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Gender hate, a global trend

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Special Issue: Women and "the People"

Patriarchy, no thanks!

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editorial

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

theme issue

Women and "the People"

Guest editor:
Jenny Gunnarsson Payne

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 a 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".[1] 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.[2] 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

colophon

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reproductive and sexual capacities, as child bearers, mothers and wives in heterosexual nuclear families where gender roles are based on presumed essential biological characteristics, often seen to be overlapping with Biblical Law.[3] Through this hegemonic operation the "national people" is constructed as not only consisting of "true nationals" but also along strictly gendered lines as part of "traditional families". In this construction of "the people", women's and men's roles in society are complementary rather than equal – and the female half of "the people" are predominantly destined to be mothers, thereby literally reproducing "the nation" through childbirth and reproductive labor.

This often (but not always) Christian idea of "traditional family values" has come to serve as what Ernesto Laclau[4] has called an "empty signifier" that unites religious and more secular, populist and non-populist conservative and authoritarian regimes, groups and movements against a the common enemy of "gender ideology" (or sometimes merely "gender"), thereby creating opportunities for the creation of new transnational political alliances. As Anna-Maria Sörberg's article in this issue shows, in practice this is often materialized in the form of large international meetings and conferences, such as the World Congress of Families and the Transatlantic Summits organized by the Political Network for Values. This type of articulation of "the people" is also central for the political strategies of authoritarian leaders that cannot simply be defined as populist, such as, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and, as Yulia Gradskova discusses in this issue, in Vladimir Putin's Russia – and it is gaining an increasing momentum across the globe. The enemy picture of gender ideology has also mobilized conservative forces in Latin American countries such as Argentina and Chile against abortion and sexual education in schools.[5]

Interestingly, also in the Muslim context of Turkey, as Alev Özkacanc describes, anti-gender rhetoric describing gender as a Trojan horse – a very common trope in anti-gender discourse both in Europe and Latin America – has started to emerge in pro-government newspapers. This is but one example of how adaptable to context the anti-gender narrative is. Another example of this adaptability is discussed by Angelika Sjöstedt and Katarina Giritli-Nygren who show that in the highly secularized context of Sweden anti-gender rhetoric manages to quite peacefully coexist with both femonationalist and homonationalist political discourse. "Gender" (or "gender ideology") has thus come to serve as what drawing on Laclau's theoretical framework could be called "a negative empty signifier" that – as Erzebet Barat shows in her article – represents a plurality of "the enemy's" political demands (including e.g. gender equality, sexual education, abortion and a secular state). What these demands have in common from this point of view is that they are said to threaten the existence of "traditional values" and thereby the very way of life of common and "normal" people.

In this construction of the people the very idea that gender roles are constructed and therefore changeable becomes a threat to the national way of life (even though this national "traditional" way of life looks surprisingly similar across the globe). Often they are construed as a foreign idea coming from the outside, in countries such as Hungary and Poland as "Western imports" imposed by the "liberal global elites" in the European Union, the United Nations and rich and powerful corporations and business magnates.[6] Anna Sedysheva's essay on the campaign #IAmNotScaredToSpeak – a kind of Russian and Ukrainian #MeToo before #MeToo – discusses how the idea of feminism as a Western import has seriously negative implications for women who speak up against sexism and sexual abuse, but also about the important role of social media for contemporary feminist mobilization, nationally and transnationally.

The rise of feminist mass-movements

Readers mainly acquainted with the European context, where populism is often associated either with nationalist rightwing populism or simply used as a derogatory term to express dislike with a specific political party or leader, might be surprised that some texts in this issue discuss the possibilities of a populist feminism. To be sure, this makes more sense if we take into account that from this perspective, populism does not refer to a specific ideology, political regime or simply a "political style" but rather to a discursive strategy or *political logic*. What characterizes a populist logic, then, is that it constructs an antagonistic frontier by "dividing society into two camps and calling for the mobilization of the 'underdog' against 'those in power'" – of "the people" against an elite or oppressive regime.[7] This, in turn, is done by articulating a number of disparate political demands into a *chain of equivalence* that unites these demands under a common "name", again an empty signifier in Laclau's vocabulary.[8]

In this issue, there are several examples of scholars investigating contemporary feminist mass-struggles from this point of view, asking whether these are examples of or have the potential for forming a feminist populist movement that can effectively counteract neoliberal and authoritarian regimes. Graciela Di Marco's, Paula Biglieri's, and Mercedes Barros and Natalia Martinez's contributions all discuss Argentinian feminist mass-mobilization from this perspective. Di Marco develops her earlier work on "a feminist people" and argues that for the contemporary movement, the demand to legalize abortion has become an empty signifier standing for full citizenship, including sexual citizenship but also economic and cultural citizenship. Barros and Martinez's contribution enters into dialogue with Di Marco's perspective and extends it by, among other things, contextualizing the Argentinian movement within the country's broader political history, asking whether it is really "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". Biglieri points out that a crucial challenge for the movement now concerns the possibilities of generating an activist institutionalization that manages to keep its radicality. Taken together, and in combination with Jenny Ingridsdotter's story based on an interview with a feminist from Argentina, these texts offer a nuanced and complex picture of the massive impact that feminist mobilization has had on political subjectivities in Argentina since the first Ni Una Menos demonstrations in 2015. Gunnarsson Payne's text on the Black Protests discusses how these movements since the mid-2010s have grown into a transnational popular feminist collectivity – a feminism of the people – and how they might be one of the most potent forces in countering the rise of illiberal populism and authoritarianism as well as neoliberalism that we are seeing today.

Different versions of "the people"

It is important to note that while the construction of "a people" is indeed central to populism of any political inclination (right-wing or left-wing, feminist or gender-conservative), it does not follow from this that all claims to represent "the people" are construed through a populist logic (also non-populist authoritarianism often claims to represent the people, for example). Neither do references to "the people" say anything about whether a political project is democratic or not. Indeed, 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 of "the People" build on different understandings of gender. In our contemporary polarized transnational political landscape, we can clearly see that these different constructions are not neutral when it comes to their democratic or undemocratic nature and potential. While the proponents of "traditional values" often use a rhetoric of democracy and citizenship, their anti-gender version of "the people" actually restricts both of them. In Salecl's words, "the people" they construct is a "People-as-One", imagined as a harmonious "organic whole" from which antagonism is erased and outsiders are expelled on moral grounds. The substance of this "people" is formulated by authorities as Law (religious law, natural law, state law), and hence gives little room for democratic contestation that enables "the people" to be expanded to include more "actual people". As such, it has clear totalitarian tendencies.

In contrast, "the feminist people" as constructed by today's feminist 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.[9] Rather, what these movements all have in common is that they refuse to acknowledge such Laws: the Black Protests begun 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 albeit crucial but yet limited political issues to counteract oppressive regimes on both national and transnational levels. Also in the Turkish case, 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 Derya Keskin's article in 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-authoritarian articulation of "the people" – and that it as such, is crucial in formulating a radically different vision of the future. ■

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This issue is guest edited by Jenny Gunnarsson Payne, in collaboration with Graciela Di Marco and Ana Fiol from Argentina, and Jenny Ingridsdotter from Sweden.

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Wroclaw, Poland. October 3, 2017. Black Protest – Women's Strike. Polish women protesting on the streets against tighter abortion laws in Poland. Umbrellas become a sign of protest.

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.[1] 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 movement and parties who claim to give voice back to "the people" have emerged.[2] In some countries – such as Poland – these political actors have successfully made it into power, and begun a devastating 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 social and political life, gradually dismantling the basic tenants of liberal democracy".[3] To describe this type of illiberal democracies, feminist scholars Andrea Petö and Weronika Grzebalska have coined the term "polypore state", referring to a parasitic fungus (the polypore) 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". The *modus operandi* of such states, Petö and Grzebalska argue, is that, like the polypore fungus, they "feed on the vital resources of their liberal predecessors and produce a fully dependent state structure in return"; they do this by appropriating "the institutions, mechanisms and funding channels of the European liberal democratic project".[4]

MOUFFE CLAIMS that a "populist moment" is characterized by a situation "when under the pressures of political or socio-economic transformations, 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 bloc that provides the social basis of 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]

As we have seen throughout Europe, many of the voices that claim to give the power back to "the people" come from right-wing populist movements and parties; they promise "that they will bring back national sovereignty and restore democracy", but when they speak of sovereignty, they articulate this as "national sovereignty" that is "reserved for those deemed to be true 'nationals'". These political actors do, however, not respond to the democratic demand for *equality*, but articulate "the people" in highly exclusionary ways and formulate a number of groups – most notably "immigrants" – as a threat to the nation.[6]

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 and lifestyle on others, and by a populist political strategy managed to secure the power necessary to begin transforming democratic institutions. Their argumentation is often built on rhetorical tropes of colonial oppression whereby "Western" supra-national institutions such as the EU and the UN impose their liberal worldview – including gender equality and multiculturalism – in a manner similar to the Soviet social engineering of the past.[7]

"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."

As part of this illiberal populist project, conservative anti-feminist and 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".[8] In doing so, they have successfully managed to gain wide support for a new illiberal universalism "that replaces individual rights with rights of the family as a basic societal unit and depicts religious conservatives as an embattled minority", building successful national and transnational alliances between conservative religious actors, illiberal populists,[9] and in some countries between secular conservative, authoritarian and extreme right-wing movements and political parties.[10]

As Elzbieta Korolczuk has noted, in the Polish context the electoral victory of illiberal and conservative PiS has resulted in Polish society becoming "extremely polarized but also much more engaged and politically active", the Black Protests being one in a longer line of political manifestations against the anti-democratic and illiberal reforms performed by the current regime.[11] After having followed the movement and its transnational permutations, mostly from afar but also "IRL", it has, 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 exclusionary 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.[12]

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

CRUCIALLY, I SHALL ARGUE that three key reasons for their success are:

- their proven ability to mobilize broad layers of the population, leading to the politicization of great numbers of individuals who previously did not identify with a political movement or cause;
- their effective strategies in mobilizing around a single key issue (abortion), but successfully managing to articulate this issue with other political issues so as to make this issue part of a broader political struggle including many prototypically left-wing issues as well as intersectional feminist demands;
- 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.

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

and a good deal of Google-translating, I have tried to trace the events online and in conversation also in some other languages (most notably Polish and Spanish). I have also spoken to activist friends that have been involved in the struggle to learn about ongoing events, given a speech on a solidarity manifestation outside the Polish embassy in Stockholm (October 2016) and interviewed three activists in Argentina to investigate any potential transnational connections between the movements (Buenos Aires, December 2016).

In this process I have by no means been a "detached observer". 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, sometimes 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 video clips of big marches and speeches online (sometimes without understanding 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)[13] of the Black Protests it is impossible to avoid missing out on local organizational complexities and embodied experiences of concrete activist practices.[14]

What my research strategy has enabled me to do instead, however, is to reach an understanding of how the echoes of the Black Protests chimed (and continue to chime) across cultural, political, national and regional contexts across the globe – and how many of these echoes in the process became more or less "detached" from the political actors who originally might have formulated them. This means that some political statements quoted in this text might have originated in another group than the one I quote to have shared them. Crucially, these quotes shall not be read as evidence that their original formulation shall be assigned to the group quoted; sometimes the quote is reused from some other website or Facebook group, with or without a reference. This demonstrates precisely how political echoes work; indeed, how they are repeated in different contexts, by different actors – and how their meanings are, to a lesser or greater degree, transformed in the process.

Rather than striving to assign specific statements to an original source, in other words, I have followed the "echoes themselves" as and when I have come across them. In doing so, I have also deliberately avoided to assigning sources of inspiration to the protests or connections between groups of manifestations unless I have seen explicit references in the empirical material or if I have else been able to demonstrate the existence thereof. Therefore, while it is obvious that my emotionally attached and messy ethnographic observations have not given rise to a neutral and systematic empirical set of "data" to be neatly analyzed, I have paid conscientious effort to be faithful to my own observations. Thereby, I seek to understand some of the dynamics that led to the successful mobilization of the Black Protests, and in particularly how we can understand the Black Protests as a catalyst for an amplification of – or even a re-emergence of – transnational feminist solidarity in Europe and beyond.

Making sense of political passions

Reading the Black Protests through a populist and psychoanalytic lens

In her recent book *For a Left Populism* (2018), Mouffe[15] 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".[16] Their strategy to do so, according to Mouffe:

> **[...] aims at federating the democratic demands into a collective will to construct a 'we', a 'people' confronting a common adversary: the oligarchy. This requires the establishment of a chain of equivalence among the demands of the workers, the immigrants and the precarious middle class, as well as other democratic demands, such as those of the LGBT-community. *The objective of such a chain is the creation of a new hegemony that will permit the radicalization of democracy*.** (emphasis added).[17]

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 populist 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 – whatever those contents are".[18] 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 Graciela Di Marco has called "a feminist people" – and that this is precisely what is necessary to oppose the illiberal right wing- and anti-gender movements that have gained momentum on a global scale over the last few years.

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND *how and why* the Black Protests and their sister movements in other parts of the world managed to do this, I also take the cue from Mouffe and her statement that we cannot understand political mobilization without taking into account how *passions* lie at the very heart of all forms of collective identification. In her words, political discourses have "to offer not only policies but also identities which can help people make sense of what they are experiencing as well as giving them hope for the future" – and that such an analysis requires "a serious engagement with psychoanalysis".[19]

Viral politics and the strategies of affirmation, repetition and contagion

As is also acknowledged in the theory of populism formulated by Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2018),[20] Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis teaches us that the construction of political identities is a crucial task of politics, and processes of identification are always deeply engrained in affect. Indeed, from Freud we know that the construction of collective identities are a form of "libidinal ties" – love, in its broadest meaning – that serves the function of holding the group together against a political enemy towards which aggressive sentiments are being channelled.[21] In order to achieve this, the affective energy has to be "inclined" towards a common goal, and in political mobilization this is done through a plethora of affectively laden linguistic, visual, audial and embodied practices.[22] In order to understand the Black Protests' communicative devices in the form of affectively laden messages, slogans and images that were used in demonstrations and many that became "viral" online,[23] I draw on Laclau's Freudian reading of conservative thinker Gustave LeBon and his accounts of *affirmation*, *repetition* and *contagion*.

As I have discussed elsewhere, Le Bon describes *affirmation* as "a strategy used by a leader to break the link between that which is affirmed and any rational reasoning that proves it".[24] The main point here is that facts and rational information *in and of themselves* are not sufficient (or, unfortunately, not even necessary) to achieve a broad political mobilization. Instead, in Le Bon's words, affirmations are necessary to "making an idea enter the mind of the crowds."[25] The function of such affirmations is, then, to break with dominant discourses (in this case, for example, the dominant narratives of the Catholic church and the government), and provide a vocabulary that is able to provide an "affective lexicon" that puts "into words an experience which is felt by many, but which cannot be expressed consistently within dominant language games".[26]

IF AFFIRMATIONS ARE to exert any political influence, however they need to be "constantly *repeated*, and so far as possible in the same terms" (emphasis added).[27] It is by way of repetition that affirmations become "embedded" in the minds of the individuals that are exposed to them. The psychoanalytic implication of this is that this process also works on "those profound regions of our unconscious selves in which the motives of our actions are forged",[28] and over time comes to be experienced *as* true.[29] The affective grip of a movement is determined by its ability to "mobilize 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 work for the "same" political 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 repetition that the sense of shared feelings that are necessary for the creation of an affective collectivity can be sustained over time.[30] If we are to understand both how the Black Protests managed to mobilize such a broad spectrum of the Polish population, *and* how it managed to mobilize across national and cultural contexts, however, we need consider that no repetition is ever a "pure" repetition of the "same".

Feminist identity and fantasy echo

A crucial part of "sharing and bonding" is to create fantasmatic narratives that, in feminist historian Joan Scott's words, "enable identifications that transcend[s] history and national specificity".[31] 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 alluded to a feminist prehistory from the start: the use of the symbolic coat hangers alone repeats a symbolism of previous struggles for accessible and safe abortion, and puts it within a historical context where such items have been used to self-induce abortion.

"THE USE OF THE SYMBOLIC COAT HANGERS ALONE REPEATS A SYMBOLISM OF PREVIOUS STRUGGLES FOR ACCESSIBLE AND SAFE ABORTION."

In this context, what is crucial to understand is that the very *political acts* of creating and repeating affectively laden fantasmatic narratives about the pre-history of the movement by linking it to previous national and transnational struggles are in themselves crucial in creating "a feminist us" with which individuals can positively identify.[32] Following Scott, I argue that fantasy is crucial in understanding any successful political mobilization. For an intense affective attachment to a political cause to be formed, it is necessary for the subject to form a narrative in which they imagine themselves taking part, and begin identifying with – and this is precisely where fantasy comes in. Fantasy "enables individuals and groups to give themselves histories".[33] 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 representatives that fantasy works to secure identity. In my use of it, echo is not so**

The Black Protests in Poland with the slogan "Stop this Bloody War Against Women". PHOTO: ELZBIETA KOROLCZUK

> **much a symptom of the empty, illusory nature of otherness as it is a reminder of the temporal inexactness of fantasy's condensations that nonetheless work to conceal or minimise difference through repetition.**[34]

In other words, the operation to repeatedly articulating links with previous struggles both within and across different points in time and national territorial borders serves a crucial function so as to constitute a shared sense of "us" across time and space – and this is also what makes possible a collective fantasy that another future is possible.

Scott's reflections on "echo" are particularly helpful to theorize the resonance that the Black Protests had in a transnational context; rather than reading their repeated affirmations as "pure repetitions", we can read them as "echoes" that repeat back parts of their political messages but adding, subtracting and partly transforming them in the process. Characteristic of echoes, Scott writes, is that they are "delayed returns of a sound" and as such "incomplete reproductions, usually giving back only the final fragments of a phrase". An echo also "spans large gaps of space (sound reverberates between distant points) and time (echoes aren't instantaneous)", and because it is never a complete repetition of an original sound but always incomplete, fragmented or otherwise distorted, it necessarily creates "gaps of meaning and intelligibility". When the sounds that are echoed include words, "the return of partial phrases alters the original sense and comments on it as well."[35]

Although any metaphor comes with its own limitations, the metaphor of the echo is the most suitable I can think of in describing the resonance that the Black Protests started across the globe, and how they "echoed back" the demands of the Polish Women's Strike and other feminist networks, each with their own contextual variation, thereby creating a kind of feminist "echo-chamber" in which multiple voices can resonate without being merged into one.

The Black Protests in the populist moment

The construction of "a feminist people"

We find numerous examples of affirmations in political slogans that have been used during the demonstrations in the context of the Black Protests, including: "Stop this BLOODY war against women!"; "My body, my choice!"; "Freedom of choice, not terror"; "Girls just wanna have FUNdamental human rights", "I wish I could abort our government" combined with affectively laden visual representations such as coat hangers associated with unsafe illegal abortions, an image of uterus with a hand doing the "fuck off-sign", sometimes including a Christian cross; a drawing of a tied up woman, or a stop sign.

"SOON MORE POLITICAL DEMANDS WERE ADDED, USING THE NAME 'BLACK PROTEST' TO NAME A BROADER FEMINIST STRUGGLE."

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 autonomy or "choice", the change of regime).

