation with grim visions of the end of patriarchy and men’s power (often referred to as a “masculinity crisis”).”21 Similarly, as Trycicky put it, “antisexism at least partially reflects the growing frustration of men with no economic prospects who turn to patriarchal values rather than address the economic sources of their misfortunes”.22

I think that the Turkish case attests to the urgent need to consider masculinity, hyper-masculinity and indeed the crisis of masculinity as a crucial aspect of anti-gender politics. By the “crisis of masculinity”, I mean the new forms of masculine discontent and reactions to the shaking of gendered power rela- tions as women and LGBT people are empowered and as patri- archal morality is being undermine by neoliberalism.23 In analyzing the Turkish case we must consider hyper-masculinity as a sign of the crisis of masculinity in order to account for ram- pant gender and sexual violence. Not only this also crux of feminist writing attention to the critical difference between traditionalism- conservativism and hyper-masculinity. Whereas conservatism calls for support for pro-family policies and traditional values, a pro-family politics of women’s rights and gender-izations labelled as affiliated with terror have greatly intensified. In fact, the state of emergency regime in 2016, assaults on various aspects of domestic and familialism has been the strengthening of heteronormativity and also the centrality for the new right-wing masculinity as well as its centrality for the new right-wing masculinity, as some writers observe. Korolczuk and Graff write “Moral panics around the alleged destabilization of natural gen- der roles link anxieties about depopulation with grim visions of the end of patriarchy and men’s power (often referred to as a “masculinity crisis”).”21 Similarly, as Trycicky put it, “antisexism at least partially reflects the growing frustration of men with no economic prospects who turn to patriarchal values rather than address the economic sources of their misfortunes”.22

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attempt to link the growing popular masculine reactions firmly to an Islamic project, something different from what the AKP has done up to now. It does not yet represent a broad coalition of right-wing forces at the bottom of society, but there are attempts to form such a coalition as we see in the currently unresolved financial and social movements. We also see that some pro-government journalists or writers have just started to condemn the use of the term “gender” to wipe out the “gender equality” agenda or whatever is left of it.37 This dis- course of masculinity is in a real novelty for Turkish gender politics, though it resonates highly with the interment of sentiments of resentment and rage in the new Turkey.38 It shows that the masculine discourse is moving away from the protectionist religious and traditional discourses and calling for justice for victimized men.39 This newly emerging discourse also condemns the concept of gender as the Trojan horse lurking behind the Istanbul Treaty, aiming to destroy the natural order of sexes and promoting “perversion”. It is a very interesting coincidence that just in the first weeks of 2015, while I was trying to finish my article, a new wave of attacks on gender equality was launched by pro-government newspapers. It was triggered by a columnist who wrote a piece on “tools of the tribe of gender”, condemning gender studies as unscientific and ideological. To my knowledge, this comment is the first of its kind in a newspaper and it seems to be a direct borrowing from the European debate.40 Feminist politics The rise of anti-gender movements in the broader context of right-wing populism and illiberal regimes poses important questions for feminist politics and feminist theorizing. As Gunnarson, Payne and Turnhill put it, the differ- ent question is how to repoliticize gender in a context where the defeat of gender liberalism by state bu- reaucracies and corporate structures meets the repoliticization of gender by right-wing populism.41 Thus once again it is time to reinvent the political dimension of feminism. We have already witnessed some remarkable feminist initiatives to introduce new laws threatening women’s rights.42 As Mouffe writes, “30 years after Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, the aim is still to radicalize democracy, but in order to radicalize democracy, you first need to recover...the first step is to re-establish what has been lost.”43 I hope that the generous set of proposals feminism in constructing and enlarging the new people in the fight for radical democracy? I also believe that a queer, radical democratic and intersectional feminism has the most potential to build the bridges across es- tablished social divisions and boundaries. As Mouffe writes, “20 years after Hegemony and Social- ist Strategy, the aim is still to radicalize democracy, but in order to radicalize democracy, you first need to recover...the first step is to re-establish what has been lost.”43 I hope that the generous set of proposals Alev Özkazanç is a Professor of Political Science and Gender Studies. Since June 2019 visiting scholar at Wolfson College, The University of Oxford.

An inspiring moment for radical democracy and feminist politics
So, how are we going to think the prospects of feminist “popu- lism” – “a feminism of the people” – in Turkey? Could the acute problem of gender violence and illiberal authoritarianism be linked in politically creative ways so as to challenge both at the same time? Can gender equality be a nodal point to oppose the atrocities of masculine power carried out in the name of the holy trinity of “state, nation and family”? Can feminism be a lead- ing political and intellectual force in the formation of a radical “people”? It is difficult to answer these questions amid the utterly gloomy atmosphere of heavy oppression where all democratic opposition seems to be repressed. Yet, for the same reason it is of vital importance to recall a very recent episode in Turkish his- tory which has the most vital implications for both radical demo- cratic and feminist politics.
Between 2013 and 2015 we saw the formation of a chain of equiv- alences between the different democratic struggles against an authoritarian neoliberal regime and the emergence of a radical democratic “people’s” formation, expressed firstly in the Gazi protests in June 2013 and then in the HDP’s electoral victory in June 2015.2 We have witnessed the inspiring flourishing of an intersectional politics where the social divisions and boundaries between different long-established political subjectivities and binary contradictions were blurred and overcome for a while. In fact, the eruption of intersectional politics at this moment was the end result of the culmination of democratic and femi- nist struggles for the last two decades. Beginning in 1990s, both the Kurdish political opposition, and leftist mobilizations of various sorts (especially the movement of public employees) as well as social movements, have been working against the ruling neoliberal system, securing the environment, and urbanization had been rap- idly growing and transforming the political landscape despite the hegemonic resistance. Through a variety of different forms, the feminist movement had already emerged and succeeded in forming in- tersectional coalitions to a certain extent within women’s move- ments and while being strongly involved in all other democratic struggles. Thus, the gendered women identity and the resistance that calls for a return to “the social” would not be enough to tackle the new threats of illiberal anti-genderism. The real question has been what to do with the “people” of the political level.44 Mouffe explains the rise of right-wing popu- lism as a reaction of classes that are the losers of globalization and abandoned by neoliberal regimes. She suggests that the left must build a “new people” or “the cultural” and “the economic” and resist austerity policies as a really striking “event” in terms of its novelty and unpredict- ability and its force, its social and political background already existed.
This blurring of deeply rooted divisions and the construction of bridges was the symptom of a nascent radical democratic and hegemonic politics of coalition building.45 The huge expansion of the movement and the construction of a new popular force created a “new people” movement and the establishment. Here populism means forming a chain of equivalences and establishing a collective will around a common agenda and against a common adversary. So identity politics needs to be replaced by hegemonic struggles whereby a large “us” should be counterposed to a small “them” through a war of position and against a common adversary.46 It is the militant radical democracy, I also believe that the real question for feminist politics for our age of illiberal regimes is to reinvent and win a crucial position for gender equality demands in the construction of a large “us”,

1. Nancy Fraser has set the terms of the debate, highlighting the problem of feminism being conflictual with neoliberalism in its individual- ism and in its focusing so much on identity politics and the cultural and economic issues. Whether one agrees with Fraser or not regarding the responsibility of feminism in legitimizing the neoliberal order,47 there is no question that feminism should reinvent and revive its political potentials in new ways in order to cope with the challenge of authoritarian populism.

2. The calls for social justice-oriented or anti-capitalist feminism or a more inclusive and intersectional feminism are perfectly well grounded, yet it is not what kind of implications this turn would have for feminist politics because there are definitely different ways of doing “left feminism”. In this context, a par- ticular line of leftist thinking is emerging that proposes the idea of radical feminism as a struggle of a political “dark horse” lurking behind the Istanbul Treaty, aiming to destroy the natural order of sexes and promoting “perversion”. It is a very interesting coincidence that just in the first weeks of 2015, while I was trying to finish my article, a new wave of attacks on gender equality was launched by pro-government newspapers. It was triggered by a columnist who wrote a piece on “tools of the tribe of gender”, condemning gender studies as unscientific and ideological. To my knowledge, this comment is the first of its kind in a newspaper and it seems to be a direct borrowing from the European debate.
For different country cases see: E. Kovats and M. Poim, 2015; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017.


For a similar analysis of the rise of gender violence as the sign of the crisis of patriarchal order see; Karabekir Akkoyunlu and Kerem Öktem, “Existential Insecurity and theimaginative victim, reactionary mood and resentful sovereign”, Turkish Studies, 18 (2017): 47–53.


For different country cases see: E. Kovats and M. Poim, 2015; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017.


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Turkey

In my previous text published in Baltic Worlds (BW 2018:4, Theme: Academic Freedom), I talked about some facts regarding the challenges the women’s feminist movement and women’s gender studies have been facing in Turkey, especially after the July 2016 coup attempt and the emergency rule that immediately followed. I drew attention to the fact that the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) increasingly authoritarian regime had found an even better ground to flourish under emergency rule. The AKP government did not hesitate to change the Constitution through a controversial referendum held in April 2017 in order to transform the regime from a parliamentary to a presidential republic, providing the president with increased power. The referendum to change the Constitution passed with a narrow margin of 51% and left behind unanswered questions. The outcome of the referendum paved the way for the re-election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a leader who openly argues for the importance of family and the role of women and men cannot be treated equally.

Academics for Peace and the academic purge

Academics have experienced their share of the ongoing injustice while the greatest academic purge in the history of the country took place under emergency rule. Thousands of academics have been dismissed from their positions through decree laws, including around 500 Academics for Peace. Having signed the Peace Petition, entitled, “We will not be a party to his crime,” Academies for Peace have become open targets for political power and government-controlled media since the petition became public in January 2016. The Peace Petition, initially signed by 1,128 academics, called for an end to the harassment of those who have already been tried and convicted of crimes.

Emergency rule lasted two years and ended in July 2018, however, the practices of emergency rule do not appear to have ended. While the emergency decrees of emergency rule stayed in effect, only a small number of public servants have been returned to their positions. Under the influence of the AKP government, the justice system has become an ideological apparatus of the regime, thus creating injustice rather than justice.

“CENSORSHIP AND SELF-CENSORSHIP HAVE BECOME WIDESPREAD IN THE COUNTRY.”

Academics for Peace, the majority of whom are women, mostly working on peace, democracy, human rights, social equality, gender equity and democratic education, which incorporates these principles. As part of these efforts, solidarity academies organized a collective opening of the academic year 2019–2020 in cooperation with Education and Science Workers’ Union (Eğitim-Sen) on October 12, 2019, in Ankara.

Women gathered at the edge of Taksim Square in Istanbul to celebrate the International Women’s Day, but were stopped by Turkish police tear gas to break up a crowd of several thousand women who gathered in central Istanbul on March 8, 2019.

March 8 celebrations and Academics for Peace

Around 40 women faced trial in Kocaeli for the March 8 celebrations of 2017 and 2018. All have been acquitted in recent months. However, the criminalization of women and LGBTI individuals did not end as the March 8 celebration of 2019 witnessed another episode of violence. Tired of the violent scenes at Kocaeli, I went to Istanbul to participate in the Feminist Night March. Despite the fact that the Night March was forbidden by the authorities and the roads leading to Istiklal Street where the March takes place every year had been blocked, people gathered in the surrounding streets and alleys. Determined to carry out the 17th Feminist Night March. However, the police were literally everywhere as they outnumbered the other people in some streets, and the police attack was excessive, with the use of rubber bullets and pepper spray that severely affected many people including myself.