While these affirmations circulating online (in the form of typed slogans or as photographed placards from the demonstrations) initially focussed 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 Protest 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 feeling and thinking bodies from the hands of those, who usurp the power over us. Trump is just one striking example of global visibility, but there is so much more hidden violence going on uncovered by the news. It is hard to believe the ways in which rapes committed by powerful men Julian Assange, Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Roman Polanski are publicly excused on the grounds of the high social and political position and merits of the rapists. [...] Together we can and we should fight the rape culture in its different manifestations! #blackprotest had shown the power of women's solidarity and determination! Let us learn from this experience and do not allow our voices to fade!**

On October 10, another protest was announced in the same Facebook group, expanding the demands further. The protest was to be held five days later, this time against the international trade deals TTiP and CETA, articulating them as transnational feminist issues: "Dear Sisters and Brothers abroad? Are you preparing to demonstrate against signing TTiP and CETA agreements in your cities? We do! We recognize it as a feminist issue, as it will have a direct negative impact on women's rights." In this call, Gals-4Gals explain, among other things, that these deals would lead to weakened worker's rights and worsened working conditions, which would hit low income earners and thus disproportionally negatively affect women "and women of colour in particular". By being published on the Facebook page using the "name" of the Black Protest, the statement published by Gals4Gals articulated anti-capitalist demands of class- and race injustices as feminist issues and therefore as part of the international Black Protests.[36] In other words, what we see here is the construction of a chain of equivalence of a number of political demands, utilizing the name "the Black Protest" so as to name a struggle not only for reproductive rights but also for a broader anti-capitalist, anti-racist, feminist struggle.[37]

Yet two weeks later, on October 24, it was reported on the Facebook page Black Protest International that yet another protest had taken place (organised by the All Polish Women's Strike), again with a long list of demands including but not limited to sexual and reproductive rights. The same event is "echoed" on the website for the International Women's Strike under the heading "History of IWS" as the "Second Polish strike against violence and state ignorance of women's issues", and the extensive list of postulates that guided the protest can be read in Polish on the website for the Polish Women's Strike.[38] On the Black Protest International Facebook group, the it was reported that:

> **Today Polish women were demonstrating again – within 3 weeks a *comprehensive list of postulates* was formulated including *free and available sexual education, restoration of democratic procedures and secular state*.**[39]

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".[40] The slogan for this protest was "We are not putting our umbrellas away" indicating that the protesters 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 International on September 29, 2016, calling for transnational action and empowerment. Interestingly, the post continued with arguing 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 exceptional 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?** [41]

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-SEFFIELD-PARIS-BRUSSELS-OSLO-COPENHAGEN-STOCKHOLM-HELSINKI-BUDAPEST-PRAGUE-BUCHAREST-VANCOUVER-WASHINGTON DC-BUFFALO...**
>
> **Waiting for YOU to join the fight! <3**[42]

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*".[43] 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 detaches them from others" (emphasis added).[44] 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 theirs. As we shall see, referring to this as "fantasmatic" does in no way mean that it is "fake"; in fact, all movements need a fantasmatic 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 separates physical females from one another within cultures, between cultures, and across time".[45]

IN MY READING, 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, partly 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."[46]

This was, for example, the case in the Facebook group for the Black Protest Nottingham (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 *Irish sisters*, who fight to #repealthe8. *European women* must stand strong, together!" (emphasis added).[47]

"WITHIN A SINGLE DAY OVER 100,000 EITHER DECLARED THEIR INTEREST OR PARTICIPATION. IT IS CURRENTLY THE FASTEST-GROWING EVENT ON POLISH FACEBOOK."

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".[48] The latter was held on October 1, 2016, and added after some information on the Polish legislation and law proposal details about the first call for a strike that:

> **The first call for the strike was made during a Black Protest demonstration held at the Market Square in Wroclaw, Poland. On the same day Facebook event was created and within a single day over 100,000 either declared their interest or participation. It is currently the fastest-growing event on Polish Facebook.**
>
> **We cannot be with our sisters in Poland now, but we support them as much as we can and so this Saturday, we are wearing black to express our solidarity and our outrage because of the proposed legislation.**
>
> **At the same time we remember about our Irish sisters who are also still fighting to #repealthe8 and we welcome them as well as anyone else to join us.**
>
> **PLEASE DO WEAR BLACK!**[49]

In Reykjavik, Iceland, the solidarity protest took place under the slogan Svartur Mánudagur (Black Monday in Icelandic).[50] On the cover picture for the Facebook page of the Black Protest in Reykjavik, readers were encouraged to come to the protest and "Dress in black. Dress black garbage bag. Take black flag. Take black banner", and lastly, to "Decorate yourself with a black ribbon if you cannot be with us." Text snippets accompanying press photos online report that "Polish & Icelandic women stood side by side downtown Reykjavik to protest the new polish abortion law" and that members of parliament from all Icelandic parties from all parties of the Icelandic parliament sent their polish counterparts protests as well in support of #blackprotest".[51]

Manifestation in Buenos Aires. PHOTO: MARIANA TERRILE

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 wo/men 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.**[52]

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 – "Warsaw 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!"**[53]

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 parole 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", also explaining 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).[54]

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 impressed by the mobilization that the Black protests spurred in such a short time – I was also informed by feminist friends 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 as much as I could (being equally 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 femicides (murders of 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 UnaMenos 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.[55]

Although I had been informed of some of these developments in private conversations, it was not, however, until the Ni Una Menos collective in Argentina organized another big march and strike on October 19, 2016 in Buenos Aires after more brutal femicides 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"), protesters had been dressed in black, a social strike had been announced – and I noticed from the many videos and images that circulated in my Facebook feed that in Buenos Aires they all seemed to be holding umbrellas, just like the protesters in Warsaw had two weeks before. This time, the protests spread even further and also took place not only in Chile, Peru and Uruguay, but also Bolivia, Guatemala and Spain, as well as in Brazil one week later. Intrigued by the similarities, I asked some friends who had taken part in marches whether there were any connection between the movements, but none of the people I spoke to knew of any.

About two months later, in December 2016, my friend and colleague Paula Biglieri helped me to meet three of the central activists from the Ni Una Menos collective when I was visiting Buenos Aires. In the interview, it was explained that while there had not been any contact between the organizers before the march, the news about the Black Protests had reached them at a time that coincided with a range of developments and events that together had made the movement "explode" at this juncture. The example of the Black Protests had, according to one of the interviewed women, offered an example of "If they can do it, we can do it" at a point in time when there was already groups and networks in place, as well as an increasing frustration over the political situation. As she continued to explain:

> **So I would say that the strike was fuelled 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 narco-violence, and yeah... [...]**

In other words, what characterized the time at the October march and strike in 2016 was a combination of factors that had spurred the mobilization: police repression in feminist 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 pro-government groups (a concatenation of political interests that we, despite many other contextual differences, indeed do recognize from Poland and other European societies):

"A NEW GLOBAL FEMINIST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HAS QUICKLY DEVELOPED OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, WITH ONE OF ITS MOST IMPORTANT MOVEMENTS BEING THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S STRIKE."

> **[...] So Mar del Plata is a kind of laboratory for this new kind of society, the war on drugs, the cartels are coming, I mean there is a whole thing going on and also in Rosario, in these two cities, so it was emblematic that the same day in two cities there was police repression and a femicide and this was you know when we said enough is enough, we'll go for a strike ... and we planned it in five days [laughter]**

The activists pointed out to me that the protest went international not only because of the Internet, but also because some of them had gone to international women's meetings to share experiences and ideas across borders. One of their fellow activists, they told me, had gone to two meetings, one in Brazil and one in Bolivia between the demonstration in June and the protest in October "and she was already plotting this international network of Ni Una Menos".

While, as I now know, the Argentinian protests took place independently of (though inspired in part by) the Black Protests, contacts between the movements were made afterwards – and in the aftermath of these events, a new global feminist women's movement has quickly developed over the last few years, with one of its most important movements being the International Women's Strike:

> **We didn't connect with the Polish when we were doing the strike, we just did it in five days like crazy, and then of course admiring them and reading their stuff, but not talking actually and then they contacted us and said well, we're on the same page and also the Koreans, so we were receiving emails from other women's organizations and this is how we made this network [the International Women's Strike].**

Since then, the International Women's Strike – also known as Paro de Mujeres – brings together progressive women's and feminist groups from over 50 countries according to the US-version of the website, mostly from Europe and the Americas.[56]

On the website parodemujeres.com, we can read that the network was formed in late October 2016, just after the large Black Protests and the Ni Una Menos protests, and under the heading "How did it start?", the narrative brings together the Icelandic strike as a historical inspiration, followed by brief descriptions of the Black Protests of Poland and South Korea, and the Ni Una Menos protests of Argentina and the Women's March on Washington that was organized in the US and many other countries January 21, 2017 after the election of Donald Trump.

> **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. On 19 October 2016, Argentine women reacted with massive one-hour long strikes and rallies to an inhuman femicide and brutal repression of police of the Women's National Meeting. More protests followed, leading to establishing the International Women's Strike platform.[57]**

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 articulated as a struggle 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 responsibility 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 explain that this is why the International Women's Strike was formed. The very purpose of the International Women's Strike, then, is to build bridges between women's and feminist collectives in different countries with the aim of more effectively putting pressure on their governments.[58]

Although the International Women's Strike is a truly international movement, it is built on the different national movements and thereby retains the sensitivity to different national and cultural contexts and traditions. The importance of contextual specificity was emphasised by the Argentinian activists that I spoke to, and on the website it is clearly communicated under the heading "Why do I strike?" which was published in preparation of the March 8 strike in 2017 and where 21 different countries are enlisted in alphabetical order, each offering a detailed description of the political situation in their country and their specific political demands. While there is certainly some issues that come back in different country descriptions (reproductive and sexual rights, gendered violence, discrimination) the differences in emphasis clearly communicate urgent issues that each national movement prioritizes. The website also includes a map of events across the globe, showing how it is widespread, but concentrated in Europe and the Americas.[59]

On the website for the International Women's Strike US its' "populist logic" becomes even clearer, both in their formulation of "a feminism for the 99%"[60] – a "feminist underdog" – and in the articulation of demands that is communicated as their platform, part of which is here quoted at length:

> **The International Women's Strike is a network of women that emerged through planning a day of action for March 8, 2017 in more than 50 countries.**
>
> **In the spirit of that renewed radicalism, solidarity and internationalism, the International Women's Strike US is organizing a new strike on March 2018 and continues to be a national organizing center by and for women who have been marginalized and silenced by decades of neoliberalism directed towards the 99% of the women: 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, discriminatory immigration policies, and imperial wars abroad.[61]**

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 description is published in both English and Spanish. In an interview in the *Jacobin Magazine* the Argentinian feminist scholar Verónica Gago[62] comments that what we are now witnessing globally is the "emergence of a broad-based, 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".[63] As I shall discuss in the conclusion, the political potential of this new transnational feminist 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 popular feminist collective identity against authoritarian, socially conservative 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 have had not only insofar as that it has played a pivotal role in building a democratic resistance against the illiberal regime in Poland, but also in building up a "transnational feminism of the masses" – and one that in some cases has had concrete success in influencing political decisions. In Poland, as we know, the Black Protests managed to pressure the government to back down – at least temporarily – on the issue of abortion. The Irish movement Repeal the eighth – also a member of the International Women's Strike whose campaign included, among many other things, dressing in black and organising a social strike on March 8, 2017 – succeeded in mobilizing for a change in the constitution which will make a legislation for free and safe abortion possible in Ireland. Although Irish activists had already mobilized for a change in the constitution for many years, international media has reported that the successful mobilizing of the Polish Black Protests served as an inspiration for the actions leading up to their victory. Similar advances have been made in Argentina, where in the summer of 2018 the lower house of congress approved a bill to liberalize their abortion laws. Although the Senate subsequently voted against it, the successful broad mobilization has, in similar ways to the Black Protests, managed to politicize also people who have not previously identified as feminist. At a time when authoritarian, illiberal 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 other 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 illiberal, authoritarian and right-wing populism, whose increasing success constitutes a serious threat to democracy, is the emergence of other popular identities – other, more inclusionary versions 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 it begin to desire a deepening of the two democratic ideas of freedom and equality and thus get spurred into action to work for this. For this to happen, more anti-populist strategies (that in the current conjuncture tend to be located at or near the centre of the political 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 us is how to create mass-movements around urgent national and regional issues (abortion, gender violence), to create and repeat affectively laden messages (affirmations) around these issues and how to make them contagious enough to mobilize the masses against oppressive regimes. Thereby the struggles have articulated these demands (e.g. abortion, femicide) to other progressive democratic demands, including criticism of neoliberal damage, issues of immigration and racism, and calls for a secular state – chains of equivalence that differ somewhat depending on context, but that still share a family resemblance between them. The concrete results in some countries, at the time most notably on the abortion issue, have been communicated across borders and instilled hope and energy across their own contexts.

"THIS EMERGENCE OF 'A FEMINISM OF THE MASSES' MOBILIZING A 'FEMINIST PEOPLE' IS MOST CERTAINLY ONE OF OUR GREATEST HOPES TODAY."

By way of on- and offline strategies such as marches, solidarity manifestations and online communication through social media, they both also managed to create solidarity echoes across the globe, that linked these national and regional struggles to create the global International Women's Strike. Importantly, in the latter, the basis for concrete action still consists of local, national and regional grassroots organizations, and the specificity of their respective situations is reflected in the variety of demands that are claimed in global events such as the mobilization for March 8. As reflected by Gago, existing feminist traditions have offered valuable insights and inspiration for this movement, and, I would argue, have provided a necessary narrative of a fantasmatic feminist "us" that have 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 united individuals in very different situations and with sometimes very different experiences to begin conceiving each other as part of an "us". The repeated "echoing" of both previous and contemporary feminist ideas, slogans, symbols and struggles, through textual, visual, bodily and audial performative representations have made this possible.

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 in the different local/national/regional contexts between groups from different political traditions possible is precisely that each repeated affirmation is characterised by a certain openness that allows for it to be 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 solidarity 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 movements threatening democracy in Europe and beyond, the Polish Women's Strike, Ni Una Menos 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. Its most significant contribution so far is not only to provide a powerful example for other progressive movements to learn from and to join – to chime in with the "solidarity echoes" – but, perhaps more importantly, the transformative effect it has had on the progressive political landscape across the Atlantic. At this juncture, the outcome of the European (and indeed global) "populist moment" remains unsure. Indeed, to turn the chilling development towards illiberalism and authoritarianism that we are now witnessing in Europe 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'. Czarne Protesty jako przeciwwaga dla autorytarnego populizmu w perspektywie transnarodowej, in: Korolczuk Elżbieta, Kowalska Beata, Ramme Jennifer and Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez (eds), *Bunt kobiet. Czarne Protesty i Strajki Kobiet*, Europejskie Centrum Solidarności (European Solidarity Centre): Gdańsk.

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14 Indeed, for such details to be captured, more systematic, in-depth local ethnographies, interviews and textual analyses are necessary.

15 Mouffe 2018.

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18 Ernesto Laclau, "Populism: What's in a Name?" in: *Ernesto Laclau: Post-Marxism, Populism and Critique*, ed. David Howarth. (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2005/2015): 153; Mouffe 2018: 11.

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21 Sigmund Freud, *Mass Psychology and Other Writings*. (London: Penguin Books, 1921/2004); Gunnarsson Payne 2018; Mouffe 2018: 73.

22 See e.g. Mouffe 2018: 73; Gunnarsson Payne 2018.

23 Importantly, unlike Le Bon, the Laclauian reading does not understand these affectively laden modes of mobilization as pathological, but, rather, as necessary for the formation of political collectivities as such. Where Le Bon makes a separation between "the 'true signification' of words and the images they evoke", Laclau argues that "we cannot simply differentiate the 'true' meaning of the term … from a series of images connotatively associated with it, for the associative networks are integral parts of the very structure of language". Laclau, 2005: 24–26; Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, Manuscript compiled by Carlo Mostacci, (1896/2012).

24 Gunnarsson Payne, 2018. While in the context of the Black Protests we need to put aside his strict emphasis on "the leader", and realize that affirmations in principle can be formulated by anyone (also anonymously), we can still use his theory to understand their function for political mobilization: namely to give name to underlying frustrations in a way that cannot be done within hegemonic discourses or with the mere enumeration of factual information.

25 Le Bon 1896.

26 Laclau 2005: 26–27.

27 Le Bon 1896, emphasis added.

28 Laclau 2005: 27.

29 Although this may be obvious in times of "fake news", this is actually the case for *any* political movement.

30 Gunnarsson Payne, 2018.

31 Scott 2001: 303.

32 See Scott 2001: 289–290.

33 I agree with her that this in no way discredits feminism, but rather that fantasy is precisely what makes possible "identifications that transcend history and national specificity", and that by theorising the feminist movement(s) through fantasy, we can reach a deeper understanding of how it functions without running the risk of essentialising either feminism *per se* or the subject feminism seeks to represent (most notably "women"). Scott 2001: 303.

34 Scott 2001: 292.

35 Scott 2001: 291.

36 https://www.facebook.com/Black-Protest-International-blackprotestinternational-1162858547117141/?hc_ref=SEARCH&fref=nf; http://www.globaljustice.org.uk/blog/2016/feb/25/why-ttip-feminist-issue

37 See e.g. Laclau 2005.

38 (http://strajkkobiet.eu/postulaty/).

39 Black Protest International. https://www.facebook.com/Black-Protest-International-blackprotestinternational-1162858547117141/?hc_ref=SEARCH&fref=nf

40 Black Protest International. https://www.facebook.com/Black-Protest-International-blackprotestinternational-1162858547117141/?hc_ref=SEARCH&fref=nf

41 Quote Audre Lorde

42 September 29, 2016, Black Protest International.

43 Le Bon 1881, 116, quoted in Le Bon 1896, footnote 17, see also Gunnarsson Payne 2018.

44 Gunnarsson Payne 2018.

45 Scott 2001: 303.

46 The text is cited from the Facebook event entitled "Blackprotest Vigil at Polish Embassy by Polish Feminists" (available https://www.facebook.com/events/899856403481306/. Accessed October 28, 2016.

47 https://www.facebook.com/events/178161805959853/ Accessed October 28, 2016.

48 "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)

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

50 Although, interestingly, I have not been able to detect any references to the Icelandic strike on the Facebook page of the Icelandic Facebook group (which is mainly written in Icelandic), references to the historic strike were made on the English-language Icelandic news site *RÚV* as being an inspiration for the Polish protests."

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

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

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

54 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!".]

55 (Chinchay & Cortijo 2017).

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

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

58 November 10, 2016, http://parodemujeres.com/international-womens-strike/

59 http://parodemujeres.com/why-do-i-strike-porque-paro/

60 Cincia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya & Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (London & New York: Verso, 2019).

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ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON

STIGMATIZATION OF FEMINISM

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

by **Erzsébet Barát**

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In 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 dangerous assumptions as a mundane habit of thought about "us" against and over a range of diverse political demands under the banner of "them". What used to function as explicit "hot statements" stigmatizing particular values has become a "banal" series of diverse, contradictory statements in Michael Billig's sense of the distinction.[1] Although Billig discusses the particular ideology of nationalism, his objective is to expose that hot statements of nationalistic hate are made possible because they are embedded in the network of banal statements that are therefore not benign but constitutive of the harm carried out by the hot statements; I believe this objective can be useful for studying other ideologies at work. I think the ultimate point of banalization 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.[2]

The stigmatization of "gender" as "ideology" has become a key element of this political rhetoric of hate. The concept functions as an empty signifier in Ernesto Laclau's sense of the term,[3] as if it were a self-evident center rendering a series of diverse but familiar statements of linguistically mediated injury of hate speech, in the service of manufacturing of what Ruth Wodak calls the politics of fear.[4] Furthermore, "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 work of stigmatization of "gender" hinges on its capacity to evoke these various other tropes, rendered in a chain of equivalence. They may emerge as constitutive elements of the meaning of "gender", effectively legitimizing the forceful rhetoric of hate as the inevitable response to the "fear" in opposition to "gender ideology". The right-wing populist discourse works then in an uneven discursive field of hate with several effective conjunctures of empty signifiers at play, reinforcing the binary of "us" and "them" from multiple perspectives to the point of unbridgeable rupture. The most harmful effect of this politics of fear in my view is the fetishization of "hate" itself: the naturalization of the assumption that the only legitimate and reasonable routine response to difference is "fear" that should inevitably require one to "courageously wage a war" rhetorically in the form of hate speech against the "intruder". It is the formulation and routine inscription of this logic that has made hate speech "banal".

The discourse of "gender ideology" (sometimes "gender craze" or "genderism") over the preceding eight years of the regime culminated in the government's ban of the MA degree in Gender Studies on October 12, 2018.[5] The official announcement consisted of a single statement of a decree published in the *Hungarian Official Gazette*. What is more, even the legal document avoided naming the particular degree: "13. Line 115 in Appendix 3, 139/2015. (09. VI.) Government Decree is to cease to have effect."[6][7] Against the systemic stigmatization of the concept of gender in the political discourse, the announcement may read as the "hot" statement of stigmatization but, paradoxically, mitigated by the act of silencing the very name of the program. A cryptic reference suffices, coopting everyone concerned in higher education and academia to know that the empty line in the list used to be occupied by the MA in Gender Studies.