Meanwhile, the celebration was held quietly in Kocaeli as the authorities provided a designated area (a small park surrounded by the police and a barricade) for the celebration. Although this was not welcomed by many women and women’s organizations, the women’s platform of the town had agreed to accept it for various reasons.

March 8 and the ongoing injustice

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Latin America

militarization of some countries such as Colombia, Peru, Chile and includes Piñeira (Chile), Duque (Colombia) and Maduro mer beloved son of the market, Mauricio Macri (Argentina), vative, base their economic power on commodity extraction. Note that Latin America is the most unequal region in the world

15 years of neoliberal policies

Note that Latin America is the most unequal region in the world and has the most violent cities on the planet. All governments, both popular and center-left as well as neo-liberal and conser- vative, base their economic power on commodity extraction. This is true from the deposed Evo Morales (Bolivia) to the for- mer beloved son of the market, Mauricio Macri (Argentina), and includes Piñeira (Chile), Duque (Colombia) and Maduro (Venezuela). Extractive industries are accompanied by private armies that contribute to violence against native populations, as well as gender violence and femicide. In addition to the massive militarization of some countries such as Colombia, Peru, Chile and Bolivia, borders and maquila zones (manufacturing plant that imports and assembles duty-free components for export) are other factors that contribute to gender violence. Moreover, over the past decade and a half, neoliberal governments have cut spending on health, education, and pensions. Spending on vaccines, medicines and comprehensive health and education programs has also been slashed. As a result, child pregnancy and school dropouts are increasing, while the consequences of unemployment proliferate.

After fifteen years of neoliberal economic policies, women and girls have been doubly affected by the current situation of widespread poverty and violence. This is the face of poverty in Latin America: female, indigenous, a minor, who lives in a rural area.

Resistance and responses

In this context, the organizations of indigenous and urban women, of young millennial artists, journalists in social networks, workers, trade unions and student organizations, has not stopped growing, strengthening and developing new ways of do- ing politics, while at the same time resisting state violence.

From October 2019, citizens of Ecuador, Chile, Bolivia and Colombia have come out to protest for weeks at a time, in a popular uprising across countries simultaneously that took us all by surprise. Their governments have responded by placing cities and municipalities under curfew, declaring states of emergency, militarizing daily life, ordering the repression of the population by police and military, with the result of underreported victims of hundreds of gunshot wounds and detainees, including chil- dren and teenagers, reports of missing persons and widespread sexual abuse from the police and peace [cops].

The peoples of Ecuador, Chile and Colombia have been on the streets, squares and assemblies to demand an end to the neo- liberal economy and “the right to live in peace with dignity.” This scenario is populated by a new urban generation of feminists, as well as by the “ancestral” organizations of the original feminists.

The evangelical ideology and the Catholic Church

The situation in Bolivia is different. The government led by Evo Morales was deposed by a coup d’etat and a hunt has been un- leashed against officials of the MAS Movement (Towards Social- ism, Morales’ mass party), the unions, indigenous people and all the institutions and symbols of the “Pruritalian state of Bo- livia.” It is a racist anti-indigenous coup, which relies on the bible and on discourses emanating from the evangelical Pentecostal churches.

The coup d’etat in Bolivia was formalized with the lady presi- dent of the Senate swearing by a huge bible (with no opposition present), while police forces burned synagogues, [the alternative Bolivian flag]. The mayor of the municipality of Vinto, Patricia Acre, was tortured and humiliated, her hair was cut, and red paint was thrown at her. Shaving “cholas” [persons of mixed indigenous/European ancestry] has become another form of torture, as has causing blindness by hurting the eyes in Chile (800 cases reported so far to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights).

The Santa Cruz business leader “Macho Camacho” represents a fundamentalist Pentecostal evangelical sector. “We are going to get Pachamama out of public places and we are going to impose the bible,” Camacho has promised.

As the decolonial philosopher and theologian Enrique Dussel explains, evangelical ideology is the spearhead of US politics. In the 1970s, the Catholic religion was used as the dominant ideol- ogy and the left was seen as the enemy, but now evangelical groups are used as a starting point and indigenous cultures as enemies.

In Brazil, the Brazil Libre movement, which emerged in the context of Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment, and the “Schools with out violence” movement, articulated with sectors of the Catholic Church, evangelicals and the Jewish right, actively participated in the election of Jair Bolsonaro. In November 2017, Judith Butler was attacked by groups of the extreme religious right, who car- ried bibles and crucifixes and burned photos of the philosopher where she was portrayed as a devil and as a witch.

Nationalism and anti-genderism

In Colombia, the revision of the school coexistence manuals ordered by the Constitution (2016) and the peace agreement between the PARCE guerillas and the government, which co- incided in time, strengthened the extreme political and religious right of Colombia and caused the peace agreement (2016) to fail. A moral panic against “gender ideology” was created by the conservative and religious right, with the purpose of defeating this democratic process. Anti-gender politics has built a sense of collective identity around family values, “our imagined nation”, “don’t mess with my children”, anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ+ rights, but above all, fighting to impose an Orwellian meaning on peace and democracy, in a country harassed by so many forms of violence.

Feminist women’s movements are leading the struggles for survival and emancipation in their respective public spheres. In Chile, despite fierce repression, women’s organizations lead the fight for a new constitution, that, it is hoped, will express a new social pact and also a new sexual pact for living together.

In Bolivia, despite murderous persecution, women carry out “The Women’s Parliament”, using networks, permanent public assembly and community dialogue. In Argentina, the fight for the right to legal, safe and free abortion continues and the new president Alberto Fernandez has committed himself to the legal- ization of abortion on demand.

In my view, we can suggest that against a revitalized discourse of the anti-gender right that actively collaborates with the neoliberal political economy, the “feminist people” is the protagonist in all its multiplicity in the defense and (re)construction of dem- ocracy throughout Latin America.

References


ARGENTINA HAS experienced a wave of emerging feminism in recent years. Feminist organizations seem to be appearing everywhere: in shantytowns, in schools, at workplaces, in middle-class neighborhoods, and in the countryside—all over, women are organizing protests against patriarchal society.

This recent emergence of feminist mobilization can be traced, on the one hand, to the campaigns against femicides—challenging patriarchal violence and ultimately the murders of women solely for being women—that started in 2015 with the social media campaign “Ni una Menos”[Not one woman less] led by feminist journalists and academics. On the other hand, women in Argentina have also mobilized for legal and safe abortion for all women for many years. In early 2018, years of struggle led all the way to the Argentine Congress, where a draft to legalize abortion was formulated, and gained preliminary approval in the Chamber of Deputies, but was later rejected by the Senate in August 2018.

“Green has become the color of feminism in Argentina to the extent that the green emoji heart is a clear symbol of the feminist struggle. As an ethnologist, the political landscape of Argentina has always intrigued me. I first arrived in 2005 when the country was slowly recovering from the severe economic crisis of 2001. During the 1990s, under the administration of president Carlos Menem, Argentina had implemented neoliberal policies through which large sectors of society were privatized or deregulated. In 1991, the so-called Convertibility Plan pegged the Argentine peso to the US dollar at a fixed rate which resulted in high wages and gave those with economic capital purchasing power. As the century came to an end, social inequality grew alongside with social protests and financial liquidation, finally resulting in the financial collapse and social crisis of 2001. The Peronist Néstor Kirchner was elected president in 2003 and held office until 2007 when his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, from the same Peronist party, was elected president. During the Kirchner administrations the economy stabilized and the unemployment rate fell. A trademark of the Kirchners was open support for human rights organizations, and during their administrations laws that protected former oppressors of the last Argentine dictatorship were annulled and some cases against military officials were re-opened.

I moved from Argentina in 2010. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner held office until 2015 when the rightwing corporate business leader Mauricio Macri was elected president and once again, a new era began in Argentina. It was an era that coincided with the emergence of massive and popular feminism. Watching the feminist marches in Argentina from afar I was surprised, not at the fact that women were massively speaking out with such anger and solidarity, but rather that the many activists had found strength to protest at this particular time of history. During the course of the Macri administration I had seen my friends, some whom were filled with pioneer spirit and hopes for the future during the previous government, grow more disillusioned and apathetic towards the political future. My friend, interviewed on the next page, told me as we talked about the cutbacks in the public sector, increasing state violence and poverty during a visit in Buenos Aires in November 2017 that she could not really see how the political solution can ever be solved. “The only thing that gives me hope is feminism,” she concluded. (For reason of ethnographic ethics she will remain anonymous, and is here called Victoria.)

I asked Victoria to tell me her memories of some emblematic political events and politicians during their lifetime, I wanted to know how she had experienced Argentine politics during her childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, and then, how she lived the emergence of feminism.
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I transformed my life”

In regard to the government of Néstor Kirchner, and all the memories I have from that period, I am not really sure whether they are my own memories or collective ones. However, the first image that comes to mind is when he took down the portraits of the oppressors. I mean, I remember the news and the impact it had. Until that moment nobody spoke about the “disappeared” or the dictatorship. There was no talk in the schools or in the media, anywhere ... Of course, there were the social organizations HJRS, ABUELAS, MADRES, but it was not a public issue; it was reserved for exclusive areas of militancy for human rights. That is, there was no public account of it, or a collective awareness of the seriousness of those events of the past ... I had an idea because my parents were Peronist militants in the 70s, but not even then they wanted to talk about it. ... There was a lot of silence in my family in regard to the dictatorship; it was only many years later, when the subject was already publicly spoken about that my parents actually told me about it and about their lives. In other words, what little I knew about that period in history I had learned from the hard-core music bands that I listened to, because in their lyrics they talked about the military actions of the 70s.

ANYHOW, REMEMBER MY amazement in that moment (in 2004), that people increasingly began to speak openly about it ... I remember seeing a reporter on the TV who was asking young people the streets if they knew anything about what had happened in the 70s and with the “disappeared”, and they responded that they had no idea. Today, that is impossible; everyone knows what happened. So, there was a before and after in our society, and of course in my family in particular too.

I think it was during Cristina’s first government in 2007 that I began to identify with her policies. There are a lot of memories. I am not quite sure now when the law on Media arrived before the Congress, or when the Law on Equal Marriage was discussed. I do not remember exactly the moment when I first said “I am a feminist”, I only know that I have many memories from childhood to adolescence of unfair or violent situations, of realizing that because I was a girl or a woman I could not do this or that, and of feeling upset. At that time there was no name for it. But when I heard and read the feminists, everything began to fall into its place. It is nice when you realize you are not the only one who felt something was wrong. On the other hand, with regard to the word “feminist”, when I was a teenager, I thought that to be a feminist you had to read Simone de Beauvoir, that it had more to do with an academic education. I did not understand it as a movement, as a struggle that already existed, the mere fact of being a woman, a struggle of which I could be a part.

But there was a moment in my life when I really felt the violence with all its power; that was in my twenties, when I tried to enter the labor market. That was really very difficult, because the labor market made it very clear to me that I could only get certain types of jobs. And my first job was as a secretary, of course, and they asked me to dress nicely, to wear makeup ... and I could barely stand it.

And well, inserting myself into my work area was very difficult too, and it is still, because even today the technical fields are still mostly occupied by men. And in that sense, I think that feminism also emerged to fight for that, for our inclusion, in a fairer way. But here I create another problem for myself, because I wonder, if this world is so full of shit, how will we include ourselves? I mean, do we really want to be part of this?

I THINK THAT feminism, personally, was a tool to survive or rather, a weapon to defend myself on a day-to-day basis. And here I speak about other feminisms, not the feminism of Ni Una Menos. I speak about literature, poetry, music and feminist philosophy, I speak about the feminism of lesbians, of transvestites and trans, of anarchists, or of those who are more on the sidelines.

I have been taking a bit of each of those feminisms to make myself weapons to live. Sometimes weapons that have never been used. Sometimes I can defend myself and sometimes I know it’s better to take shelter. But I learned, and I continue to learn, to recognize violence, and to provide in my process of learning to turn back. By this I mean that through feminism, I transformed my own life, and my way of relating to others. And in this path forward, friendships are a fundamental part; after all, I was through my friends that I became aware.

And the most powerful thing I see in feminism is its breadth and its capacity for transformation ... it is not a fixed and inflexible doctrine ... some feminists say something, and then other feminists come and criticize them, and everything is transformed again and so it goes on. In that sense it is literally a liberation movement, right? A movement that is transformed from within.”

Jenny Ingeldseder, PhD in Ethnology and postdoctoral researcher at Umeå University.

Note: Another feminist life story is to be found online.

Victoria: “Through feminism, I transformed my life”

S
ince I was a little girl, I always knew that my parents were Peronists. Evita is the first woman I associated with politics. There was something about her, like a certain devotion, even as a child I could sense it in the air.

I remember that for a school test (the subject was Civic Education) I learned about the most important political measures of Peronism (and obviously I felt most proud about the female vote). In the exam I wrote “Evita” but the teacher corrected it to “Eva” in the test. Until that moment I had always thought that everyone was a Peronist, and that “Eva” was the natural way of referring to her. I believed Peronism was the best thing that had ever happened in Argentina; I had a super idealized image because my parents had only showed me one side of the story.

Another political figure is of course Menem. I remember, after the 995 elections, I was 14 years old and when the results were announced on the TV my mum cried. Until that moment I had not thought that the result of an election could affect my everyday life.

When I saw my mother get so upset and sad, it seemed to me that what had happened was really of tremendous severity ... And now, yes, now we all know that it was ...

If we use the theoretical tools for discourse analysis developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to study this case, the first aspect that we detect is that originally the signifier “Not one woman less” was inscribed in the social – discursive – space as a particular demand. That is, it was a type of political demand that was satisfied or not – remains isolated without establishing any solidarity link with other demands. In other words, it does not participate in any equivalent articulation of demands. “Not one woman less” as such was born in March 2015 in a “Reading Marathon” held at the main entrance of the National Library in Buenos Aires city by a group of women writers, poets, journalists, actresses, intellectuals, and social activists as well as relatives and friends of the victims. The demand was basically addressed to the entire institutional system of the State, but also to the mass-media, which were accused in many cases of misogynist news reporting of femicides. This first expression of “Not one woman less” had an immediate effect as a social protest, mainly reaching urban middle-class activists.

The second aspect is that this originally particular demand became a popular one. Following Laclau, we understand popular demands as those that are not specifically necessary – and not just for that reason – and entail a noun slipping out to be reshaped in a popular way. Therefore, the social space was already crossed by many demands of subordinated social groups. However, one demand was basically addressed to the relatives and friends of the victims. The demand was limited effect as a social protest, mainly reaching urban middle-class activists.

The discursive context of the irruption of “Not one woman less” was inscribed in the social – discursive – space that had already been crossed by different antagonisms anchored in social claims made by subordinated social groups. Therefore, the social space was available, let us say open, to receiving demands associated with vulnerable or minority social groups that were pursuing social justice, inclusion, wealth distribution and equality. Let us remember that by 2015, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s left-wing populist government was nearing the end of its period in office, and it had supported, among other things, many demands of subordinated social groups and had passed laws in the National Congress such as the egalitarian marriage law and the gender identity law, as well as introducing the element of femicide into the Penal Code. The feminist movement had already gained an important place because the National Meeting of Women, attended annually since 1986 by steadily growing numbers of women, gave feminism a wide and varied public space of social and political debate. Therefore, we can say that thanks to and beyond this discourse context, the irruption of “Not one woman less” and its becoming a popular demand reshaped social antagonisms in a double sense: first, feminism turned into a popular struggle – becoming equivalent to other political demands, including demands that are not specifically necessary – and consequently started to be part of “the people”; secondly, feminism overlapped struggles for other popular demands, putting itself forward as a polemic issue within the different popular organizations inasmuch as they also reproduced unequal gender relations. In other words, feminism established a new antagonistic frontier between “us, the people against patriarchy” and “them, the ones that reproduce gender inequality that affects the people”.

A clear example of how feminism became part of “the people” is the struggle to legalize abortion. The “National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion” was born during the debates of the National Meeting of Women in 2001 and 2004. Therefore, it was obviously an already inscribed demand in the social space, but the irruption of “Not one woman less” re-sighned it in an entirely different popular way. We find the clue in 2016 when “Not one woman less” protests included another signifier: Vivas Nos Queremos (We want ourselves – women – alive). This new element enabled, on the one hand, the demand for legal abortion to be rewritten in terms of Ni una muerta más por aborto clandestino (Not one woman less due to clandestine abortion), and entailed a noun slipping into the signifier and its meaning. In this way the signifier “legalizing abortion” was linked to the idea of a legitimate access to basic rights; because it was the first time that in the political struggle for legalizing abortion, the signifier “life” was extensively associated with abortion. And this was a major political victory for the women’s movement as abortion had normally been associated with death and murder by the Catholic Church and the different evangelical branches, as they placed abortion as equivalent to murder. On the other hand, these signifiers also entailed a reaction against the political context in a country marked by the return of a conservative neoliberal coalition to government in December 2015 (headed by President Mauricio Macri) after 12 years of left-wing populism in power. In this way, the slogans “Not one woman less/...
We want ourselves — women — alive and take into account that no practice in itself is intrinsically emancipatory, we can understand that any practice may only become emancipatory when linked to other practices. Solidarity among the demands of different subjugated groups permits the emergence of a wider political subjectivity, not so easily available to be captured by the solipsistic terrain imposed by neoliberalism. And it also gives feminism the chance to overthrow its own frontiers and “dye green” to influence “the people”.

A fourth aspect, the emancipatory potency of “Not one woman less” built upon a solidary chain of equivalence largely exceeded the construction of “the people” in Argentina. It also provoked enthusiasm, becoming an international signifier that translated its politicizing effects into different contexts. “Not one woman less” reactivated and updated the element of feminicides, austerity policies against women and translated its politicizing effects into different contexts. “Not one woman less” reactivated and updated the past history of women’s strikes as a practice through which women collectively protested not only against the capitalist oppression but also against their subjugated position in relation to men. This renewed global, massive and historically built struggle allows us to see that feminicides, austerity policies against women and their consequent precarization, the refusal to legalize abortion, etc. are the limits to patriarchy itself in terms of dominant social relations. This also explains the hatred incarnated in the conservative reaction against the renewal of feminism.

A FIFTH AND FINAL aspect I would like to mention has to do with the challenge that feminist militancy as political activism faces. The irruption of “Not one woman less” had the full attraction of a moment of reactivation as it questioned sedimented practices and established hierarchies. On the other hand, any militant subjectivity that attempts to make that irruption last necessarily assumes the risk of institutionalization, because the moment of irruption can never be completely resolved through a passage to a militant institutionalized moment. In this passage, there is always a loss or a remainder. That is to say, the moment of the irruption can never be exhaustively absorbed by the activist political organization, no matter how horizontal or democratic that is. Institutionalization always brings, at some point, disappointment, discontent and annoyance as it entails new routines, established spaces, hierarchies and antagonisms. However, the paradox is that without this second moment, the first would vanish into thin air without really producing any change in the social order. So that is the challenge for feminist militancy: to generate an activist institutionalization that at the same time keeps alive at least something of that moment of irruption. Maybe, a first step into this impossible yet necessary challenge is to have an awareness that there is no institutional format (whether meeting, party, social movement, union, etc.) capable of resolving completely and once and for all that moment of irruption. This subjective position is the only one that can prevent militancy from domesticating it all under an organizational logic and keep alive the enthusiasm for change.

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references
2 Laclau, 2005.
3 Laclau, 2005.
4 The “egalitarian marriage” law was passed in 2010, the “gender identity” law in 2011 and the element of femicide was introduced in the Penal Code in 2012, after the murder of two young French women tourists in the Province of Salta.
5 “Social justice” has been a key nodal point in popular struggles since the first Peronism in the 40s and 50s.
6 The emblem of wearing a green headscarf was initially associated with the demand of legalizing abortion; now it is linked to the feminist movement as such.
Feminists are at the forefront of the democratic struggles in many countries, depending on their history and context. In Argentina the political momentum promoted by the debate over the abortion law motived more than a million women, lesbians, transgender people and men to go to the polls to vote in favor of the initiative of the deputies who did not sign the abortion bill after it had been approved by the Chamber of Deputies, the political and cultural change goes beyond this.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the processes followed by feminist movements and articulations that emerged and opened the possibility of a historical moment in which these are at the center of the political scene. My long-standing research seeks the existence—or not—of the articulations of identities that would embody the construction of counter hegemonies based on demands around the expansion of rights, which allows the linking of the struggle of feminist movements with others. I particularly consider the period inaugurated in the new millennium in Argentina, which was characterized as a “battleground” between neoliberal and populist discourses. When I refer to populism, I take into account that this category has the meaning of “we—the subordinated—confront the others, those that hegemonize power”.

In recent years, many European and American scholars have considered populism solely as rightist, against liberal democracy. However, I believe that populism can be fundamental for the feminist movement and the struggle against patriarchal order. Following Ernesto Laclau and Jacques Rancière, there is a people that when the struggle against one group is articulated with others, their claims to be included in the democratic count.

**INRECENT YEARS, many European and American scholars have considered populism solely as rightist, against liberal democracy.**

In this essay I will refer firstly to the notion of “feminist people” (right-wing) as if it seems as if it were the way that the minimalist women’s movement (in the sense of “we—the subordinated—confront the others, those that hegemonize power”). I refer to populism, I take into account that this category has the meaning of “we—the subordinated—confronting the others, those that hegemonically dominate.” In this confrontation, a “people” can contingently emerge—Following Ernesto Laclau and Jacques Rancière, there is a people when the people—subaltern groups articulates their claims to be included in the democratic count.