In order to situate the contemporary discursive formation of the meaning of "gender" as ideology and its complex relationship with the other three prominent empty signifiers, "Soros", "Brussels" and "migrant", I first briefly outline the historical legacy of the Orbán regime's politics of fear and introduce the logic of the three major junctures in the political media discourse that emerged in the wake of the system change in the 1990s, trying to ward off feminism. In the second section of the analysis I show how these discourses reemerge in the 2010s and come to be mobilized in the Orbán regime's populist discourse after some ten years of silence at the beginning of the 21st century. In the third and final part of the analysis, I address the feminist discourses in circulation in the media in both decades and explore whether and to what extent their position on "gender" could resist discreditation. I include this self-reflexivity to see if its logic could open up for mobilization and draw on the power of the immediate and huge international protest against the Government's ban.[8] This is an important question for the future of gender studies in Hungary.

abstract

In my paper I look at the discourse strategies of the current official Hungarian political discourse in which the rights of women, sexual minorities and people with non-conforming gender identities as well as feminist academics are sacrificed in the wake of a right-wing populism where hate speech has become the daily routine of communication. The stigmatization of "gender" as ideology has become a central element of political discourse in Hungary since 2010 — resulting in the ban of the MA in Gender Studies in the Official Gazette on October 12, 2018. For a critical reading, I situate the strategic attack in relation to three junctures of meaning-making of "feminism" and "gender" since the system change in 1989 that have eventually crystalized into the commonsense discourses of "gender ideology" and "gender-craze" of right-wing populism. I develop a social semiotic model of situated polyvocal meaning that goes beyond the post-structuralist understanding that all meanings should be ideological – a position that is counter-effective for feminist knowledge and movement alike as the current crisis over the status of gender studies shows. I argue that without a positioned epistemology there is no ground left for reclaiming "gender" as the key critical category of analysis for exposing unequal relations of power.

KEY WORDS: Gender studies, feminism, populism.

Meaning and ideology

Before studying the actual discourses, I need to develop my position on the relationship between meaning and ideology; this epistemological work needs to be done to counter the populist discourse that tries to discredit the analytical category of feminist critique as the (necessary) expression of an aggressive ideology. To my knowledge, this important epistemological question has not yet been addressed in the various critical works on anti-genderism.[9]

This epistemological work entails going beyond the logic of the binary that either all meanings are inevitably ideological or scientific truth should necessarily escape the bias of ideology, as both positions would inevitably make us go on the defensive at best, reiterating the entitlement of the more powerfully positioned to define the meaning of "ideology". The post-structuralist approach rests on the assumption that all meanings are arbitrary cultural constructs and as such always already ideological, including any possible meanings of "gender" – our feminist definitions just as much as those of our hostile political opponents. The structuralist approach, on the other hand, proposes that ideology is a matter of false consciousness pertaining to the superstructure. It holds out the promise of owning "the" truth in the final instance in the allegedly objective non-biased field of science that is to describe its object of study true to the facts, including feminist scholarship. Instead of this binary I propose a discoursal approach to conceptualizing the relationship between meaning and ideology. The category of gender would be neither an infinite number of arbitrary textual constructions everywhere and anywhere, nor would it be always in one and the same place, anchored in the foundational logic of a self-evidently understood sexual(ized) visibility of bodily morphology. "Gender" needs to be positioned somewhere particular to be open to change and political accountability according to historically contingent relations of power.

As a scholar who makes critical studies of discourse, I understand the concept "gender" as a dialectic relationship of the socially regulated material practices of gendering and its institutionalized symbolic practices of representation. The concept emerges and registers as meaningful with a given speech community as part of the socially regulated practices of distinction from within multiple particular institutions of habitual activities – of which we cannot designate the field of economic production as purely "material" and necessarily the most important "origin" of the ideologically inflected superstructure completely outside of the symbolic practice of signifying. The material practices one is directly engaged in always entail the act of encoding, or the act of recalling other practices one reflects on from within a given perspective. In short, the historically contingent material practices of gendering always entail a practice of categorization which is shaped by the material practices to be made sense of and, conversely, our understanding of the activities will shape the trajectory of those practices. The categories therefore come to be enmeshed within particular orders of value and are indexical of the institutions within which they emerge as concepts of particular meaning/with particular intelligibility.[10]

Drawing on Denise Thompson's argument,[11] I contend that once we stop collapsing power and domination on the one hand and stop setting up (scientific) truth as the opposite of ideology on the other, we can argue for the emergence of a historically situated contingent (but not purely arbitrary) meaning that allows for the formation of meaning that turns out to be positioned in symmetrical relations to power, beyond the ruling relations of dominance. In Thompson's words:

> **It is not the case that we are always in ideology. What we are always "in" are systems of meaning. Whether meanings are ideological or not depends on whether or not they are used in the service of domination. [...] For the purposes of feminist politics, whether any particular ideological pronouncement is true or false is not the main issue. What a feminist politics needs to decide is whether the meanings which structure [i.e. organize] people's lives reinforce relations of ruling by reinforcing the interests of the dominators and suppressing the interests of the subordinated [...]**[12]

The argument above explicitly states that meaning is ideological as long as it is the effect of relations of domination and as such reiterates those hierarchical configurations as "inevitable", "natural" or even "desirable". Meanings can be reconfigured within terms of equal standing and be used to deconstruct and expose ideologies. We can argue therefore that feminist reconfigurations of "gender" can be defended as non-ideological in so far as they enable (the imagination of) producing equal gender relations of power.

"THE DISCOURSE OF 'GENDER IDEOLOGY' [...] OVER THE PRECEDING EIGHT YEARS OF THE REGIME CULMINATED IN THE GOVERNMENT'S BAN OF THE MA DEGREE IN GENDER STUDIES ON OCTOBER 12, 2018."

Meaning is inevitably implicated in social struggles and as such is never neutral but charged with values. Language (signification) enters into politics as a medium (representation) as well as a focus or site for conflict about "legitimate" meaning in its own right. Any change to meaning therefore can be potentially transformative if and when articulated from within a position that is temporarily structured by equal relations of power that at the same time allow for a configuration of meaning that undermines relations of domination. These transformative meanings of gender then are not made once and for all but are in need of reiteration as long as heteropatriarchy lasts.

Reading Thompson's distinction between living in meaning

versus living in ideology in relation to the dialectical conceptualization of discourse in critical discourse analysis provides me with the methodology that enables an ideology critique of the meanings that hegemonic power relations of social existence re/produce and keep in place, representing those relations of domination as inevitable.[13] The very conditions of the effective existence of the current right-wing populist political regime of domination hinges on "banalizing" its strategies of making meaning, including the acts of stigmatizing the concepts, including gender, singled out for functioning as "empty signifiers". 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 of power. The intelligibility of any category then is organized by multiplicity. In so far as making sense of the actual practice we are engaged in doing implicates articulating reflections on multiple other practices at different locations, moments, and systems of value, the regulated practice of signifying "here and now" is inherently plural and the emerging category of classification in the process is necessarily organized by plurality. Categories are articulated into a relatively coherent pattern from a dominant perspective at the intersection of various other vectors of social relations of power mobilizing their own constituent elements of the "concept". Conversely, these elements are potentially articulated into other categories. Any given category may therefore evoke multiple other categories through the partial inclusion of historically contingent constituent elements – keeping the concept open to (critical) reconfiguration. That is, categorization may play an ideological role in multiple ways through various chains of equivalence in endorsing a given pattern over other patterns of meaning as long as it is recognized to be sufficiently in sync with what is perceived as "obviously" intelligible in a given social space without any further reflection.[14]

The misogynistic renaming and inversion of "gender" as "ideology" hinges precisely on the familiarity of the disparaging meaning across multiple discursive fields to the point of escaping critical reflection and working as "common sense" and unquestionable, obvious "truth", a category that makes "false" claims to scholarly value. Over the past eight years in Hungary this is exactly what has happened to the meaning of "gender". It has been redefined as a "hideous ideology" and as such a legitimate and inevitable target of (hate) attacks and discreditation manipulated from within the various institutions of state power and social actors in the highest positions of decision making. This centralized redefinition "in protection" of the citizenry is particularly ironic in a country where citizens' lived experience in the past eight years is a pervasive interference of state politics and ideology in all spheres of our life.

Discursive legacy of discreditation from the 1990s

The contemporary populist discourse of anti-genderism in Hungary has its own historic legacy. It draws on the hostile discourses on feminism that emerged in the wake of the system change in 1989. The category at stake back then, though, was not "gender" but the name of the field itself that has developed it, i.e. "feminism". The most influential institution in the 1990s for shaping the meaning and public disposition to "feminism" was not the institutions of state power but (mostly the right-wing) print media functioning as a gate-keeping mechanism.[15] In addition, the discreditation in the 1990s media was a small-scale strategy at that stage. There were only 52 mentions of "feminism" in the entire database of the so-called *Pressdoc* CD-ROM of the first decade of the system change, including 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.[16] The 48 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 in the 1990s shared the epistemological stance that reduces feminism to its actual actors, collapsing a social practice into its actual practitioners, the "feminists". This conflation in itself 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". Insignificant in number, they can be safely imagined to be precluded from the institutions of the new "democratic system" – yet important enough to "recognize" and keep an eye on them. The actual reader is invited to fear them, thereby precluding "in time" the formation of any alliance and sympathy with them. The three discourses will be reconfigured in the commonsense discourses of "gender ideology" and "gender-craze" in the 2010s.

"A DISCOURSE OF ANTI-GENDER OR GENDERISM HAS EMERGED IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE SINCE 2010, THE BEGINNING OF THE ORBÁN REGIME IN POWER TO DATE."

Each of the three discourses of stigmatization in the 1990s has a figure at their center, making up a constituent element of the trope of the "lesbian terrorist". The first is an anti-American discourse of nationalism that articulates feminism as an "alien import". This explicit location and reduction of global feminist history to the US social and cultural space – erasing its Hungarian history at the same time – works to implicate feminism as "non-Hungarian" "alien" propaganda that threatens to undermine the newly won autonomy of the "nation". It is imagined to be working against the newly re-gained "real" interests of "our" women, should they go along with their "infatuated" American sisters.

American women are said to have gone "too far", now allegedly abusing their power when taking wealthy and powerful (celebrity) men to court. They are reported to be suing those men for sexual harassment with no cause. They are simply motivated either by their insatiable greed or – even better for the purpose of stigmatization – 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 feminist figure is expected to be the object of contempt and disidentification by any "reasonable" women in the readership.

The second intertwined discourse of anti-communism contributes to the meaning of fear by the contention that the few but "infatuated" feminist women in Hungary did not learn from our past experience of communism. They do not understand that the "woman question" on the communist party's agenda belongs to the failures of the communist past. In state socialism, goes the argument, in the name of full employment of women, the communist ideology deprived women of their "real career", i.e. enjoying giving birth to children and taking care of the home (sic). Following this logic, the woman reader should know better and act as the "new woman" of the system change who obviously wants nothing but to leave that past and the workplace behind, and "choose" to return happily to the home – the place that the "careerist feminist" would refuse in the name of "self-fulfillment".

Finally, the feminist figure is re/presented as a failure on its own terms in that she allegedly refuses to acknowledge the importance of women's ways of knowing. She is said to disregard the disposition of the "majority" of women who are now apparently satisfied with their life re-centered in the home – as a happy result of the regime change. By implication, this rhetoric entails yet again the assumption that the feminist figure is unintelligent or simply too stupid to recognize her situation. Her ignorant determination to recruit other women into their "militant army" is that of brute aggressive force. As such, it requires some equal measures for elimination in the name of "protection" performed by the political media if "properly" responsible.

At the intersection of the three discourses then, we have the ideologically double-blind "lesbian terrorist" who is intoxicated by the new (American) and old (communist) ideologies which have made her lose her sense of reason, trying to force other women to join the militant ranks of her ilk. But the reasonable reader does not need to worry any more, now that she has been warned against these "amazons" and invited to act against them. In short, the dominance of the heteropatriarchal institution of the media is effectively maintained by this gatekeeping at the expense of its real challenge by feminism – scapegoating feminists as "lesbian terrorists". It is only legitimate and morally right to act against them and what they come to be associated with, at the historic moment of regaining and rebuilding the "nation" in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Recontextualization from within a populist politics of fear

After some ten years of silence following the first decade of the system change in the 1990s, a discourse of anti-gender or genderism has emerged in the political discourse since 2010, the beginning of the Orbán regime in power to date. The emergence of this hostile politics is not unique to Hungary. It has been gaining a lead and strengthened its position on the political horizon of right-wing populism in Europe in response to the global crisis of neo-liberal capitalism since the 2008 crisis.[17] Right-wing populist parties, in fact, have been successfully established and present on a global scale since the 1990s, challenging what they call "multiculturalism",[18] but until the 2008 crisis they were believed to be a marginal political force – a belief that has proven wrong as the global and increasingly violent discourses of anti-gender may prove. The Hungarian situation in this regard can be seen exceptional in that the discourse has figured in official government propaganda. In the first four years of their government, 2010–2014, the anti-gender stance was predominantly defined in parliamentary debates, and was then taken over by political figures of the highest rank: ministers, state secretaries, and the prime minister and the speaker of the house. Ironically, the inability of political institutions to deliver and maintain the sense of security and prosperity is to emerge as an appeal to the "people" at the moment when the privilege that the dominant classes enjoy, and their sense of confidence about the entitlements associated with their social location, is under threat. The politics of fear has conveniently pushed the important matters of economic, cultural or political conflicts of "nation building" in the background, while promising to deliver some "good life" to any and all groups of precarity at the expense of those who are singled out as enemies and their collaborators.

The production of this "us, the Hungarian people" reached its peak in the Prime Minister's speech on March 15, 2018 only three weeks before the general elections. It was delivered on the occasion of the national holiday celebrating the outbreak of the 1848 war of independence from Habsburg rule:

> **After the elections we shall, naturally, get even, politically, morally, and legally; but now we cannot waste our energy and time on this. Let's throw off the attacks like water off a duck's back [...] all we should invest our force in is defending Hungary.**[19]

One could argue that since winning the April 2018 election, it is precisely this fortified showdown that the prime minister has explicitly called a "culture war" that has been going on, including the ban on the MA in Gender Studies. As the quote from the prime minister's speech shows, the politics of fear has redefined all political, cultural and economic opponents in the country as "enemies threatening the Hungarian nation" and as such the legitimate targets of the anti-intellectualism element of hate speech rhetoric serving to justify all kinds of legislative moves in the field of education and research, such as what is called the Lex CEU (see below), the restructuration and nationalization of Corvinus University of Economics from a state to a private institution, and the most recent example of aggressive state control over the research institutes of the Academy of Sciences.

Linguistically speaking, the most telling characteristic feature

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 irreconcilable radical conflict with each other through the routine use of diverse forms of hate speech.[20] On the one hand, that logic produces a homogenized "us" around which diverse social groups that live in fear of precarity, losing their autonomy, their trust in the possibility of transparent political institutions, can conveniently be called upon to come together and re/imagine themselves as "strong defenders" of the "cultural values" of the "nation" in the face of any event, institution, collective, or individual declared to be "a hostile malicious threat", trying to invade "us" with "their alien ideologies". The cultural threat to the "nation" in the eight years – which from the perspective of the strategic demonization of "gender" results in the ban of the MA in Gender Studies – is predominantly encoded as a fundamentalist Christian discourse, inviting "us" to defend "our" so-called traditional family values, mobilized also against the perceived threat of the "Muslim immigrant" that "Brussels" is trying (in vain) to impose upon "us". The constituent element of fear is a xenophobic, Islamophobic discourse that can be set up as "Brussels" transnational conspiracy" betraying "our Christian values" that should be seen as the "foundation of Europe" as well as sacrificing "our women" to the imaginary sexual violence of "their men": The mobilization of the fundamentalist discourse of Christianity may then be associated with an anti-Semitic discourse when "Brussels" and the various civil organizations, NGOs supporting the refugees over the 2015 crisis, are encoded as part of a "Soros conspiracy", drawing on the figure of György Soros and his Open Society Fund that is argued to be promoting cultural and political values that are merely a matter of concern for the "liberal cosmopolitan intellectuals", evoking not only the discourse of anti-intellectualism but that of anti-Semitism as well. How does the legacy of discrediting feminism in the 1990s work in the Orbán regime's rhetoric of fear? In my reading, the concept of gender comes to be rearticulated as an empty signifier with the help of all three discourses from the 1990s.

Firstly, gender as the legacy of the communist past in the 1990s comes to be reconfigured through the anti-intellectualism discourse of the 2010s when it is now denied the status of a scientific category, implying that gender studies are guilty of usurping the status of science, deceiving their students, the parents, and the broader society of "us". The Prime Minister's chief of staff, shortly after the Government's plan to revoke the MA in Gender Studies was reported in the media, said at a press conference in August 2018: "The Hungarian government is of the clear view that people are born either men or women. They lead their lives the way they think best, but beyond this, the Hungarian state does not wish to spend public funds on education in this area."[21] In short, the discipline was denied academic merit and relegated to the domain of ideology, encoding its practice as a matter of mere political propaganda.

The chief of staff's conclusion that it should be legitimate and reasonable for the government – for any responsible government, for that matter – to stop funding a degree that hides its "real face" as a vicious ideology implicates another element of the meaning of the term. In so far as "gender studies" is argued to have no foundation in the materiality of biology, gender is assumed to be a set of meaningless words and so the discipline comes to be implicated as inessential, an ideological fabrication in comparison with the "productivity of real science". The conclusion resonates with an important constitutive element of the regime's populist discourse, namely the argument questioning the value of anything intellectual if and whenever it is seen fit to be declared "non-productive" of knowledge that could transform "the materiality of reality" to "our advantage". Along that trajectory of "non-productivity" we can easily situate calling gender an ideology within the much broader "cultural war" going on in the country against the social sciences and humanities evoking the discourse of intellectualism – pushing the very productive potential of social criticism into oblivion as an act of political denial.

"FEMINISM IS ABOUT CHANGING THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE OR PARTNERSHIP ALTOGETHER AND WITH IT THE BIOLOGIST PERCEPTION OF THE MALE/FEMALE BINARIES OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE."

Secondly, the 1990s discourse of calling feminism an "alien ideology" is also reconfigured in the gender-ideology discourse of the 2010s in two intertwined ways. On the one hand, the "alien", American character of "gender" now comes to be explicitly encoded as "anti-Semitism". Since the national blueprint for registering an MA in Gender Studies accredited in 2004 was submitted by the US chartered private university, Central European University in Budapest, it could easily be represented an American "import" in the context of the debates around and protests against the fast-tracked law of April 2017 that requires "foreign universities" to continue teaching activities in their country of origin. In the case of CEU, having been active since its foundation in 1991, this meant imposing legislation retroactively and the threat of discontinuing its degrees that are accredited in the US only.[22] Consequently, the fate of the concept and the degree is linked to its institutional "alien" origin as a New York State chartered university. However, the university's private status has become much more prominent in the past two years, centralizing the figure of its funder, György Soros, who is of Hungarian Jewish decent. In the various government administrators" speeches and statements, CEU has been constantly referred to as the "Soros University".

The potential meaning of the name and the image of the person as "the frightful, ghastly, monstrous Jew" was already present everywhere in the Government sponsored huge billboards all over the country as part of their ongoing waves of anti-refugee campaigns since the summer of 2015.[23] It is through the mediation of the anti-Semitic representation of the photos of the university's founder that gender comes to be associated with the second meaning of the "alien ideology", the "migrant" who is encoded to be "alien" in terms of his religion, who, just like "gender", is threatening the "Christian values" of the nation by the allegedly "increased amount of sexual violence committed by "(male) migrants." For a telling example of this logic, let me quote the government's spokesperson explaining their refusal to participate in a parliamentary debate on why the government refuses to ratify the Istanbul Convention:

> **The biggest threat for women at the moment is migration and migrants in Europe. Wherever they have appeared the figure of violence against women and children has dramatically jumped. Those who are now talking about their concern for women in a round-table discussion have hindered the modification of the constitution to forbid the settlement of migrants.[24]**

Regarding the third discourse in the 1990s, i.e. the backlash against the feminist claim of the importance of women's ways of knowing, it is rearticulated in the right-wing populist discourse today when gender is stigmatized as the "secret" propaganda of the "gay lobby", the reincarnation of the "terrorist lesbian" trope. Over the years they are assumed to have grown into a powerful lobby, aiming to undermine the "traditional Christian (heterosexual) family". According to that logic, the definition of gender as a social construct in effect denies the male/female binary of some divine creation and results in the dangerous blurring of "children's healthy sense" of identity. This stigmatization of gender and the discipline that is supposed to be responsible for promoting the demise of the "traditional family" is not unique to Hungary. Calling the concept of gender into question has been part of a larger global discourse since the 1990s and goes back to the United Nation's Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Judith Butler, exploring the historical trajectory of the meaning of sexual difference, singles out the moment when the Vatican warns against gender and tries to dislodge the concept "from its foundational place"[25] and encode it as the ideological weapon of non-heterosexuals. It is still surprising to see this fundamentalist discourse being validated by the secular power of the state at the historic moment when the Vatican has been trying – in varying degrees – to revisit its hardline stance on gay sexuality and gender identity since the election of Pope Francis in 2013.[26]

Feminist voices of self-definition

The political discursive field in Hungary is not as homogeneous as has been implicated by the discussion so far. Feminist voices, even if marginalized by the media, were already challenging the regime's rhetoric of discreditation in the 1990s. The little space given to feminist self-definitions – the four mentions of feminism by feminists in the *Pressdoc* CD-ROM – took place in interviews with prominent scholars who were also known for their activism in the 1990s. However, in the political dailies it was predominantly the voice of a reformist feminism speaking: Reformist in the sense that it did not question the heterosexist myth of men and women as equal partners in a presumably complementary relationship. To that extent, this perspective shared the misogynist male position of the dominant gate-keeping rhetoric and reinforces the ideology of "complementarity of the two sexes':

> **Academic: [...] Of course, *it is not that feminists would reject the major elements of the bourgeois family values* or would be anti-sex or anti-men. But we should dust off the ancient perception of woman in order to see what we, women, want [...] So that we can choose from various options in accordance with our real needs.**
>
> **Journalist: Where are men in all this process?**
>
> **Academic: Naturally, without men, feminists would be left all by themselves in it. It would be good to see that men take democracy seriously as well, beyond party politics, and start practicing it right in the home. [...] *A woman who is more balanced, and has more time for her appearance and children, could be a nicer partner for men* as well, which can, in turn, enhance men's well-being too. We should also take our own first steps in this direction right now! (emphasis in italic added)[27]**

The reformist feminist discourse in the 1990s enters into a:

> **hegemonic allegiance [with the dominant misogynistic discourse on "feminism"] in defense of the hetero-gendered social order, even if for different reasons. [...] Insofar as (discursive) practices [are] ideological in that they aim at maintaining the status quo by naturalizing the given hegemonic relations of patriarchal power, [...] the various types of discourses enacted in the definition of "feminism" reinforce the patriarchal regulation of women's labor and desire precisely by taking gender as sexually pre-given.[28]**

As I argued in my 2005 contribution quoted above, my premise is that feminism is *not* about giving housewives their due as "partners" who may therefore have energy and time left to be pleasurable to live with. Feminism is about changing the social conditions of the institution of marriage or partnership altogether and with it the biologist perception of the male/female binaries of sexual difference. A feminist critique of the Government's current meaning-making practices of discrediting and stigmatizing "gender" as a category of hideous ideology cannot return to validating the (little) reformist self-definition of feminism back in the 1990s. In Rosemary Hennessy's formulation:

> **Positing male and female as distinct and opposite sexes that are naturally attracted to one another is integral to patriarchy. Woman's position as subordinate other, as (sexual) property, and as exploited laborer depends on [this] heterosexual matrix in which woman is taken to be man's [natural complementary] opposite.[29]**

That is, instead of naturalizing further the biologist concept of sexual desire, what should have been addressed in the 1990s is the hegemonic power relations of gender between "woman" and "man" that organize sexual difference ideologically in order to naturalize the heteropatriarchal "partnership" that then re-emerges in full force as the ahistorical fundamentalist "Christian family" model in the right-wing populist discourse of the 2010s. This is not wishful thinking projected back into the past, though. In addition to the little reformist voice in the *Pressdoc* CD-ROM, there was one resisting voice, even if in a single issue of a newly founded alternative weekly magazine, challenging precisely that imposition of normative sexuality through the power of irony:

> **But feminists are also said to be lesbians. And if they protest, their opponents only become all the more satisfied because they have managed to change the topic, to shift the direction of feminist criticism, or perhaps because they have succeeded in frightening other women into thinking the same. So the only good strategy is if a feminist answers: "Sure, I am a lesbian. So what?"[30]**

"THE 1990s DISCOURSE OF CALLING FEMINISM AN 'ALIEN IDEOLOGY' IS ALSO RECONFIGURED IN THE GENDER-IDEOLOGY DISCOURSE OF THE 2010s."

What has been at stake over the past thirty years, in my reading, is forging a position that makes feminism and its key analytical category of gender meaningful beyond securing a heterosexual social order by harnessing desire and labor in the interest of the expansion of (cultural) capital and the accumulation of profits (including our own academic promotion or access to research funds). In short, we must be determined to de-center the concept of gender as grounded in biology and with it we can develop a different logic that is not inflected with our own ideology of heteronormativity and can undermine the charge of "ideology".[31]

How far do the contemporary feminist discourses participate in the reification of this hetero-gendered sexual identity today? Have they been rearticulated beyond the binary distinction of gender?

I think the past decade can be characterized by the emergence of a new radical left discourse of gender that evolved and was shaped in the debates on "sex work or prostitution" and "transgender or feminism" in the name of a new Marxist feminist critique, trying to redefine "gender" in the face of the hostile discrimination of the category. The representatives of this radical left, who are between their mid-twenties and thirties, based in Budapest, doing a PhD (not necessarily in gender studies) and/or participating in activism organized by women NGOs, mostly draw on Nancy Fraser's works. With reference to Fraser, they argue for the priority of a critique of redistribution, as that should result in structural, i.e. "real" change of global neoliberalism, against and over the arguably inessential cultural claims to recognition of identity associated with queer theory and trans activism.[32] The latter is seen from within this logic as a "dangerous foreign, mostly Anglo-American-based" import that cannot explain the social reality of Hungarian women, whose main problem is economic survival.

> **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 what counts as feminine and masculine, what options are available for men and women in a given society. In the other [LGBTQ activist] usage, social gender is expanded with, or more exactly substituted 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 instance if in 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 within a male-female binary.) The left/feminist critiques of the latter position also call this understanding a gender-ideology – without inverted commas – which makes the situation more complex.[33]**

Paradoxically, turning to Nancy Fraser for a feminist critique of neoliberalism and the co-optation of contemporary feminism, which she calls identity-based apolitical feminism, is not seen as the improper application of an "alien other". "Foreignness" in her case is cancelled out by her perceived "radicalism". The divide between the "right" and "wrong" conceptualization of gender and the internal divide within the "progressive left" needs the legitimization 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 misrepresenting it for the sake of political instrumentalization, and that it has created a straw man without any real-world reference, based solely on a 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 within the progressive camp, otherwise we leave the terrain to the Right. Clarity about the differences of our own definitions is a prerequisite for that.[34]**

At the same time the author also formulates that it is dangerous to embrace a queer or trans politics of sexuality as the right-wing populist discourse would attack gender as ideology by seeing it as a matter of political correctness, which is nothing but a matter of mere words of naming dictated by a particular individual's arbitrary choices. According to this neo-Marxist logic, a queer conceptualization of gender, which is symbolically associated with Judith Butler's name in this discourse, would leave "us", feminists, defenseless against the charges of gender ideology that is defined as the propaganda category of the trans lobby. The discontinuity between sex and gender is therefore not desirable as that "minority" position would undermine and divert the critical gaze from the "real" material problems of the economic structure of neoliberal capitalism in "women's" life. This position runs the risk of echoing the Orbán regime's discourse of anti-intellectualism:

> **Fourth, many writers use it in trans and genderqueer scholarship and activism to mean *gender identity*: a person's felt sense of identity, meaning identifying or not with being born male or female. This is evidenced by the expression "gender assigned at birth", referring to the fact that it might not correspond to the person's later defined gender identity, or the practice in core countries with languages having gendered pronouns that when introducing oneself, one should identify one's "preferred pronoun", on the basis that we "cannot assume one's gender" on the basis of appearance. So, in this sense *gender* does not mean an analytical category to describe the social components of our being a woman or man, attached to our sex (being female or male, e.g. girls should do this, boy should do that).[35]**

I agree with the author's proposal to start a debate about the effective politics of feminist research that inevitably involves the re/conceptualization of the category gender. However, as the current article has argued, unlike her, I do not see the different meanings of gender within feminism to be a matter of ambiguity or of an unfortunate influence of "Anglo-American countries", let alone a "practical" act of reducing transgender relations of power into a matter of individual claims of mere words, choosing a preferred identity allegedly captured by pronoun preferences.

In my understanding, we need to cut across the binary thinking of sex and gender and think through the discourse model I have proposed here. It argues for the socially regulated articulations of partial distinctions of the sex/gender system and materiality and symbolic encoding. Without such a move, the desirable debates within "progressive politics" turn out to be what Laurent 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.[36]

It would be then possible to see that social divisions of power also exist at the level of symbolic representation, expressed in images and texts inflected with ideologies, including those having 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 is to analyze how specific positionings and identities and political values are constructed and interrelate and affect each other in particular locations and contexts. Similarly important would be an examination of the particular ways in which the different divisions are intermeshed. (Yuval-Davis, 200)[37]**

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3 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 36–46.

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Recovering traditions?

Women, gender, and the authoritarianism of "traditional values" in Russia

by **Yulia Gradskova**

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,[1] 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 birth-rates, 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.[2] In his inaugural speech on May 7, 2018, Putin also stated the importance of "traditional family values".[3] 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.[4] 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 already 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.[5] 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.[6] In 1996, a statement on legal priorities for guaranteeing equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women that had been formulated in collaboration with the American Bar Association (ABA) was proposed by the Parliamentary Committee for Women's, Family and Youth Affairs and was adopted by the Russian Parliament in 1997.[7] The statement declared the importance of creating national legislation on equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women and of creating a state system guaranteeing gender equality on different levels. The democracy assistance to Russia from the side of many national and transnational organizations in Europe, the US, and Canada usually included support for gender equality and reproductive rights. It opened many opportunities for women's NGOs, but was also frequently criticized for different problems regarding its practical realization.[8]

The research on cooperation between the Nordic countries and Northwestern Russia with respect to gender equality shows, for example, that in spite of the Nordic partners usually showing a genuine interest in promoting gender equality in Russia, the cooperation often ignored the complicated Soviet experience of equality between men and women, as well as the new challenges for women's rights connected to the shrinking welfare state.[9] One associated problem was that the commonly used categories of social or gender "equality" 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.[10]

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 ideas that these organizations promoted had support in many parts of the population.[11] Therefore, I argue that the new official agenda on "traditional values" could not have developed without strengthening the authoritarian pressure over these actors.

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[12] 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.[13] The law against violence against women was not adopted in Russia, and furthermore, the general law on battery was changed in 2017 in Russia so that non-aggravated battery (where no severe injury occurs) by close relatives was decriminalized.[14] 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.[15] The new legislation on NGOs (2006) seriously limited the ability of civic organizations to obtain financial support from abroad and made registration more difficult. The latter process influenced the level of independence and in many cases the very existence of independent women's organizations. These changes also coincided with a decrease in available international funding for women's groups and associations.[16]

"THE CALL FOR A RETURN TO 'TRADITIONAL VALUES' CHANGED FROM BEING A WAY TO RECLAIM RUSSIAN IDENTITY TO BECOMING A TOOL OF SOCIAL CONTROL."

It was this period of time when the idea of "traditional values" and the "traditional family" started to be seen as particularly useful for solving the problem of falling birth rates. The state's preoccupation with falling birth rates led to the endorsement of an explicitly pronatalist policy in the late 2000s.[17] In spite of some success of this program, the 2008 economic crisis led to a fall in the standard of living, including for families with children. Thus, the Russian state continued to be preoccupied with the birth rate problem. All of this contributed to the emergence of a closer alliance between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church, after which the ideology of "traditional values" became increasingly visible in the state's political repertoire. While "traditional values" are rarely clearly defined, since the late 2000s they have come to represent values and cultural norms that are the opposite to "Western", "liberal", or "communist" values and as such are attributed to positive values such as the solidarity of traditional communities and families with many children based on genuine love and Orthodox spirituality.[18]

THE CAMPAIGNING FOR "traditional values" could, however, not be realized without certain changes in legislation in order to take stronger control over sexual, reproductive, and social behavior.[19] The first laws against the so-called "propaganda of homosexuality" were adopted on the regional level (for example, in Riazan Oblast already in 2006)[20]. In August 2013 the Russian Parliament adopted the infamous law against "homosexual propaganda"[21] that seriously limited the rights of LGBTQ people and particularly endangered homosexual families and the lives of LGBTQ teenagers.[22] Homosexual relationships are presented in official discourse as endangering the traditional family and leading to

ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON

depopulation. The number of hate crimes during the same period doubled between 2013 and 2018 according to Reuters,[23] and some parts of Russia are particularly dangerous for those who are considered to have a "non-traditional sexual orientation".[24]

FURTHERMORE, THE DRAFT of a law completely banning abortion had already been discussed several times in the Russian Parliament (most recently in September 2016), while in 2011 a law imposing a "waiting time" before abortion was accepted by the Lower Chamber, the State Duma.[25] Finally, the law on "foreign agents", a law putting restrictions on organizations receiving foreign financial support, adopted in 2012, was applied to many NGOs and research centers dealing with gender research and the protection of women's and LGBTQ rights.

The change in the legislative base was accompanied by broader changes in educational politics. While voluntary courses on religion and celebrations of religious holidays in kindergartens were promoted already from the early 2000s,[26] 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 "highly moral personality sharing Russian traditional values" is an important priority of education.[27] Finally, since 2008 the day of Family, Love, and Faithfulness – July 8 – has been an official public celebration in Russia. This celebration is expected to contribute to strengthening families, decreasing divorce rates, and increasing birth rates.

"IN 2012 THE SUBJECT 'FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX CULTURE' WAS INTRODUCED IN THE 4TH AND 5TH YEAR OF SCHOOL."

"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" presuppose gender complementarity (not gender equality) and unconditional love, and heterosexual procreation is seen as the very foundation of the family. All kinds of intimacies outside of the heterosexual family or non-reproductive sexuality (like pre-marital and extra-marital sex, voluntarily childless families, and homosexual and transsexual intimacies) are seen as "non-traditional" and immoral.

The politicians and intellectuals supporting the ideas of "traditional values" in contemporary Russia belong to different groups and orientations. First of all, support for "traditional values" is a part of the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church. For example, the head of the Church, the Patriarch Kirill, in his speech aimed for members of both chambers of the Russian Parliament in January 2018 urged them to do everything possible for the defense of "traditional values". In his speech, "traditional values" were associated with ideas of social protection of the most vulnerable members of the population (mainly those with a low income), as well as to the moral principles of humanity.[28] However, even if "traditional values" are usually described using a Christian rhetoric, the discourse around such values also tends to idealize the patriarchal pre-1917 society. In some cases, the supporters of "traditional values" succeed in presenting Soviet politics as a kind of specific politics that, in spite of the communist rhetoric, were inspired by Christian ideas and values. Thus, the development of Soviet history in some cases has come to be presented as contributing to the greatness of Russia [29] and as such has been used to legitimize traditional culture and spirituality. The building of the strong Soviet great power and the cooperation of so many nations during the Second World War served as some examples for these ideas. Finally, it must be noted that the contemporary Communist Party in Russia and its leader, Gennadii Zyuganov, have also come to the defense of "traditional values".[30] At the same time, Russia has become a more and more important worldwide advocate for the discourse on "traditional values" in the global format by supporting parties and organizations defending the "natural" gender order from the "anti-scientific" gender ideologies.[31]

DESPITE THE DOMINANT rhetoric of "traditional values" in the public space, official statistical data indicate that many social practices have continued to follow previous patterns of development. On the base of the analysis of World Values Survey, it can be concluded that in the 2000s family was one of the most trustworthy institutions in Russia – people trusted their family more than the government or the police. However, Russia also showed quite a positive attitude toward working mothers and an older age for first-time marriage.[32] Divorce rates have continually been high in Russia, and according to the official statistics in 2016 there were 6.7 marriages and 4.1 divorces per 1,000 persons in the population. In 2017, Russia was 4th in the world according to divorce rate – after Luxemburg, Spain, and France.[33] Also, most women have continued to be employed outside the home. Indeed, in 2015 60.1% of all women between 15 and 72 years of age were employed compared to 71.1% of men (according to the official data, the unemployment rate was about 3% for women and 4% for men). Also, only 6.2% of women were officially classified as housewives.[34] As for births outside of registered marriages, even though they have decreased since 2003 (when it was the highest with 29.7% of children being born by women who were not married), they still constituted 21.1% of births in 2016.[35] Furthermore, when discussing sexual morals and practices in Russia, it is important to note that Russia is in the midst of an HIV epidemic with 50% of those infected living in heterosexual relationships. In Russia, married life is often seen as a way of avoiding AIDS, and a long and faithful marriage is extolled over sexual education as an HIV prophylactic.[36]

FINALLY, IT IS WORTH noting that the authoritarian management of "traditional values" has in some cases led to open political protests. The most well-known case is probably the punk-prayer performed by Pussy Riot activists in the Church of Christ the Savior in Moscow in 2012. While several young women participating in the performance openly declared themselves to be Christian Orthodox believers, their performance – addressed to "Mother of God" – demanded an end to authoritarianism.[37] Recently, this group performed again in which several people dressed in police uniforms ran onto the pitch during the World Cup in Moscow in July 2018 to protest against authoritarianism and political repressions in Russia and to demand political freedoms.[38] This small episode once more emphasizes the problems with the acceptance of the authoritarian version of "traditional values" in Russia.

Conclusion

"Traditional values" functions as quite an ambiguous ideology that is often used by politicians in order to indicate Russia's specificity in relation to, and difference from, the "West". At the same time, however, it us used to promote social cohesion and solidarity. Declarations on the importance of "traditional values" for family life in particular are often connected to the hope of overcoming negative trends in terms of low birth rates and high divorce rates in Russia. Therefore, the politics of reinforcing "traditional values" seems to correspond to the aspirations of some parts of Russian society who are experiencing a high level of social insecurity and growing dissatisfaction with the rhetoric of individual 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 rights), 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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Did #MeToo skip Russia?

by **Anna Sedysheva**

> **"What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open."**
>
> *Muriel Rukeyser*

This quote opens the interactive #MeToo Rising map created by Google in 2018[1] 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 attempting to understand why Russia has not been touched by the #MeToo movement or why the results of the movement have been modest.[2] Amie 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:

> **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 looks for another person to humiliate. Throughout history, the other person has been a woman.[5]**

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

The issue in this essay concerns patriarchal culture in Russia and whether this might have been a factor for why the #MeToo movement did not appear to resonate in Russia.