**THE LegalIZATION OF ABORTION** is set in the framework of sexual identity as a political issue, considering the widening of sexual citizenship for women, lesbians and transgender people, in the same way as happened in the case of the egalitarian marriage (2010) and the gender identity laws (2012). It proclaims the questioning of the patriarchal order that links sexuality to procreation and intends to control women’s, lesbians’ and transgender people’s bodies. It is set in human rights and public policy approach, therefore severed from individual civil servants’ rights. This shows the relevance and the social debate that the law was enacted, that is, that it was necessary. This is a people’s movement and the gender identity laws (2012). Since that time, conservative Catholic sectors have increasingly tried to boycott them. We can include these sectors in the denomination of an integral Catholic approach that is based on and at the same time reinforces patriarchy, in its defense of the female identity, and of denial of the different ways of living sexuality. In the NWM in the Province of Salta in 2002, the presence of female piketers (piqueteras), assembly members, trade unionists, and activists of various women’s movements of different ages (with a significant presence of young people), showed the consolidation of new expressions of women’s activism, the carriers of new struggles. In 2003, the Meeting held in Rosario (Province of Santa Fe) marked the turning point of the NWM that had already been announced in Salta. The attendance of 12,000 women showed that more and more were activists of social struggles, working for the same “cause it names me”.

**THE IMPACT of the movements on women was immense, and it is still the movement that begins to claim their rights.** Added to the Catholic call to boycott the meeting, it is the basis for the radicalization of the fight to legalize abortion, one of the three fundamental rights they demanded, together with the claims linked to violence against women and unemployment.

In the NWM in the province of Mendoza (2004), the final march drew twenty thousand women. The convergence of a great diversity of women from different social, rural, indigenous, urban, poor and middle class, employed or unemployed, feminists, was accentuated. The position presented was in favor of the legalization of abortion, free access to abortion and contraceptives. This movement also called for the incorporation of sex education into the educational system. In relation to labor rights, equal treatment was demanded for women and men, the reduction of women’s retirement age and the enactment of common laws for the whole country in this regard. Active policies to protect women against violence in the private and labor sphere were also demanded. The National Campaign for Safe, Legal and Free Abortion, the first campaign of federal scope in Argentina, emerged from the workshops on decentralization strategies in the following years, the NWM participation from different movements increased, various organizations and networks were organized, and links with feminists were accentuated.

The collective Ni Una Menos (literally meaning Not One Less, standing for Not One Woman Less) emerged. In March 2018, the Executive Branch enabled the treatment of the Campaign’s abortion legalization project. Participation in the NWM grew from two thousand women at the first meeting, to reach around two hundred thousand at that held in October 2019. From the 32nd WNM held in 2018 in Trelew (Province of Chubut), the claim arose for the adoption of a name that in addition to referring to women, makes visible both their pluralistic character, and lesbian, transvestite, transgender, bisexual and non-binary identities. In October 2019, on the last day of the 34th Meeting held in Ushuaia, the title Encuentro Plurinacional de Mujeres, Lesbianas, Bisexuales, Trans, Travesties, Intersex y No Binaries (Plurinational Meeting of women, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites, transgender, intersex and non-binary people) was voted by acclamation. Zulema Enríquez, Quechua, journalist and teacher said at the meeting: “The meeting is no longer national and ‘of women’, it is a meeting of international, of women, lesbians, transvestites, transgender, bisexual and non-binary people; this touches me on a personal level because it talks about my identity, because it affects my life.”

The process I have described shows the emergence and articulation of feminist demands and identities in Argentina. In this essay I will refer to the notion of “feminist people” as if it were the way that the minimalist women’s movement (in the sense of “we—the subordinated—confront the others, those that hegemonize power”). This process, in its struggle for the approval of the abortion law, antagonized Catholic fundamentalism and its conservative allies, with demands focused on strengthening secularism and democracy. Secondly, I will present the feminist practices developed over the third millennium; thirdly, the contingent possibilities opened by the existence of the NUA Menos. Finally, I will briefly develop the previous discussion into a broader one, that is, on discourses on democracy (especially illiberal, populist and neoliberal discourses and their effects on gender and sexuality rights).
The feminist people

Women’s demands, participation in the movements and in the NVMs as well as the Catholic Church’s strategies since 1997 to bend them have contributed to favor the emergence of new feminist identities and radicalization of feminist movements, processes that have been intensifying throughout these years. New political articulations have created a momentum of displacement, antagonism and redefinition since the 2001 crisis, paving the way for the emergence of a political identity, the “feminist people”, in which women’s and feminist movements constitute a core. This historical situation rendered this political identity that is the result of the articulation of several struggles for the broadening of rights and for the consolidation of a pluralist democracy. Two antagonistic projects were confronting each other, one as a field of struggle and of democratic opportunities — being on the offensive —; and the other, that resists consolidation of new rights, being on the counteroffensive.

This confrontation was intensified in 2018 when the abortion law was addressed in the National Congress between April and August 2018, in a context of high public debate. As a consequence, a new call for collective apostasy in several parts of the country was organized and became more massive. As a result, the committees in both the chambers of deputies and senators.

...is the ‘part of those who have no part’ [...]. Politics occurs by reason of a single universal that takes the specific shape of wrong. Wrong institutes a singular universal, a poltical universal, by tying the presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society.

When I refer to the “feminist people” I mean the articulation of the part of those who have no part, the ones that are aware of the wrong (injuries); it is not about sociological or demographic characteristics, but about the “plebs” that articulate demands in the face of a perceived wrong, that claim to be a people. This brings us to what Fancièrre refers to as a dispute about who is understood to be in the democracy contingent and not predetermined count, which is the “feminist people”’ central point.

I would like to highlight two points: Firstly, I depart from a feminist approach, using as a basis the theoretical framework developed by Laclau, mentioned above, in a way that has only recently been used to analyze the populist movement in which feminists and other movements, actors from trade unions and political parties articulate their demands regarding legal abortion, women’s rights, lacism and in doing so, oppose patricularism as well as neoliberalism. For a feminist analysis the notions of “heterogeneity” and the “establishment of an antagonistic frontier” developed by Laclau are clarifying.

...it is not a denied element that defines identity, nor is it a binary opposition, it is an external element that presupposes the absence of a common space [...]. “All we know is that it is going to be the ones outside the system, the marginal ones – the ones we have called the heterogenous – that are decisive in establishing an antagonistic border.”

He also refers to the fact that the heterogenous is never a pure exteriority because it inhabits the very logic of the internal constitution. Women’s sexual identities are not the binary opposition of the male category, nor its complement; they are the heterogeneous, the Other in the patriarchy. Secondly, I differ from Laclau’s assertion that counter-hegemonic politics needs a leader. For him, the unity of the group takes place in the name of the leader, key to the affective investment (cathexis) that is basic to constructing politics. In my analysis I cannot affirm that it is always the name of the leader that represents the chain of equivalences, since the conformation of the “feminist people” is horizontal, having situational referents, not authorities. The very names of the movements and/or their symbols have the potential for generating the cathexis that unifies the demands. In the case I am studying these were articulated in the chain of equivalences and favored the emergence of diverse, pluralistic and democratic collective identities, generated from multiple locations. They have their foundation in the women’s movement’s horizontal and rhizomatic structure, their networks and their local, transnational, face to face and cyber space articulations. Feminists do not have leaders or owners, they follow neither a canonical feminist conception, nor the gender mainstreaming mandates of international organizations. On the contrary, they have the autonomy and political capability to choose their struggles, their timing, and their strategies in order to carry them out. The “feminist people” must have the right of an x number of women, lesbians, gays, transvestites, transsexual and intersexual people, in their struggle towards full citizenship.

One might wonder whether not having a leader is an obstacle to the constitution of the feminist people. I do not think so. Laclau himself presents a range of alternatives offered by Freud, when transcribing “the part of those without part” [...].

Feminists, working class people, aboriginals, afro-descendants, people with disabilities, youth, adults, males, but right now they do not delimit rigid compartmentality. The theory of intersectionality is of course needed to acknowledge the complexity of identities and the new political visibility. Nevertheless these identities are not essentialist, or fixed, but on the contrary they are in constant mutation and conflict.

Feminist practices

For almost 30 years now, feminist practices have spread horizontally to other actors, movements and spaces in society, which can be framed in what feminism flows defined as side streaming feminism. Multiple feminist interventions, workshops and publications have spread in a great range of organizations and territories.

The “feminist people” is widening the heat of the struggles day by day, including new movements, organizations and groups. For example, since 2010, the “Colectivo Varones Antipatriarcales Ni Machos ni Fachos” (“Anti patriarchal Male Collective. Neither Machos, nor Fascists”) linked to the piqueteros organization Darío Santillán Front (FDS), has activated a state of insurrectional irritation (angry and free movement); since 2010, the “Colectivo Varones Antipatriarcales Ni Machos ni Fachos” (“Anti patriarchal Male Collective. Neither Machos, nor Fascists”) linked to the piqueteros organization Darío Santillán Front (FDS), has activated a statement: “Varones por el derecho al aborto legal, seguro y libre” (“Males for the right to legal, safe and free abortion”). The “feminist people” is widening the heat of the struggles day by day, including new movements, organizations and groups. For example, since 2010, the “Colectivo Varones Antipatriarcales Ni Machos ni Fachos” (“Anti patriarchal Male Collective. Neither Machos, nor Fascists”) linked to the piqueteros organization Darío Santillán Front (FDS), has activated a statement: “Varones por el derecho al aborto legal, seguro y libre” (“Males for the right to legal, safe and free abortion”). Since 2010, the “Colectivo Varones Antipatriarcales Ni Machos ni Fachos” (“Anti patriarchal Male Collective. Neither Machos, nor Fascists”) linked to the piqueteros organization Darío Santillán Front (FDS), has activated a state of insurrectional irritation (angry and free movement).
Ni una menos

In 2015 the collective Ni Una Menos emerged from the initiative of a group of journalists, writers and researchers that used to get together to reflect upon feminism and the cultural field, through a cycle of readings at the National Library. They initi- ated a demonstration in front of the National Congress to report the emergency situation of femicides in Argentina. Their strategy attained a national presence: first and foremost, but not exclusively, aimed at gaining visibility, reporting and holding the state and society responsible for violence against women. The demands were stated in five points: the implementation of the National Action Plan that must foresee the fulfillment of the inte- gral Protection Law to Prevent, Sanction and Eradicate Violence Against Women; establishing guarantees to the victims’ access to justice; the conformation of a unique official register of violence against women; to open integral sexual education’s programs and activities at all educational levels all around the country; to guarantee protection for victims of violence. This first demonstration was followed by others in subse- quent years, just as massive, making claims against gender vio- lence and femicides, male chauvinistic justice, unemployment, and poverty affecting women, especially the youngest. The demand for legal abortion was included since 2016, demon- strations were held both in Peru and Mexico. In the latter, the motto was: “Vivas No Queremos” (We want ourselves alive), that was also incorporated in Argentina. Like- wise, 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean joined in October 19, the Women’s National Strike against femicides with the motto: “#NosotrasParamos” (#WeStop, “Ni Una Menos”) was also used in 2016, giving the name to a social movement in which the symbols of the women’s protest, the handkerchiefs (pañuelo), took place followed by the Women’s International Day demon- stration on March 8, 2017, and many activities against criminal- ization and for legalization of abortion. The Ni Una Menos slogan against sexual abuse, violence and femicides spread all over the country and had a great impact in the state, on political parties of very different orientations, social movements, unions, religious organizations etc. The images that identify Ni Una Menos could be seen in official spaces, stores and even in few Catholic parishes. The conservative sectors did not speak out against Ni Una Menos’ focal topics and demonstra- tions in the country, the WSF was critical in media and social activism, as in the case of the demonstrations and rallies in 2017 and 2018.

Ni Una Menos could have become feminist or patriarchal, since from the outset it was made up of different groups and identities that were not homogeneous. On one side, the side of patriarchal discourses, horror at femicide brutality, reports against violent men, and expressions of male de- mands were observed. Yet on the other hand, in many cases, there was neither criticism of unequal gender and sex relationships, nor demand for the change in treatment by the public services nor analysis of how appearance builds momentum, to quote Arendt. They identified themselves by the green handkerchief that has been waving since the NSW in Rosario in 2003, when many of them had to give up their contracts and work to accumulate funds for the public space shows how appearance builds momentum, to quote Arendt. This was particularly visible at “the Pañuelazo” on February 19, 2018, and the huge green-listed demonstration on March 8, 2018, as already mentioned, as the women of Argentina demanded the recognition of their right to decide about their own sexualities, emotions and bodies. This conception builds on the demand to acknowledge sexuality as not merely and solely linked to reproduction; that is to say, to anyessential approach to its purpose. Sexual rights regulations are ideologically based on the conception of woman as mother and of a feminine sexual- ity at the service of reproduction, not for pleasure. Generally, as we witnessed during the debates on abortion laws, the groups that oppose sexual rights are motivated by patriarchal ideology, whichever reasoning they may submit, and their purpose is to control and tame women and bodies able to get pregnant, in their terms. They become more merciless with the bodies, emo- tions and decisions of poor women, wanting to punish them with the excuse of taking care of their lives and those of the fe- tuses, with the motto: “save the two lives”.

Illiberal governments and rights

The government of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019) faced pro- blems of all kind because the imposition of neoliberal policies promoted economic recession, unemployment, inflation and impoverishment. In this context, after the demonstration mentioned above, the president of Argentina considered the feminist’s claims in the streets and enabled the bill to legalize abortion to be put before Congress. This response from the government is similar to the responses in 2018 to Ni Una Menos demonstrations, for example appointing a feminist to be in charge of the National Women’s Institute, launching the second National Action Plan for Prevention, Assistance and Eradication of Violence Against Women; opening new centers for women’s assistance in various provinces, etc. We can consider these ac- tions as “dispositive”34, whose emergence responds to a particu- lar historic landmark that makes it necessary to establish the conditions of their appearance as events that modify a previous field of power relationships. As on these other occasions, the dis- positivo’s spring from the heat of claims.

Some authors point to the danger that women’s rights and those of other sexual identities might become part of simulated changes (gatapardismo). In other words, one of the threats to reaching gender equality is the degree to which these rights can be a “commitment” element in the men’s’, governments’ and corporations’ agendas. How and when would it already be said, the treatment by the Argentine Congress of the bill to legalize abor- tion is due to a robust feminist movement, to a project debated and agreed for years, to a massive, permanent mobiliza- tion and to the number of young people in the demonstration on the streets that made them visible in the public arena. If we consider that taking to the streets in demonstrations and activ- ism in the digital space has an important political potential, we may see identity displacement processes in the discourses on bodies, compulsory heterosexuality, maternity, and families. These processes lead to the radicalization of the struggle against the patriarchy and the traditional forces that support it, not only regarding sexual rights but also cultural, reli- gious, political and economic rights.

ENABLING THE BILL to come before congress is a good example of how a government that has ruled the country since 2015 (until December 2019) adjusted itself to the feminists’ demand on the streets. This government can be branded as illiberal (see Zakaria; Smith and Ziegler; Galston; Graff and Zolkvacz; Petez and Gra- balle; Moshgaben; Fates; Williams and Amend). Because of the follow- ing characteristics: the constitutional division of powers was not respected; human rights violations were denied and human rights organizations denigrated; also, pre-trial detention of pop- ular activists and former civil servants occurred, authorization
Throughout the educational system, nor was the Non Punishable Abortion Protocol (2012) implemented, after the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation ruled that “every woman who is pregnant as a result of rape has the right to access a non-punishable abortion regardless of their intellectual capacity, without requiring prior judicial authorization to access the practice.”7 It is important to note that these situations in the American continent in which policies can be considered as left-wing populist, up to a limited extent, were changed by neoliberal governments, alerts us to the risks that these have faced in a globalized context in which the policies were focused on capital and the practical difficulty to take those paths back. It is also occurring with the expansion of right-wing populisms in several countries in the global north and south.

**Final reflections**

Currently, the debate about the legalization of abortion has expanded the “feminist people” to a previously unthinkable extent; it established the legalization of abortion in public opinion and promoted the demand to deepen the separation between the church and the state. The “feminist people” is a new identity that broadens itself with new actors, although that statement is not an assertion of universalization. Moreover, it is not a quantitative fact, because for the feminist people to become broader, it is necessary for the demands of particular identities to be articulated in a counter-hegemonic field. We are witnessing such articulations in the public space and the emergence of new actors. Taking to the streets in demonstrations and activism in different spaces have the potential to transform identities, that is what happened with the emergence and development of Ni Una Menos. Adolescents and youth’s discourses contributed to this populist moment. It was possible because of what was learnt at the NWM, and because of Ni Una Menos’ actions, the Integral Sexual Education workshops where they could be developed, families’ relation building, and strategies of mobilization in terms of some changes in gender and power relationships.

I have mentioned that when women’s and other identities’ movements were articulated, “the feminist people” emerged. What was not antecedent, and considering that it is part of the agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as a policy of demographic control. The above-mentioned authors regard the Polish and Hungarian governments as neoliberal to take those paths back. It is also occurring with the expansion of right-wing populisms in several countries in the global north and south.

**references**

12. This with denomination, the existence of several national communities is a male vision and recognized, for example indigenous people and Afro descendents.
15. More than 3,700 people submitted apostasy requests during 2018. To date, these projects have been submitted to achieve separation between the church and the Catholic bodies, their rejection of a global capital and free market institutions to the rejection of women’s rights and those of LGBTQI identities. Some Latin American universities have undergone projects, for example, the alliance between Catholics and evangelicals as can be seen in Brazil, Chile and Argentina. In our country, dissatisfaction about the economy was used to reinforce religious arguments in the debate about abortion, considering that it was a part of the agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMM), as a policy of demographic control. The above-mentioned authors regard the Polish and Hungarian governments as neoliberal to take those paths back. It is also occurring with the expansion of right-wing populisms in several countries in the global north and south.
17. In this chapter I will not discuss the notions of liberal democracies.
18. Gender and other subaltern collectives. This is also happening in Argentina. The “Ni Una Menos” claim, that were at first directed to violence against women were afterwards transformed and articulated with the “feminist people’s” national and transnational demands, broadening their counter-hegemonic possibilities.

26 Laclau, Razón, 127–130.

27 Di Marco, Feminismos, 66–70.

28 Laclau, Razón, 85.

29 Laclau, Razón, 287.


32 Black Monday (Black protest of Polish women (Czarny Protest- Black Protest because of the colour of mourning clothes), which was inspired by the strike carried out by women in Iceland on October 24th, 1975. “Free Women's Day”- to draw attention to the income inequality between women and men. This strike, held to protest the government's attempt to prohibit abortion, was followed by a second strike “against state violence and ignorance” about women's problems, in October 2016. The Catholic Church condemned the strike, regarding it as the devil's carnival. The protest extended to several countries, such Iceland, Germany, and Russia.


34 Laclau, Razón, 163.

35 Laclau, Razón, 99.

36 Laclau, Razón, 103.


43 Since 1921, the Argentine Criminal Code allows abortion in two cases: when the life or health of the woman is in danger and when the pregnancy is the product of a “rape or indecent assault against an idiot or demented woman.” (Article 86) paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Code.

44 In 2006 in the USA, the activist Tarana Burke coined the phrase “Me Too” to raise awareness about sexual harassment and abuse.

LET’S NOT TALK ABOUT IT

Feminism and populism in Argentina

Since the emergence of #NiUnaMenos [Not One Less] in 2015, feminism has become widespread in Argentina. Nowadays, actions such as to identify oneself as a feminist, to cite her slogans, to use her handkerchiefs, to hold her flags, are no longer conceived as minority, elitist or radicalized practices. Feminisms are becoming more common. They slip into every day and ordinary experiences, and advocates and allies of their causes appear in the most unlikely places and contexts. There are feminists in political parties, in the state, in unions, in universities, in secondary schools, in companies, in religious groups, among housewives and among the Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo [Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo]. As one of its flags usually holds, there are “feminists everywhere”.

In this essay we aim to offer an exploratory account of the conditions that have made this unusual scenario possible. In particular, we consider how the heterogeneous groups that gathered under the scream “Ni Una Menos!” have become part of a feminist “us”. That is, what were the conditions that enabled the current expansion of what is known as the green and violet tide of feminism? How have the feminists’ demands articulated multiple claims and dimensions of social protest related to economic, social, cultural and racial issues? With these questions in mind, we will begin by exploring how this expansion has been addressed by the existing literature, focusing on the approach of Graciela Di Marco, in whose view this process must be understood within the framework of the successful construction of a “feminist people”. Taking on this approach – while nonetheless marking our differences – we will go on to explain the conditions that from our perspective enabled feminism to become popular. Firstly, we will point to the relationship that feminist groups have established with human rights activism since the early 80s. Later, we will direct attention to the effects of displacement resulting from the political articulation that took place in the new millennium between human rights groups and the political force that was in government for almost a decade, Kirchnerism. As we will show, this political process decisively affected the feminist movements and the positions they hold in the social and political arena at the present time.

Dress for success: constructing “the people”

The expansion of local feminisms is provoking intense debates within different social and political spaces in Argentina. In the academic world, it has awakened an unusual interest in gender issues and motivated interesting and lucid reflections on the reasons that led to this changing reality for feminist struggles. In this respect, interventions by academics and activists proliferated on social networks and in the media, staging the multiple aspects of this phenomenon and the variety of ongoing research that addresses it. Many of these interventions focus, time and again, on the probable source or origin of the awakening of this massive feminist mobilization, attempting to find the key to understanding and explaining this unexpected situation.

Graciela Di Marco is one of the first intellectuals to approach this process of expansion, pointing to the way local activists succeeded in constructing a “feminist people”. As Di Marco shows,
it was during the mobilization process in the face of the social and political crisis that took place between 2001 and 2002 in the country,7 when feminist groups began to organize and connect with other women’s fronts in a way previously unthinkable. The *Campaña por el Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito* (Campaign for Free, Safe, and Legal Abortion) was the main initiative through which they began this gradual but effective process of articulation with different activist groups. Di Marco points out that, whereas in the 90s convergence between feminist demands and the broader agenda of social movements seemed highly unlikely, in the post-crisis context feminists began to value women’s participation in grassroots and popular groups (such as *piqueteras,* assembly members, trade unionists) and to recognize the need to articulate with these groups to accompany and influence their struggles. “Popular feminism” would then emerge in this new scenario from the alignment of feminist activists with women from popular sectors. According to Di Marco, this was made clear in the 2003 Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres (National Women’s Meeting),8 when there was a turning point in feminist strategies involving feminist groups – which in previous meetings had established alliances with women from political parties – this time articulated their demands with women from popular sectors.