Patriarchal culture in Russia

The context of Russian cultural aspects is quite complicated when looked at closely. Positive and negative tendencies can rapidly gain footholds and often reverse themselves in an unpredictable 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."[6]

This is an ironic statement, but it conveys the notion that surprises are common in Russia and that Russians ought to expect them, and this might be applicable to much of the news reporting 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 generalities 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.[7]

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 characteristic not only for us. If we look at the developed economies, the European countries, the countries of the European Union – there the average wage level for women is much lower than the average wage for men.[8]**

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%.[9]

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 gender equality. Neither discussion resulted in any improvement for women in Russia. In the beginning of 2017, a controversial proposal on decriminalizing some forms of domestic violence was proposed and then later adopted into law.[10] As Venera Zakirova noted:

> **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.[11]**

Among the strong supporters and initiators of the law of 2017 was a woman herself, the State Duma member Elena Mizulina (which touches on the issue that women and even female politicians might also support patriarchal approaches to social issues instead of fighting for women's rights). According to the recent extensive report by Human Rights Watch on domestic violence in Russia, the situation with domestic violence after the law "became completely horrible".[12] Russian officials, such as Vladimir Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, questioned the trustworthiness of this report because it contradicted the Russian government's campaign to promote traditional values and more importantly its efforts to elevate the role of the Orthodox Church in modern Russian society, which itself avoids getting involved directly in parliamentary matters on most issues but focuses on and promotes traditional patriarchal roles for people. Vladimir Putin was heavily criticized for this decision to decriminalize some forms of domestic violence in foreign press publications such as *The Guardian*.

In October 2017 the Russian State Duma then returned to the law project on quotas after many years. Why did they do so? Did this suggest that Russia was seriously contemplating the problem of gender inequality on the official level by returning to this 15-year-old law project 5 months before Russian presidential elections to be held the following March, or was this something else? This process played out during 2018, and during the last week of Russia's hosting of the World Cup, on July 11 (the day after the last semi-final match was played), it was officially rejected. This was despite the fact that the very problem of equality between men and women was acknowledged to be "more urgent than ever"[13] by the deputy chairman of the committee (a deputy of the United Russia Party), Oksana Pushkina. In 2014, while hosting the Olympic Games, Russia was heavily criticized for its so-called anti-gay propaganda law.[14] Thus during the World Cup, perhaps to deflect attention from the controversial law on domestic violence, the issue of gender inequality was brought up for discussion, but only to be later rejected when foreign reporters were about to leave Russia. Natalia Hodyreva, a member of the Human Rights Council of St. Petersburg, thinks that the law on domestic violence was actually itself also a possible attempt at improving Russia's image abroad because the law redefined domestic "beatings into administrative offenses helping to 'correct' negative statistics. This is argued to be done because in 2019 the government will have to report on CEDAW" [UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified by the USSR in 1982].[15]

"THE #IAMNOTSCAREDTOSPEAK CAMPAIGN SHOULD THUS NOT BE VIEWED AS JUST RUSSIA'S #METOO MOMENT, BUT AS A MASS POLITICAL PROTEST."

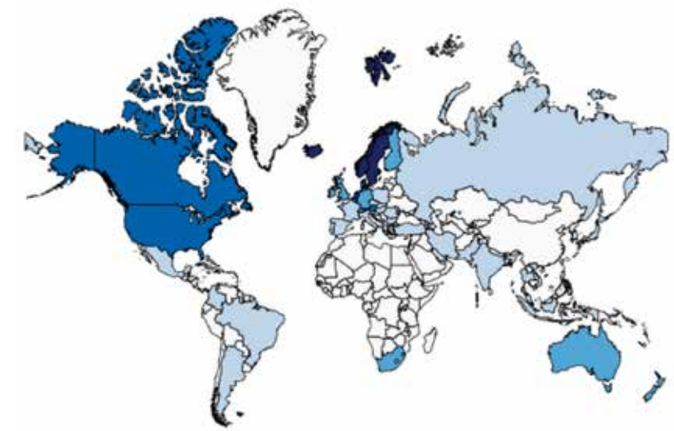
PATRIARCHAL INSTINCTS IN RUSSIA are also apparent outside of governmental political organs. Popular culture and norms are often represented by the entertainment industry of a country and especially by way of television. In this regard, many television shows in Russia (*Comedy Club* and *Comedy Women*, two television shows that have English titles, as well *Let Them Talk* (Пусть говорят) and *Male/Female* (Мужское/женское) propagate the sexism of gender stereotypes that marriage ought to be the primary goal for women, often suggesting that even 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 women themselves who have been persuaded that they must have done "something wrong".

New narratives in Russian public discourse

Women's representation in the public sphere in Russia is limited. Women are under-represented in parliament and throughout traditional media, and existing gender roles are constantly propagated and reinforced. Moreover, issues directly connected with women's rights such as domestic violence or access to abortion are discussed on the political level without women's involvement. In short, women's access to platforms where their unfiltered voices can be heard is rather limited.

Countries where the hashtag #MeToo has been most popular

Least searches — Most searches



Source: Google Trends, data from May 2017–2018.

Women's hashtag activism

Topics that might have been deemed controversial by traditional media outlets and consequently have not gotten much public airing have become natural fodder for debate on social media platforms. Forums such as Twitter, Facebook, and others have provided open and democratic exchanges by expanding the public sphere due to their ability to facilitate exchanges of opinions.[16] 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 (#iamafeminist), in the US in 2014 (#YesAllWomen), and in Britain in 2014 (#EverydaySexism).[17]

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 (#ЯнеБоюсьСказати) and was copied within 24 hours by Russian women in Russia, altering the hashtag to make it grammatically Russian.[18] 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. [...][I]t is important for us women to talk about our experiences. It is important to make it visible. Please speak. #IAmNotScaredToSpeak".[19]**

Like the Ukrainian campaign, the Russian campaign spread rapidly by way of sharing. A multitude 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 putting the former back into active discourse) helped normalize women's protests against violence and stimulated debate on the previously taboo topic of sexual harassment.

It is important to note that the #яНеБоюсьСказать campaign was well covered by traditional Russian media, 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 forum more democratic to women in societies where the access to conventional forums are limited.

THE ISSUE OF DEMOCRATIC 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 2012, 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 thus 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 actively use their accounts to express their opinions, and cases of femicide and domestic violence now appear on Russian social media forums.[20] In the beginning of 2018, social media users in Russia started the campaign #этонеповодубить [#Thisisnotthereasontokill] 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.[21]

Although the social media protest of 2017–2018 brought atten-




The images shows the online video that DNS Electronics Store released on Men's Day. The video is showing what happens if a men 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.

tion to various cases of domestic violence, it did not bring changes on the government level, but slowly the issue that used to be a taboo topic now had garnered the attention of the mass media. At the end of 2018, the Commissioner for Human Rights in Russia, Tatyana Moskalkova, called the law on the decriminalization of domestic violence a mistake and called for the adoption of another law, one that counteracted domestic violence.[22] Human right activist Alena Popova stated that more than 400,000 people signed the petition demanding the acceptance of the law against domestic violence, and she hopes to make Russian deputies accept the law in 2019.[23]

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. In an online video on the company's website (DNS.RU), a man drives his wife, tied up in the trunk of his car, into the woods and then, after letting her out, forces her to dig a grave for her gifts into which he then tosses her "bad presents". At the end of the video it turns out that all this was in the imagination of the woman who had bought her husband socks for the holiday. The woman, after such contemplation, tosses the gifts she had already bought and then proceeds to go to her local DNS electronics store for a "good gift". As she does this, the voice behind the camera welcomes her decision with the slogan: "Men's gifts without the risk to life."[24] Users of social media networks did not appreciate the video, and they accused DNS of sexism and for normalizing violence against women, as well as for its offensive attitude to both women and men. Negative evaluations of the company followed on Facebook (now its average rating is two stars out of five) pressuring the CEO of the retail chain in Moscow to officially apologize and to remove the video from their website.[25]

The company subsequently tried to repair their image by making a similar video for Women's Day (March 8) wherein the woman takes her husband to the woods in search of the presents that were buried. This precedent demonstrates how the reputation of a company might suffer from such sexist commercials, and Russian society is generally becoming more sensitive with regard to such advertisements.[26]

Social media platforms have become the democratic platforms for discussing such difficult issues as sexism (which still provokes waves of hate speech reaction), 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 afield 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 Smailova, a resident of Kazakhstan, decided to share her story by creating the hashtag #НеМолчиKZ (#Don'tKeepYourSilenceKhazakhstan) and utilizing it in conjunction with "#IAmNotScaredToSpeak.[27] This campaign was soon after followed up by its initiator with the creation of an organization providing assistance to victims of sexual violence (#Don'tKeepYourSilenceKhazakhstan). In 2017 Dina Smailova was invited as a speaker to a high-level event launching the EU-UN Spotlight initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls.[28] It is noteworthy here as well that Google's MeToo Rising map recognizes Kazakhstan and gives links to articles about #НеМолчиKZ without recognizing the Russian #IAmNotScaredToSpeak movement, even though the latter influenced the creation of the former.[29]

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 9th in terms of presence.[30] 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 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 #IAmNotScaredToSpeak 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 #MeToo and #IAmNotScaredToSpeak, but sometimes even referred to #MeToo as the American version of #IAmNotScaredToSpeak.[31]

One aspect of the Russian #IAmNotScaredToSpeak 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 was limited to its effect in reinforcing the #IAmNotScaredToSpeak 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 thusly 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.[32] Later, in response, "State Duma deputy from the Liberal Democratic Party Leonid Slutsky congratulated women on his Facebook on the occasion of March 8. He then apologized to those to whom he had caused 'any unpleasant feelings'."

The subsequent investigation by the Russian Duma Ethics Commission, however, found (March 21, 2018) no wrong doing by the accused.[33] An unprecedented action followed: "More than 20 media outlets in one form or another supported the boycott of the State Duma and the LDPR deputy Leonid Slutsky personally."[34] The editorial staff of Lenta.ru, one of the leading Russian online news publications with 100 million monthly visitors,[35] also said that it was joining the Slutsky boycott: "All materials about the deputy that do not concern harassment charges will be removed."[36]

LEONID SLUTSKY REMAINS a deputy in the Russian Duma, but this episode suggests that the discourse regarding sexual harassment in Russia is starting to evolve, and perhaps how a more recent case is resolved will provide some indication as to what path this evolution might take.

This most recent case began in January of 2019 (in the author of this article's hometown of Vladivostok) when a journalist (Ekaterina Fedorova) accused the co-founder (Alexey Migunov) of Prima Media of rape. Prima Media is a Russian media holding group consisting of a network of regional news agencies of the Far East, Siberia, and southern Russia with 2 million monthly visits to their online website.[37]

This case garnered wide coverage from Russian media in Moscow as well (including, among others, *Echo Moscow*, *Wonderzine*, *Meduza*, *Svoboda.org*[38], 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 talked to 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 that I was "a journalist from the Western paid media" and that my story was a provocation from the West.**[39]

Fedorova's words about Western conspiracy theories refer to the common Russian stereotype of feminism's attempt to break the silence around issues of sexual assault as something coming from the West. On the other hand, such an active reaction of mainstream media outlets suggests that this issue has started to become part of the active discourse in Russia. However, like in the case of Slutsky, there is a danger of negative repercussions. As Fedorova noted in her interview:

"'FEMINOLOGI' WAS CONCEIVED AS A SUPPORT GROUP THAT WOULD HOLD EVENTS ORGANIZED FOR WOMEN AND WOULD PROTECT THEIR INTERESTS."

> **[Migunov] filed a lawsuit against me for the protection of his honor, dignity, and business reputation. If he wins and I have to pay him a large sum before the end of my life, that would be only half the problem. This will create a precedent. Men will understand that it is possible to sue a woman who has accused them of violence. They will be able to say: "Just try to utter a word, and I will do like Migunov."**[40]

Ekaterina Fedorova is not just a journalist. In 2017 she created a supportive workshop group for women by the name of "Feminologi", which is a project devoted to problems that are relevant for everyone but that are often not spoken about out loud. Initially, "Feminologi" was conceived as a support group that would hold events organized for women and would protect their interests. The name of the project refers to monologue, a feminine monologue. In Vladivostok the first open evening of "Feminologi" was held in a local bar on July 27, 2017.[41] The motivation for having publicly accused Migunov, Fedorova noted, was her way of standing up for other victims of sexual abuse in the spirit of the "Feminologi" project.[42]

Conclusion

One might argue that the #IAmNotScaredToSpeak 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 the #MeToo movement or the #IAmNotScaredToSpeak campaign that preceded #MeToo.[43] 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 the hostility faced by those who complain about sexual harassment might be ebbing ever so slightly.** [44]

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 Slutsky of sexual harassment: "In Canada, a limited apology like Slutsky's wouldn't help a politician save his job, but in Russia it amounts to progress."[45] 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, were it to have read, "#MeToo helps #IAmNotScaredToSpeak to remain at the forefront of Russian discourse."

THE #IAMNOTSCAREDTOSPEAK CAMPAIGN, which began in 2016, was denigrated by many, predicting that it would die out rather quickly. The campaign, however, 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 #IAmNotScaredToSpeak was more spontaneously driven in comparison and was driven by regular people in various places throughout Russia.

This suggests that, despite few public successes, i.e. as seen by Google's MeToo Rising map and media attention in the West, the groundswell initiated by Anastasia Melnychenko's initial call for "women to speak today"[46] remains a force within Russia as individual Russian women continue to declare, "I am not scared to speak!"

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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.[1] 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.[2] 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.[3] 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

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to the far right, and even developing crucial transnational connections 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 national culture.

A novel and global phenomenon

The relevant literature mainly regards the anti-gender movements in Europe as part of the global and transnational resurgence of illiberal populism. As Gunnarsson Payne observes, "gender' has come to play a central role in the construction of political frontiers in the currently polarized political situation that Chantal Mouffe has called Europe's populist moment".[4] A number of themes recur in the literature on anti-gender movements 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 organizational and discursive networks among European right-wing activisms 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".[5] Korolzcuk and Graff perfectly capture the global importance of the phenomenon in their attempt to analyze "anti-genderism as a coherent ideological construction consciously and effectively used by right-wing and religious fundamentalists worldwide". Highlighting 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 alternative illiberal civil society – based on an alliance between religious fundamentalists and illiberal populists. This alliance is facilitated by the persistent use of the terms "gender" and "gender ideology" (aka "genderism"). These terms have become empty signifiers, flexible synonyms for demoralization, 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.[6]**

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 articulations and organizational networks culminating in a hegemonic challenge against both the liberal establishment and neo-liberal global capitalism.[7] It is essentially based on the populist dichotomy of "ordinary people" against the "global elites" of global organizations and corporations that are held responsible for the dissemination and imposition of a liberal world view.[8] 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".[9]

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 Petö explain how "gender" became an umbrella term for the rejection of (neo)liberal order.[10] They argue against the views that see the rise of illiberalism simply in terms of a backlash against recent victories of emancipatory 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 illiberal 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 progressive 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 facets 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 detachment of social and political elites and the influence of transnational institutions and the global economy on nation states.[11]**

"FEMINISM IS REGARDED AS A FOREIGN-STEERED PROJECT BACKED BY THE EU, LARGE CORPORATIONS, INTERNATIONAL NGOs AND DOMESTIC LIBERALS."

Second, they point to how gender ideology has been demonized and deployed as a tool to construct a "new conception of common sense for a wide audience; a form of consensus about what is normal and legitimate". Here the human rights paradigm is labelled and rejected as "political correctness" – or even as a new incarnation of extremism like Nazism and Leninism – and counterpoised to a livable and viable alternative centered on family

Erdoğan: 'Motherhood is biggest priority granted by Allah to women'

Childless women are 'incomplete', says Turkish President

TURKEY'S ERDOGAN CALLS WOMEN WITHOUT CHILDREN 'INCOMPLETE'

and nation. *Third*, the writers draw our attention to how a range of rightwing actors such as "different Christian churches, orthodox Jews, fundamentalist Muslims, mainstream conservatives, far right parties, fundamentalist groups and even football hooligans" have been able to unite in their opposition to "gender".

The question of the illiberal state

We see that the literature on anti-gender movements mainly highlights the social movement aspects of the phenomenon, with the effect that the problem of the state and state power is not adequately considered. Yet the question of the state seems to be of critical importance to understanding the rise and strength of the anti-gender movements in general, as well as to delineating the differences between various countries. Here, Petö and Grezebalska's work is helpful, for they provide us with a framework to grasp the matter theoretically with particular reference to Hungary and Poland.[12] They suggest a new conceptualization, the "illiberal polypore state", to understand the current transformations of central European ex-communist states and the gendered nature of this transformation. For them, the "illiberal polypore state is a new form of governance (not a backlash) stemming from the failures of globalized neoliberal democracy, which feeds on the vital resources of the previous system at the same time as contributing to its decay (appropriating the institutions, mechanisms and recourses of European liberal democracy)".[13] The success and the accompanying weakness of the progressive actors stem from three dynamics: *securitization*, *familialism* and *the polypore state*. Securitization basically means the transformation of human rights-based civil society through the discourse of securitization whereby the civil society actors fighting for human rights are framed as foreign-steered and a threat to national sovereignty. Also, it functions by creating a parallel civil society and pro-government NGOs, thus fostering re-politicization of de-politicized civil society. Familialism denotes the major shift from the concept of gender to the family, from "gender mainstreaming" to "family mainstreaming". Feminism is regarded as a foreign-steered project backed by the EU, large corporations, international NGOs and domestic liberals. Along with the attack on feminism and labelling of gender studies as pseudo-science or ideology comes the appropriation of critical gender studies discourse to advance the conservative agenda by using EU funds. The concept of the "polypore state" puts words to the ways in which this new state exploits and drains the existing institutional setup of the liberal democratic state by appropriating the language and infrastructure of human rights, by building a parallel civil society, and by misusing the democratic procedures to serve the ruling elite and their allies. As for the functioning of the polypore state, Petö mentions a range of governmental strategies such as backlash, appropriation, compliance, and reconceptualization.[14]

To sum up, the literature on anti-gender movements reveals its novel and global character and the centrality of the gender question for illiberal states. Needless to say, such a general overview of the literature can neither replace nor suffice for an elaborate discussion of the complexities of the phenomenon at hand. A more comprehensive analysis would require considering the different trajectories of anti-gender movements within the European region (especially between more liberal-democratic regimes and illiberal regimes). Limited as it is, my aim is to evaluate the case of Turkey by focusing on the illiberal polypore state and its gendered nature as well as "gender as symbolic glue".

The case of Turkey as a leading illiberal regime

The "New Turkey" under Erdoğan's rule is undoubtedly a perfect example of the global phenomenon of emerging illiberal regimes. The complex dynamics of the transformation of the regime after 2010 are much discussed in the literature and different conceptualizations are being offered such as "hybrid regime", "neoliberal populism", "competitive authoritarianism", "Bonapartism", "neo-fascism" or even soft or hard "totalitarianism".[15] Leaving aside the conceptual problems of naming the new regime, there is no question that the "New Turkey" under Erdoğan's rule takes part in the novel global trends where neoliberal globalism is challenged by an ultra-nationalistic and Islamic populism. Beginning with a critical constitutional referendum in 2010 and then with the AKP's third electoral victory in the 2011 general election, the government gradually started to follow an authoritarian route by eradicating opposing forces both within the state and in civil society. When strongly challenged by a growing coalition of democratic forces in the 2013 Gezi Resistance and then in the 2015 elections, the authoritarian

Turkey: Sumeyye Erdogan says men inheriting more than women is \'normal, fair and righteous\'

Erdogan: women not equal to men

Erdogan says 'women are above all mothers'

'Digging soil is against their delicate nature': Turkish president says women are not equal men

slide of the regime became more reckless and severely militarist, culminating in the declaration of a state of emergency after an attempted *coup d'etat* by its former ruling coalition partner in 2016. Under the state of emergency regime, all democratic opposition has been suppressed and a new "constitution" was imposed with the effect of establishing a one-man regime.

It is also very clear that gender politics and attacks on gender equality lie at the heart of the new authoritarianism in Turkey. In fact, the gendered nature of this authoritarian turn has been explored in its many aspects by the recent feminist literature.[16] It is not my aim here to discuss the complex interactions between neoliberalism and authoritarianism and to answer the question of how gender regimes and gender politics are implicated in this nexus. What I seek to do, is to draw attention to a missing theme in the existing literature in Turkish, with the aim of making some comparative observations. Until now there has been no attempt to consider the Turkish case in relation to anti-gender movements and illiberal regimes in Europe and elsewhere, the most likely reason being that in the Turkish case we do not witness the rise of anti-gender mobilizations similar to those in Europe. As I will try to show in the following section, instead of an anti-gender popular movement which is critical of government policies of EU orientation, what we have in Turkey is a fully-grown illiberal regime with harsh anti-gender politics. As a fully-developed illiberal regime, Turkey displays very similar characteristics to the illiberal polypore state and its gendered aspects. But, when it comes to gender acting as symbolic glue, the Turkish case departs somewhat from the expected course and needs to be examined in its own right as an example where gender constitutes not the unifying element but the Achille's heel for the New Turkey.

"THERE IS A GROWING ATTEMPT TO CURB AND VIOLATE THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF LGBT PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THEIR RIGHT TO ASSOCIATION AND FREE ASSEMBLY."

The illiberal state and its gendered nature

The Turkish experience shows striking similarities with the illiberal polypore state and its gendered nature in all three characteristic attributes of the new regime, namely its securitization of civil society, familialism, and polypore nature. It is not clear whether the new Turkish regime can be evaluated as a kind of polypore state in so far as a polypore state feeds on the vital resources and institutions of European liberal democracy, given the fact that Turkey has never had such an establishment. Still, we can argue that for the last 30 years Turkish civil society and politics have been transformed to certain extent in the direction of liberal democracy and in line with the EU accession process led by the AKP. Thus, we can see many striking similarities such as appropriating the language and infrastructure of human rights, building a parallel civil society, and misusing democratic procedures to serve the ruling elite and their allies. In addition, the existing state apparatus for gender equality has been totally transformed into an apparatus to serve only family support services, marginalizing the term "women" and "gender equality" in the state bureaucracy. As for securitization, we have seen the massive deployment of a nationalist-culturalist ideology regarding a global conspiracy to destroy the nation against which the country needs to protect its distinct national values from encroachment from the outside Western world.[17] Moreover, we have witnessed the same fearmongering language about the bigger plots of global powers, (the plots of "the super-mind", as it is called by government circles) and the criminalization of human rights-based civil society on the basis of alleged associations with terrorism (including all organizations of the Kurdish women's movement).

Regarding familialism, we should note that it has been the most basic tenet of the governmental discourse, not only of its gender politics but the entire Islamic-conservative ideology in general. As a matter of fact, the AKP had inherited a strong legacy of familialism from its Turkish-İslamic tradition which was nothing new and surely not restricted to the AKP. Yet, the AKP turned familialism into the basis of an entire web of economic, political and ideological relations.[18] The AKP not only founded

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. Familialism has also been promoted and supported on various different levels and by multiple means such as the promotion of a strong pro-natal policy without any precedent 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 overtly Islamic cover both 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 Erdoğan often opposes the concept of "gender equality" as ignoring the basic natural (*fitrat*) sex 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 discursive 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 biological sex differences.[21]

Yet, side by side with this apparently "reasonable" conservative stance lie the more blatant forms of misogynist and discriminatory attitudes regarding the looks and manners of women shown by local party people, and a great deal of Islamo-fascist intervention in daily life by local officers, police forces and civilians. In fact, after the state of emergency regime in 2016, assaults on women protesting on the streets and on feminist organizations labelled as affiliated with terror have greatly intensified. Together with the increasing stress on the ideology of fitrat came the increasing assaults on not only feminists but any women who are deemed as rebellious in the domestic or public spheres.[22]

A major dimension of AKP's familialism has been its pro-natal policy with clear implications for reproductive rights.[23] Thus, in 2012 Erdoğan made an attempt to illegalize abortion on the grounds that it is immoral (indeed he declared it to be "murder") and also based on his firm conviction that the superpowers are plotting to reduce the Turkish population. It was entirely an attempt by Erdogan alone without any grassroots demand or support, so he had to withdraw his original plan to illegalize abortion altogether, though leaving behind various impediments for access to the services. Another inevitable aspect of the familialism has been the strengthening of heteronormativity backed by an increasing attack on LGBT rights. There is a growing attempt to curb and violate the fundamental rights of LGBT people, especially their right to association and free assembly. The Gay Pride parade has not been allowed since 2013 (when 100,000 people were reported to have joined in the Istanbul parade). The Ankara Governorship directly issued a ban in 2017 on all LGBT activities on the grounds of public morality and "protection against assault". As for the attacks on gender studies that seem to be typical of anti-gender movements, it is interesting to notice that so far, there has not been an attack on gender studies as such in the sense of labelling it as ideological or cutting funding etc. On the contrary, it seems to be the case that AKP is trying to appropriate the language of women's rights and institutions of women's research centers in the universities by eliminating dissident academics and appointing pro-government cadres.[24]

Turkey differ from the European cases

Despite the striking similarities regarding the gendered nature of the illiberal polypore state, the role and saliency of gender politics in relation to the wider Turkish political landscape seem to be rather different from the European cases. In fact, when looked from the perspective of the Turkish experience, the conception of gender as symbolic glue seems rather questionable. I think that there are two main reasons why gender does not act as symbolic glue, but as something problematic and even potentially divisive of the right-wing forces. First, we do not observe that anti-genderism exists as a coherent ideological construct unifying religious fundamentalists and non-religious populist right-wing actors. We observe a similar coalition of right-wing forces in Turkey, and the cement for this coalition of ultra-nationalists and Islamic forces can be said to be an ideology of Islamo-Turkism framed in an anti-colonial discourse together with an acute condemnation of human rights discourse. However, we see that the unifying cement essentially comprises statist and nationalistic (read as anti-Kurdish) sentiments and the gender question is not at the forefront. In other worlds we can say that the themes related to gender are mostly disguised or overlaid by the prominence of concerns for national security and national unity supposedly threatened by the USA and EU.[25] Gender might act like a symbolic glue, particularly in Central Europe where it becomes a strategic identity marker in the absence of other important ethnic and religious markers, as in the case of Poland for example as observed by Grzebalska. Yet this certainly is not the case in Turkey where several deep seated identity markers such as ethnic and religious divisions have always been at the heart of the political conflicts.[26]

Gender as the Achilles' heel

The other reason why gender does not act as symbolic glue relates to the specific content of gender politics in contemporary Turkey. Today the most heated topic of gender debate in Turkey revolves around the problem of rampant violence against women and child abuse in such a way as to make gender politics not the strongest part of the regime but its most contested one, even its Achilles' heel. I argue that this is the main reason why the Turkish case differs from the European cases. To understand why and how, we need to consider the importance of gender violence in relation to the problem of masculinity, a crucial topic mostly neglected in the discussions of anti-gender movements, which basically draw our attention to familialism in the broader context of nationalistic responses to global neoliberalism. The literature on Eastern Europe mainly considers the phenomenon as a nationalist response with a large number of social equality concerns, employing the gender issue as symbolic glue. I think that the problem with putting too much emphasis on the pro-family stance of anti-gender movements or illiberal regimes is the risk of overlooking the urgency and autonomy of the question of the (crisis of) masculinity. Yet, the question of masculinity should be taken seriously in any analysis of anti-gender movements, as some writers observe. Korolzcuk and Graff write, "Moral panics around the alleged destabilization of natural gender roles link anxieties about depopulation with grim visions of the end of patriarchy and men's power (often referred to as a "masculinity crisis").[27] Similarly, as Tryczyk puts it, "antigenderism at least partly reflects the growing frustration of men with no economic prospects who turn to patriarchal values rather than address the economic sources of their misfortunes".[28]

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 relations as women and LGBT people are empowered and as patriarchal male bonding is being undermined by neoliberalism.[29] In analyzing the Turkish case we must consider hyper-masculinity as a sign of the crisis of masculinity in order to account for rampant gender violence. The Turkish case is also crucial in drawing attention to the critical difference between traditionalism-conservatism and hyper-masculinity. Whereas conservatism calls for support for pro-family policies and traditional values, a political regime which reflects the characteristics of hyper-masculinity (or is indeed an embodiment of heightened masculinity) can neither be explained by its recourse to family values nor any traditional gender roles. On the contrary, it can only be understood in the context of the dissolution of the patriarchal family and is directly reflected in the problem of domestic violence and child abuse. In fact, I consider that the term conservatism cannot really capture the novelty and cruelty of the gendered nature of the new regime.[30] What we see here is not power but the demise of the "traditional" or "patriarchal family" amid the dissolution and fall of the state of law and the ensuing crisis of patriarchal power.[31] The resulting pathology is a far-right male supremacist reaction with heavy sexism, heterosexism and great deal of misogyny against the public visibility and human rights of women and LGBT people. The interwoven nature of gender, violence and masculinity as well as its centrality for the new regime has been more apparent since the suppression of the 2016 attempted coup.[32]

Although the government tries to present itself as supporting women against violence or supporting working mothers, the growing masculine or hyper-masculine character is too apparent to hide. We see this character most strikingly in the problem of rampant gender violence and child abuse as a form of gender violence.[33] As I said before, gender politics is not the strongest aspect of the right-wing populist attempt to form a hegemonic bloc; it is its Achilles' heel, its weakest, most vulnerable point. The reason for this should now be clearer: the very heated and polarized debate on gender violence is such that the AKP government is held at least politically responsible if not seen as totally and directly triggering or encouraging it. So, considering the problem of widespread domestic violence and child abuse, the "threat to family" comes not from the outside world, i.e. the West, (in the form of liberal gender equality laws imposing sex education, over-sexualization of children or gay marriage) but from within the patriarchal family and society backed by the new regime in its attempts to erode the legal rights of women to get a divorce, or to escape from domestic violence by divorce, and to lower the age of consent etc. In contrast to the "concerned parents" of European anti-gender movements who depict the children as in danger of being overly sexualized or under threat from gender equality politics, in the Turkish case, this "threatened child" figure is mostly a real victim of child abuse in a domestic setting or in government-controlled educational units or forced underage marriages.[34] Further we should add that the pro-family and pro-morality image of new regime is grossly damaged and contested as many incidents of sexual scandals involving conservative politicians are revealed to the public and the covert practice of adultery among religious people is widely and fiercely reproached by the secular sections. Overall we can say that both the pro-family stance and the morality of the Islamic government are highly contested in Turkish politics. I am not arguing that the existence of an acute problem of gender violence is a barrier for anti-gender mobilization in itself. Rather, the specific contingencies of social and political forces in Turkey and particularly the impact of a strong women's movement block the emergence of a wide coalition of rightwing forces based on gender as symbolic glue.

A new episode of anti-gender politics?

In this article, I repeatedly pointed out that Turkey is a particular case in that there has been no anti-gender movement as yet. Yet, I have to say something that could cause an interesting change in the course of the argument, not for the time being but certainly for the future. It is my very recent observation that seeds of an anti-gender movement in the European style are currently being planted. This is very recent development which needs to be watched and about which I can only say a few things to point out to its novel character. It reflects a more radical Islamist reaction to the AKP and is mostly based on the crucial politicization of some critical gender issues regarding family law, such as child custody and divorce maintenance payment as well as the law protecting women against violence. With the emergence of this new discourse we are witnessing an

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 case of the currently unsuccessful divorced fathers' movement. 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.[35] This discourse of masculine victimization and male resentment is a real novelty for Turkish gender politics, though it resonates highly with the incitement of sentiments of resentment and rage in the new Turkey.[36] It shows that the masculine discourse is moving away from the protectionist religious and traditional discourses and calling for justice for victimized men.[37] 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 "perversity". It is a very interesting coincidence that just in the first weeks of 2019, 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 "fools 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.[38]

Feminist politics

The rise of anti-gender movements in the broader context of rightwing populisms and illiberal regimes poses important questions as to the contemporary feminist politics and feminist theorizing. As Gunnarsson, Payne and Tornhill put it, the difficult question is how to repoliticize gender in a context where the depoliticization of gender and sexual diversity by state bureaucracies and corporate structures meets the repoliticization of gender by rightwing populisms.[39] Thus once again it is time to reinvent the political dimension of feminism. We have already witnessed some remarkable feminist resistance and challenges to the new threats in many different parts of the world such as the USA, Ireland, Poland and Argentina in the last few years. Inspired by these global trends and motivated to go further, a new feminist theorizing on feminist politics has emerged which promotes two basic and recurring themes. One is reclaiming feminism's lost socialist or anti-capitalist dimension.[40] And the other is a call for a transnational and intersectional feminism.[41] As for the first strand of critique, Nancy Fraser has set the terms of the debate, highlighting the problem of feminism being complicit with neoliberalism in its individualism and in its focusing so much on identity politics at the expense of social justice and economic issues.[42] Whether one agrees with Fraser or not regarding the responsibility of feminism in legitimizing the neoliberal order,[43] 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 populisms.

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 certain 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 particular line of leftist thinking is emerging that proposes the idea of radical democracy and leftist populism which is currently being revived in feminist thinking as well. Thus we see that many feminist observers of the illiberal regimes of Central and Eastern Europe are highly critical of previous and existing feminist strategies which are falling short of challenging rightwing populism.[44] Petö and others, for example, suggest that "resistance alone is not enough" and a new progressive politics is needed for the enhancement of feminist politics.[45] Petö suggests that progressive politics should move away from the technocratic and NGO style of functioning and engage in building legitimacy and mass support for the cause through political action. We have recently witnessed that women in Hungary are coming forward in the opposition to Orbán's macho politics.[46] In Poland, the reason for the success of the Black Protest is that "the struggle of women has become constructed as a struggle against the regime".[47] Similarly in Argentina, the Green Wave movement represents a perfect and inspiring model whereby we witness the emergence of a "feminist people" by forming a chain of equivalences between gender equality demands and other demands of social justice against the neoliberal-conservative ruling coalition.[48] Hence, Di Marco claims that "the feminist people" articulates the counter-hegemonic resistance to the ruling hegemonic bloc under the leadership of Catholic Church.[49]

Thus, a growing strand of feminist thinking argues for a kind of leftist populism in the form of a "feminist we" that is much indebted to the idea of radical democracy elaborated by political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. As Laclau and Mouffe have shown, for socialist politics the choice is never between identity or "the cultural" and "the economic" That's why calls for a return to "the social" would not be enough to tackle the new challenges of illiberal anti-genderism. The real question has always been and still is the creation of a "we the people" on the political level.[50] Mouffe explains the rise of right-wing populism as a reaction of classes that are the losers of globalization and abandoned by neoliberal regimes. She suggests that the left must create a populist frontier of all classes against elites and the establishment.[51] 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 counterpoised to a small "them" through a war of position in and outside the existing institutions. In line with 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".

An inspiring moment for radical democracy and feminist politics

So, how are we going to think the prospects of feminist "populism" – "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 leading political and intellectual force in the formation of a "we the 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 history which has the most vital implications for both radical democratic and feminist politics.

Between 2013–2015 we saw the formation of a chain of equivalences between the different democratic struggles against an authoritarian neoliberal regime and the emergence of a radical-democratic "people's" formation, expressed firstly in the Gezi protests in June 2013 and then in the HDP's electoral victory in June 2015.[52] 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 feminist 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 many resistance movements concerning human rights, secularism, the environment, and urbanization had been rapidly growing and transforming the political landscape despite the ongoing neoliberalization. Moreover, a vibrant feminist movement had already emerged and succeeded in forming intersectional coalitions to a certain extent within women's movements and while being strongly involved in all other democratic struggles as well. Thus, although the Gezi resistance appeared as a really striking "event" in terms of its novelty and unpredictability 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.[53] The huge expansion of the intersectional sphere was striking and spectacular, representing a rising politics of coalition building prescribed by both intersectionality, radical democratic and queer politics. Crucially, it was the women's movement and LGBT movement that played a strategic role in the process. The women's movement was the constitutive part of the newly emerging democratic-popular formation and played a crucial role in both the Gezi movement and HDP politics.[54] The strategic role of women's mass participation as well as the role of feminist and LGBT movements in the constructing of this new people formation was remarkable. It took many forms, finally culminating in June 2015 in the İstanbul Pride Parade where more than 100,000 people participated.

And then came the backlash. It was such a promising and inspiring political moment and it was so powerful even in its initial phase that it had to be severely suppressed by the government resorting to all kinds of extreme violations of the rules of democracy. After 2013, and as a reaction to the possibility of an alternative counter-hegemonic politics, a new and hyper-masculine regime has been set in motion. It is important to note that even under the oppressive conditions of the state of emergency, the women's movement proved to be still alive, in fact as the only resisting political force on the streets. The vitality of the women's movement was expressed by the huge numbers of women who gathered to celebrate Women's Day on March 8, 2016. (50,000 women joined the Night March in Istanbul). It was also proved when women successfully protested to curb several of government initiatives to introduce new laws threating women's rights. Yet whatever the resistance capacity of the feminist movement, it is clear that "resistance alone is not enough". A new strategy should be developed in order to challenge the new regime. I believe that the real question for our times must be: what could be the original contribution of 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 established social divisions and boundaries.

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 it…the first step is to re-establish what has been lost."[55] I hope that the generous potentials of feminism can be re-invented and drawn upon to help to recover the idea of radical democracy.

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AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES AND CRIMINALIZATION OF CRITICAL VOICES

Turkey

by **Derya Keskin**

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 as president through the June 2018 national parliamentary elections, also held under emergency rule and thus lacking justice as well as political and public acceptance in general.

Women's movement and Gender Studies

Erdoğan, a leader who openly argues that women and men cannot be treated equally because it goes against the laws of nature, and who emphasizes the importance of family and the role of motherhood at every opportunity, was re-elected president with increased power in June 2018. Holding power for the last 17 years, Erdoğan and his governments had already been trying to eliminate the laws that empower women and install new policies that would change women's lives in all aspects. The latest developments made the implementation of these policies easier for the government while things only got harder for women and LGBTI individuals as well as those who study or do research in these areas, including gender issues in general.

The AKP's authoritarian regime had always been hostile to all critical voices, and the state of emergency only made it easier for the government to attack those who speak up. Hundreds of journalists and media workers, thousands of students and a number of politicians have been imprisoned without fair trials. Censorship and self-censorship have become widespread in the country, including in the media and the universities.

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 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 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", Academics 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 violence in the south-eastern part of the country, and deemed the state responsible for restarting the peace process. Meanwhile, the number of the signatories reached 2,212 in the following weeks until the petition was closed.

Dismissed academics have been prevented from being hired at public and private universities, and their passports have been cancelled. Some of the signatories living in smaller provinces were physically and verbally threatened, some were detained, and five were imprisoned for periods between one month and two and a half months, based on the petition. At the same time, Academics for Peace have been presenting a historical example of resistance and solidarity. They have founded over 10 Solidarity Academies (SAs) around the country since the academic purge started in 2016, such as Ankara Solidarity Academy (ADA), Eskişehir School, İstanbul Solidarity Academy (İstanbulDA, İzmir Solidarity Academy (İDA), Kocaeli Solidarity Academy (KODA) as well as a gender/solidarity academy named AramızDA (in between us). In addition, having worked together through several workshops in the last few years, the members of individual SAs felt the need for a joint structure for all Academics for Peace and those around them and decided to initiate a platform which later became the umbrella association of all SAs in July 2018, called BirAraDa (Together) Association for Science, Art, Education, Research and Solidarity. Academics for Peace along with their colleagues have been organizing seminars, workshops, reading groups, conferences and other informal gatherings open to the public at their local solidarity academies. In fact, SAs have become collective learning places not only for the signatories of the peace petition and their students but also for other academics and the general public. They are determined to continue to be a gathering place for the promotion of 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.

Turkish police fired tear gas to break up a crowd of several thousand women who gathered in central Istanbul on March 8, 2019.

PHOTO: KEMAL ASLAN / REUTERS

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 İstiklal 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.

Academics for Peace, the majority of whom are women, mostly working on women's and gender issues, had been facing trial on charge of "propagandizing for a terrorist organization" for signing the Peace Petition since December 5, 2017. 646 Academics for Peace had stood trial as of July 26, 2019, when the Constitutional Court ruled that penalization of Academics for Peace on charge of "propagandizing for a terrorist organization" violated their freedom of expression, after examining individual applications of 10 Academics for Peace who had been sentenced to prison and therefore taken their cases to the higher court. Following the decision of the Constitutional Court, local courts started to rule for the acquittals of Academics for Peace. 362 Academics have been acquitted as of October 8, 2019, while 250 ongoing trials are expected to result in acquittals. The verdict of the Constitutional Court is also expected to affect those who have already been convicted.