This new experience made possible the radicalization of feminist claims, and eventually, the emergence of a popular feminism that made the demand for the legalization of abortion a nodal point of the feminist movement. Drawing on Ernesto Laclau’s theoretical developments,9 Di Marco argues that it was actually the demand for legal abortion which succeeded in becoming an “empty signifier.”10 That is to say, a demand that was capable of bringing together the heterogeneity of the broad women’s and feminist movement, transforming its own singular content into a universal one that overlapped all other feminist claims. For Di Marco then, this demand embodied the representation “of women’s full citizenship, secularism and pluralism,” vis-à-vis the traditional and patriarchal values upheld by the Catholic Church and its conservative allies.11 It was by means of that particular claim that feminist struggles became the manifestation of a feminist people.12

Although Di Marco is not the only researcher to address this path of feminist alliances, her approach is provocative and suggestive, not only because she examines the relationship between feminism and popular sectors, but also because she understands that process as a “populist articulation.” However, if we examine the processes that have taken place since Di Marco wrote her book, especially the demonstrations against gender violence under #NiUnaMenos and the recent #8M,13 it becomes necessary to reconsider her analysis and ask ourselves about the current conditions of this feminist people.14 But we also consider that there is a problem in Di Marco’s argument that is mainly related to her narrow view of the process that enabled feminism to become popular. That is to say, it is only because of the feminist movement, as Di Marco suggests, that feminist ideas found the way to success and reached universalization! In other words, is it possible to understand the emergence of the “feminist people” without referring to the political tradition that historically claimed for itself the representation of the people in Argentina?

In the next sections, we aim to put forward two analytical paths to address these questions. First, we consider that one of the keys to understanding how feminism became popular lies in the relationships that this movement established with human rights activism during the 1980s. Second, we argue that it was precisely because of this relationship that feminism did not remain immune to the eruption of the popular political discourse that dominated the political scene from 2003 to 2015. In other words, the relationship with human rights groups enabled feminists, not only with a new form of activism, but also with a logic of articulation that put the people at the forefront.6

The happy marriage of feminisms and human rights

Regarding our first analytical approach, we need to address the conditions that made possible what is now openly recognized as “popular feminism.” As we have noted in earlier writings, during the 1980s feminist activism brought forth a new impetus from which to find answers to the social and political problems that Argentina had to face in the transition to a new democratic era. It was against this background that the encounter of feminisms with human rights groups was actually possible.14 The new privileged position of human rights activism ensured that the feminists’ instant love for the mothers and grandmothers of “disappeared” people was not overshadowed by the latter’s constant victimization of the maternal role and family bonds. Rather, in the feminist view, these groups were the symbol of resistance to the *de facto* regime and represented the confrontation with the State and party politics. That is, those mothers were bringing to the fore a new contentious language that also implied a new form of activism against the most visible figures and whose most visible figures were precisely women. “This last remark is crucial to understand the political identification of the majority of feminists with the Madres and Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo, and it makes clear that this process did not respond to any common feminist given interests or ends, but to political circumstances that ultimately involved contingent and arbitrary decisions.”15

Three’s a crowd: the Kirchnerist people

The second point of our argument takes us from the 80s to the new millennium. During the first years of the 21st century, the heterogeneous character of the feminist movement gained a new impetus and feminist politics also acquired a renewed popular slant. As we pointed out in the above section, according to Di Marco, it was the demand for legal abortion that enabled the feminist movement to succeed in representing vast and heterogeneous feminist and women’s claims. However, Di Marco’s assumption relies mainly on the feminist achievements, but devotes little attention to the political context that enabled these political moves. The argument that we put forward here attempts to show that this articulatory capacity cannot be understood without paying attention to the effects produced in the social imaginary of Argentina by the political experience that began in 2003, under Néstor Kirchner’s government. Our aim is to trace not only the conditions that feminism itself engendered from its laborious activism, but also the singular political context that sheltered and helped determine them: “the Kirchnerist people”. And that is: Kirchnerism, we do not define it simply as a government; but as a political phenomenon that implanted a novel social and political mobilization from which a new political identity emerged.

As we explained elsewhere,16 this form of identification shaped a new popular experience in the country that affected all the social and political actors of the time in one way or another. That is to say, the changing and porous border of the “Kirchnerist people” had disturbing effects that not only provoked the emergence of new popular identifications, but also influenced...
existing ones, as happened with feminism. But how did that populist discourse achieve this?

As we have pointed out, this political project managed to articulate one of the most valuable causes of Argentina’s recent history: the narrative of the women who, until then, had not been recognized in the so-called Madres and Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo, in their unhappy struggle for justice, memory and truth, that Kirchner’s discourse inscribed and legitimized the origin of its own political project. It is in this way that the result of a political act that took place at an early stage, starting from the enactment of a double rupture: on the one hand, with a recent past embedded in Menemism (Menemism) and in the market reform process of the 90s; on the other, with a distant past that went back to the military dictatorship and whose effects are still felt today. Both ruptures were organized around a critique of the prevailing im- pute in the country that placed the democratic governments in a line of continuity with the last dictatorship.6 In this critique of past and present impunity, Kirchner’s discourse laid the foundations for a broad relationship of solidarity with the struggle for the human rights of relatives of victims of repression, with the victims themselves, and with a whole field of contiguous social and political struggles against social and economic inequalities. As a result of this metonymic disruption, Kirchner’s fight against impunity was also meant as a fight against exclusion and against impunity was also meant as a fight against exclusion and social injustice. In the name of those who had been estranged by a terrorist state and by the impunity of the democratic govern- ments that followed (mothers, grandmothers, daughters, relatives), in the name of those excluded by an unjust economic model initiated in the dictatorship and deepened by Menemist neoliberalism, in the name of those who had lived through the past and were present hurt by repression and the economic crisis, Kirchner is- ism burst forth as the possibility of representing a new legiti- matory identity proper to the human rights, justice and social inclusion.6 In doing so, Kirchnerism highlighted something of the order of the unthinkable or implausible with respect to the existing community. A possibility of inclusion that the Madres and Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo dreamed, but that had not been dreamt of.7 This “unthinkable” shows the radical character of Kirch- ner’s discourse: the imagination of a new “All”. It is there, in that radicalization of the populism that divides and includes the origin of the proliferation of many of the claims for greater inclusion that were present at that time, including the claims historically held by feminists.

“Feminist people” or “popular feminism”: what does the name tell us? But how has this process of inclusion been constructed, which made “human rights” a struggle of its own, affected feminism? What are the links between Kirchnerism and the current emergence of feminism? Before addressing these issues, two clarifications should be made. First, we have seen in recent debates that in order to understand the rise and popular- ization of feminisms in the country, many of the most prominent readings appeal to the effects of a “fourth wave” of feminism that travels the globe uniformly.8 In this context, we consider it necessary to distinguish between two levels of analysis: on the one hand, the internationalist discourse of the Kirchnerist ideology, and on the other, the singular conditional possibility of inclusion in each context that enable or hinder the processes of collec- tive mobilization.9 Without underestimating the hard work on international and regional fronts and networks, we consider that too much focus on the international effects of the feminist global ideology and struggle does not allow space to pay attention to the specific conditions that enable particular feminisms in each country and region. These conditions are what ultimately provide the possibility of configuration of singular feminisms (popular, lib- eral, trans, communitarian, lesbian) many of which pose incom- pactible or opposing political horizons for future articulations. In this sense, it is crucial to address the terrain of inscription of feminist demands in each case, to understand why, for example, in Chile the “EMILY” was linked to an economic politics that confronts private pension funds, or in Colombia and Paraguay, how the alliance was with the peasant and indigenous move- ments.

SECONDLY, GIVEN THE RECENT dissemination and polyclave of the term “populist” – including “right-wing populism”, “left- wing populism”, “classic populism”, “populism of the new mil- lennium” – it is necessary to clarify some of the meanings that we consider crucial when it comes to understanding its effects on Argentinian feminisms. In line with Ernesto Laclau’s work, we aim to emphasize that populism is a mode of political identi- fication that constructs and gives meaning to “the people” as a political subject.10 This does not mean that “the people” is an objective entity, but rather a “subject-formation” that constructs and gives meaning to “the people” as a political entity; it is central to the understanding of populism – even though not all references to “the people” are necessarily populist. The internationalist dimension proper to populist identification is that “the people” are always understood as a political category that divides and includes the origin of the configuration of demands, and the dimension of the radical and sub- stantive articulation of this “people” – which does not remain indifferent to the singular modification of this new populist interpellation. Even though the new political discourse did not attempt to co-opt feminists, nor did it have a feminist agenda in its origins, the structuring relationships of the politi- cal and social field were altered by this new form of articulation and partition of the community space. Thus, previous identity configurations were also modified by the changing dynamics of the field of representation. In this sense, what we argue is that the effects on feminisms did not respond to a direct interrella- tion of Kirchnerist discourse, but rather to a distorted appeal that was not enough to realize the political project and the contingent relationship that worked and became successful, to a large extent, based on the contingent relationship that linked feminisms to the human rights movement, in particular, to the Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. There were, which, as part of the explanation of the popular commotion of feminisms. It was this same commotion that once again contributed, as in the 1980s, to questioning the frontiers that gave meaning to feminist politics, its alliances and interests and demands were made by feminist activists in key places of political decision with a great load of exposure and public visibility. Now, in terms of the demands of feminisms and sexual diversity, the shifting perception of human rights organizations towards the state gave way to greater cred-
THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN WHAT IS ‘FEMINIST’ AND WHAT IS NOT HAVE CHANGED IN WAYS UNIMAGINABLE A DECADE AGO.

**references**

1. “Néstor Kirchner was a banking/shielded social media under which massive demonstrations were held in eighty cities in the country on June 3, 2013. These events emerged as a response to the violence against women and its negative impact on the feminist agenda. Feminism, now stands for the name of a particular feminist front, the “No Una Menos movement.”

2. Human rights groups that emerged in the search for “disappeared” persons and organized around the state, and recruiting and identifying that has been present in Argentina since 2003: “las hijas de las Madres” (“We are the Daughters of the Mothers”), inscribing their claims in an intimate bond, such as a kinship filiation. It is a generational change in the long struggle of these human rights groups that guarantees the continuity of their demands, as well as their articulation with feminisms.

3. To conclude then, do these displacements—around the state, Peronism and a “popular” agenda—mean that feminism is populist in Argentina? Or that feminists are now Peronistos? What implications does this growing popular base of feminisms have for feminist struggles? With no intention of answering these questions unequivocally or in an all-encompassing manner, we consider that feminism is today a mode of popular identification.