While the verdict of the Constitutional Court has been welcomed by the Academics for Peace, their lawyers and those who support them, it only eliminates one of the rights violations of the academics, since it does not result in the reinstatement of other rights including lost positions and thus all other rights attached to them. In addition, there have not been any developments in terms of restoring peace in the country. Therefore, the struggle will continue for the reinstatement of all rights of the academics and others as well as for permanent peace in the country. ■

Derya Keskin is affiliated with KODA (Kocaeli Academy for Solidarity) AramızDA Gender Research Association, BirAraDa Association for Science, Art, Education, Research and Solidarit.

Feminist protest in Brasilia, Brasil, in november 2019.
PHOTO: MÍDIA NINJA/FLICKR

Latin America

REVIEW OF A TURBULENT 2019

by **Ana Fiol**

A year ago in Stockholm, colleagues from the Baltic Countries and Latin America met to study and compare the contexts where anti-gender politics and democratic resistance from women's and feminist movements were taking place across continents and countries.

Latin America experienced the intensification of a dual political process in 2019. On the one hand, we saw the growth and advance of anti-gender politics supported by religious fundamentalism and police brutality; on the other, the growing prominence of women's and feminist movements in the insurrectional struggles of our sub-continent. A green wave of disobedience and defiance has swept through Central America, Ecuador, Chile, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia and Argentina.

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.[1] All governments, both popular and center-left as well as neo-liberal and conservative, base their economic power on commodity extraction. This is true from the deposed Evo Morales (Bolivia) to the former 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.[2]

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.[3]

Resistance and responses

In this context, the organizations of indigenous and urban women, of young millennial artists, journalists in social networks, workers, trade unionists and student organizations, has not stopped growing, strengthening and developing new ways of doing 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 children and teenagers, reports of missing persons and widespread sexual abuse from the police and *pacos* [cops].[4]

The peoples of Ecuador, Chile and Colombia have been on the streets, squares and assemblies to demand an end to the neoliberal 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 evangelic 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 unleashed against officials of the *Mas* (Movement Towards Socialism, Morales' mass party), the unions, indigenous people and all the institutions and symbols of the "Plurinational state of Bolivia". 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 president of the Senate swearing by a huge bible (with no opposition present), while police forces burned *wiphalas*, [the alternative Bolivian flag]. The mayor of the municipality of Vinto, Patricia Arce, 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, evangelist ideology is the spearhead of US politics. In the 1970s, the Catholic religion was used as the dominant ideology and the left was seen as the enemy, but now evangelical groups are used as a starting point and indigenous cultures as enemies.[5]

In Brazil, the Brasil Libre movement, which emerged in the context of Dilma Roussef's impeachment, and the "Schools without Party" 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 carried bibles and crucifixes and burned photos of the philosopher where she was portrayed as a devil and as a witch.[6]

Nationalism and anti-genderism

In Colombia, the revision of the school coexistence manuals ordered by the Constitution (2015) and the peace agreement between the FARC-EP guerrillas and the government, which coincided 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-LGBTQI+ 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 legalization 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 democracy throughout Latin America.

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Argentina

Argentinian politics and feminism – a love story?

by **Jenny Ingridsdotter**

PHOTO: MARIANA TERRILE

ARGENTINA HAS experienced a wave of emerging feminism in recent years. Feminist organizations seems 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.

This process was accompanied by mass mobilizations where activists changed the visual landscape of Buenos Aires with the symbolic presence of the color green, seen massively in green handkerchiefs, recalling the white handkerchiefs the Madres of Plaza de Mayo used as they marched in order to claim their "disappeared" children back during and after the last dictatorship (1976–1982). 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.

Victoria:

"Through feminism I transformed my life"

"Since 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 in 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 "Evita" 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 when he won the 1995 elections. I was 14 years and when the results were announced on the TV my mum cried. Until that moment I had not thought that the result in an election could affect my everyday life. Then 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.

DURING THE EVENTS of the economic crisis in 2001, I was 20 years old and I had an unequal relationship with a guy, that appeared to be romantic but in reality was rather masochist. However, on December 20, we took to the streets – as did everyone else. We were both in fact drunk and I would say "in our own bubble", but yet we could feel that it was a historical event; something was happening, and you just had to be there. I had an alienated sensation at that time – I was more like an observer, unlike everyone else I wasn't screaming, "que se vayan todos [everyone must go]," which was a demand for all politicians to leave their posts. Unlike the majority I had not lost my savings in the crisis. I was not interested in politics and I had no idea about it … Now that I think about it, perhaps that was quite typical for that generation of the 1990s …

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 HIJOS, 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 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 hardcore music bands that I listened to, because in their lyrics they talked about the military assassins of the 70s.

ANYHOW, I 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 asked young people in 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 new Law on Media arrived before the Congress, or when the Law on Equal Marriage was discussed. However, in those moments you just had to be there. I remember that I felt an obligation to go and support the passing of those laws. I believe that the governments of Néstor and Cristina listened to and gave space to social demands that had been postponed for a long time. Now it is easier for me to see how my life changed throughout those years, that there were possibilities or openings for other ways of living that had never crossed my mind before.

FEMINISM TODAY IS very complex; I am going to try to think about the beginning, about the feminism of Ni Una Menos, that is, as it became massive in the cities. On the one hand, it seems to me that feminism transformed and continues to transform our society. Different forms of violence against women and dissent – transvestites, trans, lesbians, bisexuals, fags – became visible and recognizable, violence that was previously not even seen from a distance (the violence of not being able to abort, the violence of harassment and sexual abuse, the violence of mandatory motherhood …). Today you can talk about abortion, you can talk and discuss on the street, at school, at work, at the hospital. Before 2015 it was not spoken about, nor was it named, apart from by militant feminists. And of course, from last year on when the question of abortion was discussed in the congress, the issue became public.

My criticism of this movement is something you see particularly in the cities of Argentina: in many cases, there is something fashionable and very superficial about it, people just uploading their photos from the protests to Instagram. And with that, there is also something else: an act of ignoring the past, feminist history, the feminists who have been fighting for decades in Argentina, and not only for abortion. By this I mean that suddenly, there are very popular characters (actresses, musicians, etc.) that call themselves feminists and say, "I am in favor of abortion," but don't know about the fight for legal abortion and that it has not just started at this moment. And this ignorance makes them say anything, such as, "I am in favor of abortion, but we already know that no woman really wants to abort because it is horrible". Maybe for a lot of women it's a relief, or at least for me it would be.

This is just one example. I understand that you have to start somewhere, and, in the beginning, we do things like that, a little from the outside, without understanding at all … and over time we get more and more involved, don't we?

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 very 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 implied you by 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 still is, 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 work, sometimes not. 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 from that process of learning there is no turning 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, it 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." ■

> "When I heard and read the feminists, everything began to fall into its place."

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

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

PHOTO: MARIANA TERRILE

Argentina

NI UNA MENOS – NOT ONE WOMAN LESS

How feminism could become a popular struggle

by **Paula Biglieri**

Ni Una Menos (literally meaning "Not one less", standing for "not one woman less") is the signifier that has become the name of a whole popular feminist movement. Its moment of irruption can be clearly traced back to June 3, 2015, when thousands of women took over different squares across Argentina, but in particular the National Congress square in Buenos Aires city. The scene turned out to be shocking for many people as the call to demonstrate against femicides and all other kinds of gender-based violence, after the horrifying murder of Chiara Páez (a 14-year old pregnant teenager who was killed by her boyfriend), turned into a gigantic collective testimony of all those who had suffered gender violence. The images of so many different people carrying banners with the names and pictures of their beloved women who had been killed or injured, crying out their stories, testifying the horror, provoked a reconfiguration of social antagonisms. And this reconfiguration had to do with the fact that, for the very first time, feminism was becoming part of the popular struggle in Argentina. Let us examine the argument in detail.

"FEMINISM ESTABLISHED A NEW ANTAGONISTIC FRONTIER BETWEEN 'US, THE PEOPLE AGAINST PATRIARCHY' AND 'THEM, THE ONES THAT REPRODUCE GENDER INEQUALITY THAT AFFECTS THE PEOPLE'."

If we use the theoretical tools for discourse analysis developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe[1] 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 – satisfied or not – remains isolated without establishing by contiguity any solidarity link with other demands. In other words, it does not participate in any equivalential articulation of demands.[2] "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 limited 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,[3] we understand popular demands as those that – although different from each other – establish by contiguity a solidarity link when facing a common antagonistic "other". This solidarity link, known as a chain of equivalence, is the first step towards constituting a broader social subjectivity, namely "the people". As mentioned, we can locate this change in the massive demonstration of June 3, 2015 which – retroactively – acquired the status of an event. This is because the irruption, on the one hand, was not within the given system of countable possibilities of the social space and, on the other, when it publicly exposed that gender violence was not an exception but an widespread practice, it modified the way in which social antagonisms were disposed up to that point. However, one thing needs to be mentioned regarding the discursive context of the irruption of "Not one woman less". By the time this event took place there was a 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.[4] 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. Then we can say that thanks to and beyond this discursive context, the irruption of "Not one woman less" and its becoming a popular demand reshaped social antagonisms in a double sense: firstly, 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", as well as the different popular organizations that compose feminism from within.

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 2003 and 2004. Therefore, it was obviously an already inscribed demand in the social space, but the irruption of "Not one woman less" re-signified 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 effectively 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" were also linked to demands such as the rejection of the closing down of public gender-based programs developed by the former left-wing populist government; the rejection of police repression against the National Women's Meeting in October 2016 in Rosario city; the rejection of the irregular imprisonment of the native community leader Milagro Sala in the Province of Jujuy; and the International Women's Strike in March 2017 also included the demand to reject austerity policies that mainly affected women and directly pushed them into precarious situations, etc. In any case, this slipping of the meanings and signifiers attached to the women's movement was linked to broader political subjectivity, "the people". The women's movement was associated with a series of heterogeneous demands not necessarily considered feminist but usually as part of the long-standing tradition of popular struggles associated with the "social justice" element. At this point we would like to emphasize that "social justice" is the empty signifier that has been the key nodal point articulating every popular struggle over the past sixty years in Argentina's political life.[5] We can think of "social justice" as the structuring element of an ever-increasing chain of equivalence of rights in terms of a livable life. This is the reason why the "green wave" [6] was structured around the nodal point "social justice" and not only in terms of a basic individualistic civil right (I decide about my own body), but mainly as a social right. This is a crucial aspect that makes the women's movement in Argentina mostly anti-neoliberal.

THIRD, THE DEVELOPMENT of the feminist struggle in Argentina gives us a key to understanding how feminism in a neoliberal context can become a decisive emancipatory fight. Because if feminism remains as a particularity or an isolated element within the social space – that is, if it attempts to remain as a demand of identity – it is likely to become an easy target for the markets and to be incorporated into the circuit of neoliberal practices and translated into a mere commodity. But if we leave any essentialism behind 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 overflow 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 internationalist signifier that 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 femicides, 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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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* was in power in the 40s and 50s.

6 The emblem of wearing a green handkerchief was initially associated with the demand of legalizing abortion; now it is linked to the feminist movement as such.

Argentina

THE FEMINIST PEOPLE

PHOTO: MARIANA TERRILE

National and transnational articulations. The case of Argentina.

by **Graciela Di Marco**

Feminisms 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 motivated more than a million women, lesbians, transgender people and men to go onto the streets. Although the Senate rejected 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 feminisms in Argentina, the demands and articulations that emerged and opened the possibility of a historical momentum 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 "battlefield" between neoliberal and populist discourses. When 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[1] and Jacques Rancière,[2] there is a people when the plebs – subaltern groups – articulate their claims to be included in the democratic count.

IN RECENT YEARS, many European and US scholars have considered populism solely as rightist, against migration, racist and xenophobic, etc. Also, when theorists that study illiberalism[3] associate it with one type of populism (right-wing)[4] it seems as if the experiences in some Latin American countries with left-wing populist regimes are not taken into account; for example, the processes in Brazil (2002–2016) and in Argentina (2003–2015). In these left-wing populisms there was progress in economic, social and cultural rights. However, this process was incomplete, due to historical structural factors and the results of the implementation of neoliberal policies since the 1990s in these countries. In general, both in Brazil and in Argentina the role of the state was held in higher appreciation and structural reforms were carried out to change neoliberal policies. This was accomplished together with popular representation and the deepening of democratic institutions in three key dimensions: a) political: full functioning of democratic institutions and republican division of state powers, activating collective actors, widening democratic citizenship; b) economic: towards redistribution and supervision and control of the economy carried out by the state; c) human rights recognition (gender, sex, race, ethnicity, etc.). Beyond differences between the countries, emphasis was placed on both on the struggle against social exclusion, the search for social justice, the effective exercise of democratic institutions and respect for human rights.

This is particularly important for this investigation, since more sexual, political, economic and cultural advances, included in the broad framework of human rights, can be attributed in Argentina to the left populist stage. However, the key question of the abortion law was not enabled to come before the national Congress until 2018. The feminist movement has brought the struggle regarding abortion legalization into the public arena and the phase of it being addressed has been reached. It was approved by the Chamber of Deputies; however, as I already mentioned, it did not pass the Senate. This fact manifested the interference of conservative forces, in particular the Catholic Church and some evangelical churches, in matters related to the rights of women, lesbians and transgender people.

THE LEGALIZATION OF ABORTION is set in the framework of sexuality as a political issue, considering the widening of sexual citizenship for women, lesbian and transgender people, in the same way as happened in the case of the egalitarian marriage (2010) and the gender identity laws (2012).[5] 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 a human rights and public policy approach, therefore severed from individual civil servants' religious beliefs. This shows the relevance of deepening the secular state, that like democracy can always be widened and perfected. It should guarantee women, lesbians and transgender people the ability to take decisions over their bodies and freely pursue their own life projects.

"WHEN 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."

Enabling the legalization of abortion to be addressed is the product of the women's and feminists' movement's history. This struggle has not started recently; in fact it dates back to thirty-five years ago, almost the same number of years since the democratization process started in Argentina in 1983 and developing along with it. The legalization of abortion has been discussed collectively for more than fourteen years and the project has been submitted to the National Congress seven times. Many scholars who pursue an intense and long-standing feminist activism consider it necessary to "regain our genealogies, remember and build up on our own history".

I agree with Claudia Anzorena[6] and María Florencia Alcaraz et al.[7] that the key to understanding what goes on in women's, lesbian and transgender movements is in the Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres – ENM *(National Women Meetings – NWM)*, the most important demonstrations of women's and sexualities activism in Argentina.

Therefore I choose to approach the analysis of the Argentinian women's movement by presenting the main characteristics of the National Women Meetings, NWM, as these are the core of feminist expansion and articulation points. Those meetings started in 1986, initiated by a group of Argentinian feminist women that had participated in the Women's Third International Conference in Nairobi organized by the United Nations (1985). The NWM are anti-patriarchal, anti-neoliberal, autonomous, horizontal, self-summoned, pluralist, massive, and non-institutionalized. The National Women Meetings are held once a year in a province chosen by the participants and organized by an ad hoc commission.

The core of the NWM organization are thematic workshops, faithful to the horizontality of the movement, since they enable reflection and debate while at the same time facilitating the creation of networks. They cover a wide variety of problematic issues: contraception, abortion, living conditions, health, education, unemployment, consequences of neoliberalism, external indebtedness and adjustment, which were always denounced in the NWM.

From 1997 women from the incipient organizations of unemployed workers and others that were part of various organizations that emerged in the protests and pickets around 1995 began to appear at the NWM. These women denounced the hardships they were going through.[8]

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 sexuality subject to procreation, of traditional motherhood as the basis of female identity, and of denial of the different ways of living sexuality.[9]

In the NWM held in the Province of Salta in 2002, the presence of female piketers (piqueteras), assembly members, trade unionists, and militants 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 in the NWM that had already been announced in Salta. The attendance of 12,000 women showed that more and more were activists of social movements, piqueteras, workers from "recovered" factories, indigenous and peasant women. Rights related to sexual and reproductive health were among the most frequently demanded. Like other times, one of the branches (called "Founding Line") of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (*Mothers of Plaza de Mayo)* was present, and the use of green handkerchiefs to symbolize the struggle in favor of the legalization of abortion was inspired by their white handkerchiefs.

THE IMPACT of the movements on women was immense, and it became the impetus for them to begin claiming 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 origins (rural, indigenous, urban, poor and middle class, employed or unemployed, feminists), was accentuated. The position presented was in favor of the legalization of and free access to abortion and contraceptive methods, and to the incorporation of sex education in 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 decriminalization strategies. In the following NWMs, the participation of women from different movements increased, various organizations and networks were organized, and links with feminists were accentuated.

IN 2015, 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 33rd NWM 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 plurinational character, and lesbian, transvestite, transgender, bisexual and non-binary identities. In October 2019, on the last day of the 34th Meeting, held in La Plata, (Province of Buenos Aires), the title Encuentro Plurinacional de Mujeres, Lesbianas, Bisexuales, Trans, Travesties, Intersex y No Binaries (*Plurinational Meeting of women, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites, and transgender, intersex and non-binary people*) was voted by acclamation.[10] Zulema Enriquez, Quechua, journalist and teacher said at the meeting: "The meeting is no longer national and 'of women', the meeting is plurinational, and of women, lesbians, transvestites, and transgender, bisexual and non-binary people; this touches me on a personal level because it talks about my identity, because it names me".[11]

The process I have described shows the emergence and articulation of new feminist demands and identities in Argentina. In this essay I will refer firstly to the notion of "feminist people" that I have been developing since 2009,[12] following Laclau's theory of populism.[13] This people, 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 emergence of the Ni Una 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).[14]

The feminist people

Women's demands, participation in the movements and in the NWMs as well as the Catholic Church's strategies since 1997 to boycott 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. I have stated that: "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 counter-offensive".[15]

This confrontation was intensified in 2018 when the abortion law was addressed in the National Congress between April and August 2018, in the invited key speakers' presentations in front of the committees in both the chambers of deputies and senators. As a consequence, a new call for collective apostasy in several parts of the country was organized and became more massive when the Senate rejected the bill to legalize abortion.[16]

The articulation of each collective group's concern with that of others can trigger the radicalization of the claims for the broadening of rights. These groups may find themselves in equivalent positions upon challenging the existing hegemony and as a consequence, create a people – an antagonistic formation – as the result of unifying various demands in a stable signifying system that allows equivalence consolidation[17] I called this a "feminist people". It is a contingent political construction and not a sociological entity.[18]

Laclau[19] refers to the hegemonic construction when a particular demand takes on a universal representation that is always impossible and incommensurable. These people, quoting Rancière:[20]

> **"... 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 polemical 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).[21] 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 Rancière refers to as a dispute about who is understood to be in the democracy contingent and not predetermined count, which is the "feminist people's" 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 momentum in which feminists and other movements, actors from trade unions and political parties articulate their demands regarding legal abortion, women's rights, laicism and in doing so, oppose patriarchalism as well as neoliberalism.[22] 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 heterogeneous – that are decisive in establishing an antagonistic border."[23]**

He also refers to the fact that the heterogeneous is never a pure exteriority because it inhabits the very logic of the internal constitution.[24] Women's/sexual identities are not the binary opposite of the male category, nor its complement;[25] 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,[26] 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 equivalence, 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 equivalence 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 rhizomatous structure, their networks and their local, transnational, face to face and cyber space articulations. Feminisms do not have leaders or owners, they follow neither a canonical feministic 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" nucleus is made up of women, lesbians, gays, transvestites, transsexual and intersexual people, in their struggle towards full citizenship.[27]

"THE 'FEMINIST PEOPLE' IS WIDENING THE HEAT OF THE STRUGGLES DAY BY DAY, INCLUDING NEW MOVEMENTS, ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS."

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 an extensive quotation by the latter, in which he wonders if the leader can be replaced by something different: a shared trend, a desire that a crowd could participate in.[28] Also, when referring to the new internationalism and the possibility of creating chains of equivalences through a common language, he reflects on the obsolescence of traditional institutional forms of political mediation.[29]

The "feminist people" is an identity that includes feminisms and other subordinate collectives, since it comprises an articulation through a process that builds it. It confronts traditional sectors, through the demand for the separation between sexuality and procreation, between church and state, since the demand for the legalization of abortion is an empty signifier of full citizenship: That is sexual citizenship, but also economic, and cultural. This demand for secularism and pluralism builds a frontier and confronts the patriarchal discourses hegemonically represented by the conservative Catholic Church and allies from some evangelical churches.