4. That is to say, it has enabled multiple acts of identification that at the same time strengthened its particular character; it has turned it into a universal deal with hegemonic pretensions. In this respect, we aim to emphasize that feminism no longer represents a specific category, such as the right to legal abortion, or a life without violence. Nor does it stand as an exclusive politics of “the woman”, or even “the women”. Today, feminism is open to heterogeneous demands and identities that are chained to an ever-broader meaning that is inscribed in its name. What we attempted to point out in this paper is that this possibility was not present in feminism in the case of feminisms, the expansion of their limited agenda towards demands considered historically as “non-strategic” was only possible in the context of the collective mobilization that began after the 2001 crisis, but actually happened in 2003, by means of the articulation of the trajectories of feminisms; it was also the result of a singular context of over-determination marked by a populist discourse and identification that has been present in Argentina since 2003: the Kirchnerist people. The changes with respect to the horizons that were opened in that context are still in making. It will be our task to point out the possibilities for a feminist agenda.

5. Mercedes Barros is Researcher at the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas and at the Universidad Nacional de Rio Negro. She is currently teaching at the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Argentina. Natalia Martínez Prad is Assistant Researcher at the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas and Assistant Professor in the area of Feminisms, Gender and Sexualities (FEMG@) at the María Salas de Burónich Research Centre (Centre of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities, and National University of Córdoba, Argentina).
Argentina [Argentinian Feminist Organization]. See María Elena Oddone, La pasión por la libertad. Memorias de una feminista, (Asunción: Ediciones Colihue, 2000). Another way is to look at the rejection by most feminists of the establishment of any link with the Amas de Casa del País [Housewives of the Country], another women’s caucus that emerged during the eighties. These groups arose as a new form of protest against economic problems and hyperinflation in the Buenos Aires suburbs and they were known for calling a 24 hour “shopping strike” every week. Although they did not join any political party, nor did they identify themselves as feminists, they were one of the first groups to demand housewife’s retirement, and they actually ended up supporting the demand for legal divorce, unclear parental power and policies related to abolition of violence against women. See Archenti, Situación de la mujer en la sociedad argentina. Now, in spite of this obvious affinity with feminist struggles, most feminists groups did not articulate or identify with the housewives’ claims, some of them arguing that this was a movement that only had “women housewives as subjects and targets” which would limit “the perception of the global character of female oppression”. Magui Bellotti, El feminismo y el movimiento de mujeres. Una contribución al debate (Buenos Aires: Centro de Documentación sobre la Mujer, 1989).

22 Mercedes Barros, “Los derechos humanos, entre luchas y disputas”; Mercedes Barros, “Democracia y Derechos Humanos”.

23 The name generally used to refer to the period of Carlos Menem’s government (1989—1999) and also used to characterize the period in which neoliberal economic policies were implemented in the country.


25 Mercedes Barros, “Democracia y Derechos Humanos”.

26 Mercedes Barros, “Los derechos humanos, entre luchas y disputas”.

27 Specifically in Argentina, we refer to the approaches of Ana Natalucci and Julieta Rey “¿Una nueva ola feminista? Agenda de género, repertorios de acción y colectivos de mujeres (Argentina, 2015 – 2018)”, Revista de Estudios Políticos y Estratégicos, 6 (2), (2018):14 – 34; Gago, Gutiérrez Aguilar, et al., 8m constelación feminista ¿cuál es tu lucha? ¿cuál es tu huelga? (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2018); Junta y a la Izquierda, Mujeres en revolución. La Nueva ola feminista mundial, (Buenos Aires: La Montaña, 2017); Freire et al. La cuarta ola feminista, (Buenos Aires: Emilio Ulises Bosia, Mala Junta, Oleada, 2018). This perspective is also replicated in the U.S. reading of 99% feminism. See Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto (New York: Verso, 2019).

28 As for the internationalist dimension, as Clare Hemmings (2005) argues, we need to be skeptical about the “insistent narrative that sees the development of feminist thought as a resilient march towards progress or loss”. In particular, we question the way in which the attributes of the “fourth wave” are presented as the result of overcoming previous waves. This sort of learning would imply a certain progressive complexity of the feminist subject, starting from the essential, unitary and homogeneous category – “woman” – towards its anti-essentialist and intersectional multiplication – “women” (cis, trans, lesbians, blacks, workers, immigrants…). This type of reading not only presupposes a rationality criterion in the relationship between agency and structure, as if international contexts offered opportunities to local feminisms. It also prevents the understanding of how the emergence of singular feminisms are actually conditioned and altered by local conflicts and political languages and traditions.

29 Ernesto Laclau, La Razón Populista, (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2009), 153.


32 On August 21, 2003, as a decision promoted by the President, the Senate of the Nation approved the annulment of the “Punto Final” and “Obediencia Debida” laws [Final point and Due Obedience] which were the main legal obstacles to the reopening of the trials for crimes against humanity in Argentina. This marked a turning-point in the search for truth, memory and justice in the democratic era. See Mercedes Barros and Virginia Morales, “Derechos humanos y post kirchnerismo: resonancias de una década y esbozo de un nuevo panorama político”, Estudios Sociales Contemporáneos, 14, 7 (2016): 104–124.


34 We refer to the political movement that emerged in Argentina in the mid-1940s around the figure of Juan Domingo Peron and that has remained since then as one of the most important political forces in the country.

35 For a thorough analysis, see Mercedes Barros and Virginia Morales, “Derechos humanos y post kirchnerismo”.


37 As for the first group, the Movimiento Evita [Evita’s Movement], La Cámpora [The Cámpora], and La Jauretche [The Jauretche], among others that emerged during Néstor Kirchner’s mandate, organized their respective gender commissions during this period. On the second group, Mala Junta (Frente Grande) [The Bad Board (Great Front)], Muralá (Libres del Sur) [Muralá (Free from the South)] and La Corriente Política y Social La Colectiva [The Collective Political and Social Current], are collectives that since their emergence have been recognized as part of the most progressive or left-wing trend of Peronism and feminism.

38 See Mercedes Barros and Virginia Morales, “Derechos humanos y post kirchnerismo”.

39 Here, we refer to the distinction between “practical” and “strategic” interests in the terminology of Maxine Molineaux which had great influence in Latin American feminisms. Maxine Molineaux, “Mobilization without Emancipation? Women’s Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua”, Feminist Studies 11, 2 (1985): 227–254. For an analysis of this categorization in the light of current discussions about the centrality of the demand for abortion rights among some Argentine feminisms, see Natalia Martínez Prado, “¿Pueblo feminista?”.


41 This type of dispute has historically taken place between autonomous feminists and left-wing parties, especially during the process of defining the closing documents of the workshops at the National Women’s Meetings. The endless debates tend to be about whether or not to include demands linked to foreign debt, wage cuts, worker layoffs, and political articulation with Latin American workers’ struggles, among others.
This current rise of conservative and illiberal politics, militarization and suppression of the voices of activists and feminist scholars makes it necessary to mobilize an ethic of solidarity to counter the growing movements against transnational feminist knowledge and equality within the European context and other parts of the world. Within the realm of this themed issue, we therefore want to comment on what role academia could take in terms of forming transnational allies to protect against the threats to academic freedom posed by the diverse mobilizations of anti-feminist and anti-gender movements.

While opposition to feminist struggles and gender equality policies has a long history, recent developments mark a distinctly new phase, establishing new regimes of oppression. These regimes of oppression include personal attacks on scholars, cutting funding for research on gender, and attempts to de-legitimize...
gender studies as merely “ideology” and as a threat to society’s well-being and development. Accordingly, nationalist narratives are also promulgated by move-
ments that hold feminism responsible for the “collapse” of the Western values system through immigration and multicultural-
ism. As a result, (anti-Muslim) racism and anti-feminism have spread, sometimes in dis-
courses co-opt various achievements in (gender) equality won through women’s struggles. Although nationalist move-
ments usually propagate solutions and policies which are against women’s inter-
est, they are often articulated under the banner of the gender equality rhetoric. Therefore, it is also necessary to take into consideration how elements of feminism are appropriated by anti gender discours-
es, for example, the role of conservative gender studies as merely “ideology” and
typically performed resistance. Efforts to cre-
ate feminist unity in the name of gender and gender
dissociations across different sets of borders also inevitably unveils the cracks and dif-
ficulties dividing feminist communities. How do we account for this while doing so-
darity that can cut across regimes of oppression? What are the conditions for the possi-
ability of engaging in cross border scholarly cooperation? What are the ways in which we can challenge the different
crafts of brick walls that we experience in inter-national, national, and other con-
texts, and that we need to go up against when continuing transnational coopera-
tion? 

**Multiple regimes of oppression**

Together with established academ-
ics, activists, gender practitioners and public intellectuals from across the EU and beyond, we have created a network which works as a platform for examining conceptual, empirical and political issues related to the possibilities of engaging in cross border scholarly cooperation? What are the ways in which we can challenge the different
crafts of brick walls that we experience in inter-national, national, and other con-
texts, and that we need to go up against when continuing transnational coopera-
tion? 

**One of the workshop’s strengths was the ability to compare events in differ-
ent countries as they evolved.**

At that time, gender studies were under threat

Keskin, formerly at Kocaeli University in

The first-hand awareness of the situation

The events in Poland where massive

We therefore believe that there are many reasons to make networks of solidarity that are ef-
ficient across different kinds of regimes of oppression. We are not the first to take on the issue. We also know that efforts to create feminist unity in the name of gender studies across differ-
ent sets of borders inevitably unveils the

differences in the different countries can be so large that it is important to remember

elements of feminism from, for example, Russia, Hungary, and

Our overall comment to the ongoing and diverse processes of multiple anti-
gender mobilizations is however that

We can see that exploring the forms and dynamics of gender and gender

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**Sweden**

**Gender Hate**

s the new global family fundamentalism celebrated another victory while taking over the historic Gran Guardia Palace in Verona, Italy in March, the US’ news media buzzed proclaimed “Italy is the clearest test of whether the same formula that brought the right-wing back right to influence in the White House can work in Western Europe” (March 28, 2019).

For three days, thousands of neo-conservative, authoritarian, religious right, and occasionally fascist Italians poured in and out through the culturally important city to show their support for the dream of a world that cherishes the heterosexual family and keeps national borders closed — the immigration issue being the second pillar of this movement.

What emerges as remarkable in the reporting is the introduction of three characters behind the big conference. Their three faces — an activist, a businessman, and a politician from three different movements and continents — are a perfect illustration of how today’s global anti-gender movements are positioning themselves.

**Baltic Worlds 2020, vol. XIII:1 Special Issue: Women and “the People”**

**by Anna-Maria Sörborg**

There is Brian Brown from the anti-US organization World Congress of Families (WCF), who has fought for a religious and authoritarian agenda since the 1990s. There is the skilled Russian networker Alexey Komov, with ties to Moscow’s central locus of political power and has managed to mobilize conservative Catholics, fascists, and “ordinary people” who are “deceived by power” in big numbers. This was the consolidation of ultra right wing global power that came together during intense days in Verona.

In spite of the common dream of another Europe and another world, it is no easy job to connect and maintain such a force that today unites movements and proposals are formulated under a neo-conservative umbrella. Restrictions on the right to abortion, preventing sex education in schools, and the promotion of a heterosexual family order as the foundation of the nation are the recurring elements. However, the meeting between conservative religious values and secular right-wing populism would never have succeeded without a common enemy. And this is where “gender ideology” comes in, according to Gunnarsson Payne.

In the magazine New Statesman (January 21, 2020), queer and political theorist Judith Butler reminds us that the present setback with respect to gender issues in itself demonstrates how much power the Vatican possesses. Butler has on several occasions been painted as the symbol of gender ideology and a threat to the nation in countries such as France and Brazil, and has been subjected to hate campaigns. Much has happened since the Vatican’s family council formulated an open letter to all the council’s bishops in 2004 with the aim of attracting attention to the threat of what was then termed “gender theory”. But it took almost ten years, and a number of attempts to create a force behind the rhetoric, until the real breakthrough came. It was in 2013, when France passed a marriage act for same-sex couples, that the family-conservative wave finally went straight into the nation’s political center. Faced with the threat of the disintegration of French national identity, manifested as the heterosexual nuclear family, a conservative and religious mob took to the streets. And the symbol of the threat was called Judith Butler.

**Four Years Later** meant another turning point. “Burn the witch”, “throw out gender ideology” chanted the religious and nationalist mob outside a conference in Sao Paolo, as they burned effigies of Judith Butler, who was one of the speakers. When the former professional soldier Jair Bolsonaro was elected president of Brazil barely two years later, it was after a long election campaign marked by hatred of gender and LGBTQI rights. As minister of education in his new government, Bolsonaro appointed a 75 year-old Pentecostalist who is known for wanting to
ban gender issues and introduce “ethical counsels” in schools. And the first thing that minister of human rights, Pentecostal preacher Damares Alves, said after she was appointed was: “a new era has begun in Brazil, boys dress in blue and girls in pink.”

The idea of the dangerous and destructive “gender ideology” is now also the subject of an ongoing review from gender research. In February, some twenty researchers gathered for a symposium at the Center for Gender Studies at Uppsala University, where the image of an allegedly threatening gender ideology was confirmed time and time again as the main hate object for the conservative and neo-authoritarian wave.

Andrea Pető, professor of gender studies at the Central European University in Budapest, described how just over a year ago her discipline lost its accreditation after a long and systematic campaign by the Hungarian government. Ayse Gul Altinay of Sabanci University in Turkey talked about the work of defending and strengthening gender research, especially queer and intersectional perspectives, at a time when more and more intellectuals, activists and journalists are being sentenced and imprisoned for their work. Swedish, British and German researchers testified of a situation that has sparked increasing threats both to individual researchers and to institutions — one of the latest being bomb threats and a hoax bomb found in the gender secretariat’s premises in central Gothenburg. Professor Lena Martinsson, who works in Gothenburg, talked about her text analysis of the most eager Swedish representative of the anti-gender ideology — journalist Ivar Arpi. Arpi has repeatedly published articles on the front page of Svenska Dagbladet that claim to “expose” gender research as a non-scientific subject. In a secular version, Arpi presents a criticism of gender ideology, describing it as a “church” — an unscientific field that hides something very dangerous: a radical underlying project that wishes to transform our entire society in a single homogeneous, and post Marxist, direction.

Arpi is also one of the main contributors to a themed issue of the ultra-conservative newspaper Världen Idag, [The World of Today] which gathered some of the strongest opponents of gender ideology. In her pink jacket, the Christian Democrats’ party leader in Sweden, Ebba Busch Thor, explains that she has nothing against gender equality but wants to do away with “gender confusion”. Here, the picture of Sweden is painted as a country where gender ideology has been particularly strong and where dangerous “gender experiments” have been pushed much too far. In an interview, psychiatrist David Eberhard describes the censorship he thinks he suffered last year, when a reader added his own comments to an audio version of his book “The Great Gender Experiment”. Eberhard believes that this incident is part of a bigger trend in society. The risk that Ivar Arpi will be censured for his forthcoming book, where he claims to reveal how “gender ideology” took over Swedish universities, no longer seems very large. “I’ve never had such a big impact with anything I’ve written before,” says Arpi to the newspaper. Has the wind turned? Världen Idag thinks so, at any rate.

AFTER THE SWEDISH public service television (SVT) and the broadcast Uppdrag Granskning [Mission to Investigate] investigated the gender change industry” in early April, the newspaper called the report “a unique turnaround in the public discourse”. The program focused exclusively on the supposed “hidden numbers” of young repenters, and that only a few who have sought help for gender dysphoria are openly visible. Throughout the program, the image of a country built on goodwill and good faith in the face of “new” ideas about gender and gender identity is drawn. It is a program that plays straight into the story of the vague but constantly formulated threat of distortion to children and young people. “May they awaken a broad and profound regret over this dark recent history,” writes Världen Idag.

The groups that drive the idea of a dangerous, destructive gender ideology are well organised and are gaining ground. But there are also counter movements that are growing stronger. All the researchers who attended the symposium in Uppsala have been forced to adapt to a partly new climate but, at the same time, they point out the fact that the experience that has led to the emergence of authoritarian forces in countries such as Hungary, Turkey, Poland, Argentina, and Italy has also given birth to resistance strategies.

“The fanatics who make up anti-gender movements are often opposed to much that many people regard as basic human and democratic rights. The resistance can thus involve many beyond the feminist and queer movements,” says Jenny Gunnarsson Payne.

An important task, therefore, is to demonstrate that the authoritarian mobilization that is currently underway is entirely deliberate and to remember the values that are actually at stake in the form of basic sexual and reproductive rights.

Resistance strategies are born out of continued political mobilization, not from powerlessness. This was also the Turkish gender researcher Ayse Gul Altinay’s message at the conclusion of her speech:

“I have never been in doubt that I must stay behind in the country and fight. Everything we do in the streets and universities is important, everywhere. We organize, arrange pride marches, teach feminist theories. What is going on right now will ultimately yield results and lead to important change. I am convinced of that.”

Anna-Maria Sörberg is a freelance writer based in Stockholm, Sweden.


Note: The anthropologist Ayse Gul Altinay who was interviewed in this text was sentenced on May 21, 2019, to 25 months in prison in Turkey for “having helped or supported a terrorist organization”. Read her statement about the sentence: https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/statement-of-support-for-ayse-gul-altinay-turkish-academic-for-peace-sentenced-to-2-years-and-1-month-in-prison/
Baltic Worlds’ statement of purpose

BALTIC WORLDS is a scholarly journal published by the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University since 2008. It publishes articles in social sciences and humanities as well as environmental studies, practicing a double-blind peer-review process, by at least two independent specialists. Baltic Worlds is listed in the Norwegian bibliometric register (DHB), included in EBSCO databases, DOAJ, and Sherpa/RoMEO. Baltic Worlds is distributed to readers in 50 countries, and reaches readers from various disciplines, as well as outside academia. In order to present multi- and interdisciplinary ongoing research to a wider audience, Baltic Worlds also publishes essays, commentaries, interviews, features and conference reports. All content relates to the Baltic Sea Region and the wider Central and Eastern European area, including the Caucasus and the Balkans. Baltic Worlds regularly publishes thematic sections with guest editors, enabling deeper explorations into specific fields and research questions. International scholarly collaborations are encouraged. Baltic Worlds wishes to advance critical engagement in area studies and to apply novel theoretical and methodological approaches to this multifaceted field. The journal’s Scholarly Advisory Council consists of international scholars, representing different disciplines and with specific knowledge on the area.

The Scholarly Advisory Council

The print journal is distributed in 50 countries. It is also published open access on the web.
FEMINISM AS LEFT-WING POPULISM

The contributions to this issue of *Baltic Worlds* aptly show that in country after country the representatives of the right-wing parties join ultraconservative groups and religious authorities in attempts to limit women’s reproductive rights, undermine the legitimacy of gender studies as a field of scientific inquiry, and viciously attack sexual or ethnic minorities. Taken together these analyses demonstrate that a new of opposition to “gender” cannot be explained as specific to post-transitional societies, as in the case of Poland, or troubled democracies, such as the Turkish one, but is a global phenomenon, highly dependent on geo-political shifts and transnational political alliances between different national and transnational political parties, non-governmental organizations, business leaders, intellectuals and religious authorities.

Whereas in public debate the socially conservative agenda of right-wing populist parties is often taken for granted (these are, after all, right-wing actors), we still lack detailed analyses and new conceptualizations of the relation between right-wing populism and “gender” understood broadly as a constructionist view on gender identity, gender equality measures and sexual democracy policies. Should we interpret the collaboration of right-wing populists and ultraconservative, often religious, organizations as a sign of deep ideological convergence between the two or is this rather an expression of opportunistic nature of populism, which tends to draw on existing ideologies in order to mobilize supporters? Or perhaps what unites the two types of actors are their enemies: liberal elites who allegedly achieved total hegemony in today’s world in the sphere of values, culture and knowledge production, and who are often depicted as feminist activists, gender studies scholars, gay men and femocrats working in state administration.

Articles included in this special issues suggest that what ails the two political forces is the political logic of right-wing populism, which tends to strengthen social polarization by dividing society into two antagonistic camps: the corrupt elites and the common people. Jenny Gunnarsson Payne asserts that “the rise of right-wing populism and the development towards illiberalism and authoritarianism and anti-gender mobilization exist in a ‘happy marriage’, where the former reinforces the latter and the latter provides further substance to their idea of ‘a national people’”. As Ruth Wodak famously out it, right-wing populism is “the politics of fear” and politicians tend to construct monsters that are scary enough to mobilize and unite people in the fight against it. In many contexts gender became such a monster, even if its face differs from country to country.

IN SWEDEN THE FOCUS is on gender studies as quasi-religious sect allegedly taking over universities, in Poland and Argentina the right-wing politicians and ultraconservative organizations aim to outlaw abortions even in cases when pregnancy results from rape and the women’s health is in danger, whereas in Turkey the main field of contention concerns gender equality policies targeting violence against women. Moreover, not everywhere gender issues come to the fore. Whereas in Poland and other European countries the critique of the gender agenda has functioned as a symbolic glue bringing together nationalists across borders and enabling cooperation between ultraconservatives and right-wing populists, in Turkey, as shown by Alev Özkazanç, a similar coalition of right-wing and religious actors is cemented by “an ideology of Islamo-Turkism framed in an anti-colonial discourse together with an acute condemnation of human rights discourse”. However, the political logic behind such discourses in different countries remains strikingly similar. Right-wing populist and authoritarian regimes define the people as an organic whole, morally superior in comparison to corrupt, usually foreign elites and in need of protection from the representatives of these elites, who aim to spread moral decay, foreign lifestyle and individualism.

WHEN ANALYZED in the context of the right-wing conservative trend, it becomes clear that mass women’s movements, which emerged in recent years in countries such as Poland, Argentina and Italy, challenge not only gender conservative policies and discourses, but also the political logic that drives right-wing populists and autocrats. As Margaret Canovan argued, over the last two centuries the belief that people’s consent is the only legitimate basis of power has become commonplace, but the question of who are the people and who can represent them has remained open. Feminist actors propose radically different definitions of the people than their opponents. Instead of highlighting homogeneity, morality and the need for national sovereignty, women’s movements embrace plurality, intersectionality and global solidarity. Graciela de Marco and other authors in the special issue conceptualize the strategy of contemporary women’s movements in terms of a left-wing populist challenge to nationalist, misogynic and xenophobic vision of political community. Whether we believe, following Chantal Mouffe, that left-wing populism is the only effective response to the current ultraconservative, illiberal trend, or not, the analyses of contemporary struggles around gender show that they are, in fact, struggles over the definition of democracy, representation and political community.

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