To sum up, the "feminist people" is a counter-hegemonic articulation that includes all kind of feminist identities and demands. The distinction exists among historical middle-class feminists, working class people, aboriginals, afro-descendants, LGBTTIQ, migrants, peasants, persons with disabilities, youth, adults, males, but right now they do not delimit rigid compartments. The theory of intersectionality is of course needed to acknowledge the complexity of identities and to attain 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 the notion of horizontal feminism flows defined as *sidestreaming feminism*.[30] 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 Fascist*") 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").[31] Some years ago, LGBTTIQ identities were debating about who made up the feminist subject, that is to say whether heterosexual women should be the sole subject of the legal abortion struggle or if this should be extended to all people capable of pregnancy (lesbian and transgender people), which has also in turn led to widening the vocabulary so as to include all bodies able to get pregnant.

From a multiplicity of territories and geographies, that are in turn global and local, a contingent articulation of anti-patriarchal and anti-neoliberal demands has been generated in a horizontal way with creativity, rebellion and boldness in a learning process at NWM throughout more than 30 years, in the collective actions that have a transnational outreach dating back a long time, in Ni Una Menos-mobilizations, that I will discuss next. In the streets and in the assemblies, the bodies and the voices become intertwined and connected in an intense way, the "feminist people" make statements, confront, negotiate and decide in equality, beside gender mainstreaming or any other leadership that may wish to head the process.

The collective identity also criticizes neoliberal paradigms and policies. It denounces the agreement of the prior government – whose term concluded in December 2019 – with the In-

ternational Monetary Fund (IMF), and the neoliberal discourses on work, social reproduction, care, etc., in the context of this stage of capitalism's virulence. In 2017 the Feminist Forum against the World Trade Organization (WTO) was organized in Buenos Aires, as also was the Feminist Forum against the G20 summit in 2018. In addition, there is an increase in organizations studying feminist economy.

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 feminisms and the cultural field, through a cycle of readings at the National Library. They initiated a demonstration in front of the National Congress to report the emergency situation of femicides in Argentina. Their strategies 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 Integral 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 victims; to deepen 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 subsequent years, just as massive, making claims against gender violence and femicides, male chauvinistic justice, unemployment, and poverty affecting women, especially the youngest. The demand for legal abortion was also presented. In 2016, demonstrations were held both in Peru and Mexico. In the latter, the motto was: "Vivas Nos Queremos" (*We want Ourselves Alive*), that was also incorporated in Argentina. Likewise, 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean joined in October 19, 2016 the Women's National Strike against femicides with the mottos:

"#NosotrasParamos" (#WeStrike), "#NiUnaMenos" (*#NotOne Less*),"#VivasNosQueremos"(*#WeWantO urselvesAlive*).

It was also called "#MiércolesNegro" (*#BlackWednesday*), echoing the name from the Black Monday that Polish women had carried out few days before.[32]

WHEN ANALYZING the above-mentioned Polish women's mobilization, Jenny Gunnarson Payne[33] asserts that when they referred to the government's intentions of prohibiting abortion, they built up a discursive frontier between "us" (women, girls and their allies) and the enemy (the government, the Catholic Church). Reflecting upon this, she wonders: "*Can women be 'the people'*?". As already mentioned in the Argentinian case, she emphasizes the extension of demands, and the Czarny Protest's "we feminist" articulation and the extension of the common "we" as well as the common "enemy", through the special space and temporal articulations of feminist struggles. Her analysis concludes with the expression "the women as 'the people'", thus approaching "the feminist people" notion from another context.

On November 25, 2016 many demonstrations were carried out in at least 138 cities in Argentina, as well as in Chile, Mexico, Uruguay, Bolivia, Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, Ecuador, El Salvador and the United States. There were also events in Spain and France. The actions developed during 2015 and 2016 paved the way for the Women's International Strike "*#NosotrasParamos*" (#WeStrike), on Women's International Day, March 8, 2017, organized through coordination between feminist organizations from several continents. The strike and the march towards Plaza de Mayo in the city of Buenos Aires, called to focus on economic and political inequality, male chauvinistic and femicide violence against women, were massive. In February 2018, a demonstration in front of the National Congress, carrying and raising green handkerchiefs (*pañuelos*), that are the symbol of the National Campaign for Safe, Legal and Free Abortion (called *pañuelazo*), took place followed by the Women's International Day demonstration on March 8, 2018, and many activities against criminalization and for legalization of abortion.

The Ni Una Menos slogans 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 demonstrations. Instead, they were very critical of the NWM and feminist activism, as in the case of the demonstrations and rallies in 2017 and 2018.

"NEW ACTORS – TEENAGERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE – ARE GOING OUT ONTO THE STREETS AND CARRYING OUT ACTIVISM THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS."

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 homogenous. On the one hand, on the side of patriarchal discourses, horror at femicide brutality, reports against violent men, and public policy demands were observed. Yet on the other hand, in many cases, there was neither criticism of unequal gender and sex relationships, nor regarding the Catholic Church, nor demands to deepen the secular state, while other aspects included ignorance or rejection of lesbians and transgender people, rejection of abortion legalization, and lack of consideration regarding the violence, ill treatment, humiliation and disrespect suffered by many women that decide to have an abortion, and the health risk they face when they do not have the resources to undergo the procedure safely.

I consider that when the Ni Una Menos demand emerged, it was a "floating signifier".[34] This means that it found itself being pulled by very different chains of equivalence (put simply: traditional and antipatriarchal), as well as there is a permanent frontier shifting. The claims against multiple forms of violence against women are addressed towards institutions and can be differentially satisfied (taking each demand separately). Laclau[35] considers that, when the system faces demands, it can absorb them differentially. They are affirmations of particularisms and are isolated from other demands. If they are satisfied as particular demands (absorbed, administered, and colonized by the State), they are inscribed in the hegemonic institutional logic of the difference. When the demands escape from the hegemonic discourses and are articulated, a momentum of popular demands may appear. They can enter into an equivalence relationship by challenging the hegemonic formation and, therefore, building a people.[36] In this sense, at the beginning, I pondered that this emergent social action could not be counter-hegemonic, as is the abortion demand. However, once this was acknowledged to be a floating signifier, the contingency of its inscription in some equivalence chain became clear. This was possible, since it depended on its capacity of enrolling itself in anti-patriarchal equivalences.

A new articulating momentum

To build up "a people", the mere aggregation of demands is not sufficient. Articulation of those demands is required, if the goal is to build a counter-hegemonic politics to oppose the patriarchal domination approach. As time went by, most of Ni Una Menos' claims built themselves into a feminist discourse, and teenagers and youth especially, embraced the struggle for the legalization of abortion, as was observed during the demonstration on March 8, 2017, when discourses burgeoned in many spaces. Different generations, sexualities, territories, and ethnic groups voiced demands for sexual rights as well as for human rights that were being increasingly threatened, and against the economic decline that was leading to factories closing down and lay-offs.

NEW ACTORS – teenagers and youth – are going out into the streets and carrying out activism through social networks. They identify themselves by the green handkerchief that has been waving since the NWM in Rosario in 2003, when many of them had just been born. Their entrance into the public space shows how appearance builds momentum, to quote Arendt.[37] This was particularly visible at "the Pañuelazo" on February 19, 2018, and the huge green-tinted demonstration on March 8, 2018, as already mentioned. They became visible and 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 necessarily and solely linked to reproduction; that is to say, to any essentialist approach to its purpose. Sexual rights regulations are ideologically based on the conception of woman-as-mother and of a feminine sexuality at the service of reproduction, not for pleasure. Generally, as we witnessed during the debates on abortion law, 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, emotions and decisions of poor women, wanting to patronize them with the excuse of taking care of their lives and those of the fetus, with the motto: "*save the two lives*".

Illiberal governments and rights

The government of Mauricio Macri (2015–2019) faced protests of all kind because the imposition of neoliberal policies prompted economic recession, record inflation, unemployment 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 actions as "*dispositifs*",[38] whose emergence responds to a particular 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 some other occasions, the *dispositifs* 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 (*gatopardists*). 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 males', governments' and corporations' agenda.[39] However, as I have already stated, the treatment by the Argentine Congress of the bill to legalize abortion is due to a robust feminist movement, to a project debated on and agreed for years, to a massive and permanent mobilization 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 activism in different spaces have a transforming potential, there were contingent identity displacement processes in the discourses on bodies, compulsory heterosexuality, maternity, and families. These processes led to the radicalization of the demand in the struggle against the patriarchy and the traditional forces that support it, not only regarding sexual rights but also cultural, religious, 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 Korolczuk; Peto and Grzebalska; Moghadam; Gates; Wilkin; Arnold),[40] because of the following characteristics: the constitutional division of powers was not respected; human rights violations were denied and human rights organizations denigrated; also, pre-trial detention of popular activists and former civil servants occurred, authorization

was given to the police and *gendarmerie* (border patrol force) to kill presumed suspects of crimes and they were congratulated for doing so, and the government intended to give to the military an internal security role, taking the fight against drug trafficking as an excuse. At the same time it dismantled the rights structure that had been historically achieved, such as social security, educational, and health systems, as well as redistributive policies from the previous progresist populist adminitration that governed between 2003–2105 and won the elections in October, 2019. Currently the present administration is working hard to revert these devastating politics. They base their politics on the defense, protection, and promotion of human rights, recognition of gender and diversity equality with institutional reforms and active public policies. An example of this is the restitution of the Ministries of Health and of Labour, which were degraded in the prior administration and the creation of a new Minister of Women, Gender and Diversity, among other policies.

We can compare some of these characteristics with other illiberal regimes, such as those in Hungary and Poland. In both, the governments act against women's rights, for example, with the full prohibition of abortion. Andrea Peto and Weronika Grzebalska[41] have coined a provocative term, the "polypore state", to refer to the illiberal regimes that have made themselves at home in those democracies, already weakened by various factors (financial crisis, insecurity and migration, for example). The authors criticize the way the content and resources of democratic institutions are used in those countries in favor of right-wing organizations' projects, as was happening in Argentina. Other authors, such as Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk[42] call this populism, meaning right-wing populism. In those countries, conservatives forces (especially Catholic bodies), link their rejection of global capital and free market institutions to the rejection of women's rights and those of LGBTTIQ identities. Some Latin American countries show more varied situations, e.g. 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 the legalization of abortion, 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 both the Polish and Hungarian governments as anti-globalization and anti-gender. Argentina's government (2015 to 2019) was pro-globalization and pro-market, and criticized the human rights system and its organizations. Notwithstanding, it had to give some ground to fulfil women's human rights, due to the feminist demonstrations that were primarily for sexual rights (legal abortion, against violence against women, lesbian and transgender people), economic and labor rights. These concerns promoted by the national government were not present in the agenda of the administration of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, which is governed since 2007 by the same political party. For example, there were neither active and concrete measures to prevent violence against women and assist those affected, nor was the Integral Sexual Education Law (2008) fully implemented 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 a rape has the right to access a non-punishable abortion regardless of their intellectual capacity, without requiring prior judicial authorization to access the practice [. ...]"[43]

The situation in various Latin-American countries in which policies that can be considered as left-wing populist, even 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 hegemonic forces of capitalism are acting with ferocity 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 momentum. 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' relationships undergoing democratization processes, and 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 anticipated was the appearance of adolescent and young people's collective action that decisively influenced the struggle for the legalization of abortion, despite it having suffered a temporary defeat.

As we have seen, the feminist rebellion is global. In October 2016, a women's strike was the Polish women's movement's response to the attack from the forces called anti-gender, to impose complete prohibition of abortion in Poland. The day after Donald Trump was sworn into office as president of the United States (January 21, 2017), a great women's and LGBTTIQ collectives' demonstration took place, in that country and all over the world. Jim Rankin and Ellen Brait, reporters from Toronto Star Newspaper, published on January 22, 2017 an article whose headline read: "*She the People*", referring to the strength and union of millions of women. In October 2017, the #MeToo movement emerged to denounce sexual misconduct practiced by powerful men.[44] One year later, Tarana Burke spoke in Chicago and said that:

> **#MeToo does not have space for black girls. It doesn't have space for black women, it doesn't have space for queer folk, it doesn't have space for disabled people, people of color, transgender people, anybody else that's other. [...] #MeToo is about who is going to be taken down next – what other powerful, white, rich man is going to lose his privileges for a period of time.**

Both Gunnarson Payne's analysis of Poland's case and the article's headline refer directly to women as "the people". As Sławomir Sierakowski[45] asserted (2017), both Jarosław Kaczyński, the powerful leader of Law and Justice Party in Poland and Donald Trump, president of the United States, are confronted by a political force that had not been fully acknowledged in all its mobilization capability: women and other subaltern collectives. This is what is also happening in Argentina. The "Ni Una Menos" claims that were at first linked to violence against women were afterwards transformed and articulated with the "feminist people's" national and transnational demands, broadening its counter-hegemonic possibilities. ×

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10 With this denomination, the existence of several national communities is made visible and recognized, for example indigenous people and afro descendants.

11 Quechua refers to one of the indigenous peoples in Argentina, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador, especially to their language. Available at: https://www.pagina12.com.ar/225288-todos-los-nombres.

12 Di Marco, *Pueblo*, 294–310; Di Marco, *Claims*, 167–189.

13 Laclau, *Razón*, 15–31; 91–207.

14 In this chapter I will not discuss the notions of liberal democracies.

15 Di Marco, *Pueblo*, 296.

16 More than 3,700 people submitted apostasy requests during 2018. To date, three projects have been submitted to achieve separation between the church and the state.

17 Laclau, *Razon*, 99.

18 Claude Lefort, *La invención democrática* [The Democratic invention] (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1990), 190–191.

19 Ernesto Laclau, "Universalismo, particularismo y la cuestión de la identidad", en *Emancipación y diferencia*. [*'Universalism, particularism and the question of identity", in* Emancipation and difference*]*. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Espasa Calpe, 1996), 43–68.

20 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 38/39.

21 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 99/100.

22 I have been writing on the subject "Feminist People" since 2008, following Laclau's theory, to understand these articulations. I will present Jenny Gunnarsson Payne's (2019) similar analysis regarding Polish women's demonstrations against government's attempt to prohibit abortion: Jenny Gunnarsson Payne in her presentation titled "Women and 'The People", or Women as 'The People'? Populism, the abortion wars, and the (re)emergence of transnational sisterhood", at the International Workshop: "Política populista y reacción neoliberal" [Populist politics and neoliberal reaction] held in Buenos Aires in December 2016. At present, there is an important body of scholarly literature that takes this approach, with rich nuances. In Argentina, an example of this is the recently edited book: Graciela Di Marco et al. eds., *Feminismos y populismos del siglo XXI. Frente al patriarcado y al orden neoliberal*. [*Feminisms and populisms of the 21st century. Against patriarchy and the neoliberal order*] (Buenos Aires: Teseo Editorial, 2019).

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24 Laclau, *Razon*, 192.

25 Jean Copjec, *El sexo y la eutanasia de la razón. Ensayos sobre el amor y la diferencia [Sex and euthanasia of reason. Essays on love and difference]* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2016), 23.

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30 Sonia Alvarez et al., "Los viajes de los feminismos hacia otros movimientos sociales". En *Crisis y movimientos sociales en Nuestra América. Cuerpos, territorios e Imaginarios en disputa* ["The journeys of feminisms towards other social movements"] In *Crisis and social movements in Our America. Bodies, territories and imaginary disputed*, ed. Mar Daza et al. (Lima: Programa de Democratización Global [Global Democratization Program], 2014), 407–432; Elizabeth Maier and Nathalie Lebon, eds., *Women's Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New Jersey, USA: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

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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.

33 Jenny Gunnarsson Payne, "Women and 'The People", or Women as 'The People'? Populism, the abortion wars, and the (re)emergence of transnational sisterhood", presentation at the International Workshop: "Política populista y reacción neoliberal" [Populist politics and neoliberal reaction] held in Buenos Aires. December 2016. In the article published in 2019 she refers to the "feminist people" and "transnational feminist people': Jenny Gunnarsson Payne *Kobiety jako lud": Czarne Protesty jakosprzeciw wobec autorytarnego populizmuw perspektywie międzynarodowej* (1ed.). [Women as a "people": Black Protests as an opposition to authoritarian populism in an international perspective (1st ed.)]. In: Elżbiety Korolczuk, Beaty Kowalskiej, Jennifer Ramme, Claudii Snochowskiej-Gonzalez (eds.), Bunt kobiet: Czarne Protesty i Strajki Kobiet [Women's Rebellion: Black Protests and Women's Strikes] Gdansk: European Solidarity Centre. 2019. 155–183.

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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).

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LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT IT

by **Mercedes Barros** and **Natalia Martínez**

Feminism and populism in Argentina

Since the emergence of *#NiUnaMenos* [Not One Less] in 2015, feminism has become widespread in Argentina.[1] 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].[2] 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*[3] 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,[4] 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".[5] 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,[6] 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,*[7] 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 *Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres* [National Women's Meeting],[8] when there was a turning point in feminist strategies insofar as 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 succeed 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 could represent 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, is it 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 populist political discourse that dominated the political scene from 2003 to 2015. In other words, the relationship with human rights groups entangled feminists, not only with a new form of activism, but also with a logic of articulation that put the people at the forefront.[15]

"ONE OF THE KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING HOW FEMINISM BECAME POPULAR LIES IN THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT THIS MOVEMENT ESTABLISHED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM."

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 democratic enthusiasm brought with it encouraging views of traditional party politics, even within feminist circles.[16] In opposition to the deep distinction between a "pure feminism" and a "political" one present in the seventies, there was now an openness to heterogeneity, which enabled new alliances and eventually the development of multiple fronts of struggle.[17] Those experiences were in fact the preceding events of the *Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres* [National Women's Meetings] that have been organized since 1986 up to the present.[18] This heterogeneous development of local feminisms allowed not only the displacement of old frontiers, but also the drawing of specific distinctions from which new oppositions and affinities with other groups were forged.

One of the closest friendly bonds that feminisms established in the early 80s was with the women's activist groups that had burst onto the public scene in defense of life and human rights during the last military dictatorship's repression: the *Madres and Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo* [Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo]. The intrepid and belligerent actions of these women in the search for "disappeared" people turned the struggle for "human rights" and "democracy" into one of the most important issues throughout the transition to democracy.[19] In those years, human rights ceased to be a problem of

ILLUSTRATION: KATRIN STENMARK

a few relatives of "disappeared" persons, becoming the very possibility of a common agreement 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.[20] 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 vindication 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 traditional politics and whose most visible figures were precisely women.[21] 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.[22]

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 successful 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 activisms, but also the singular political context that sheltered and helped determine them: "the Kirchnerist people". And when we refer to Kirchnerism, we do not define it simply as a government; but as a political phenomenon that implied a novel social and political mobilization from which a new political identity emerged.

As we explained elsewhere,[23] this form of identification shaped a new populist 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: that of human rights. It was precisely in the legacy of the *Madres and Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo*, in their unyielding struggle for justice, memory and truth, that Kirchner's discourse inscribed and legitimized the origin of its own political project. It is important to point out that this was 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 embodied in *Menemismo* [Menemism][24] 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 impunity in the country that placed the democratic governments in a line of continuity with the last dictatorship.[25] 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 displacement, Kirchner's fight against impunity was also meant as a fight against exclusion and social injustice. In the name of those who had been mistreated by a terrorist state and by the impunity of the democratic governments 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 the idealistic youth of the past and present hurt by repression and the economic crisis, Kirchnerism burst forth as the possibility of representing a new legitimate community protected by human rights, justice and social inclusion.[26] 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* indicated was "something they had not dreamed of".[27] This "unthinkable" shows the radical character of Kirchner's discourse: the imagination of a new "All". It is there, in that radical mark, that we consider it is possible to trace 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 populist articulation, which made "human rights" a struggle of its own, affected feminisms? What are the links between Kirchnerist populism and the current emerging popular nature of feminisms? Before addressing these issues, two clarifications should be made. First, we have seen in recent debates that in order to understand the rise and popularization 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.[28] In this context, we consider it necessary to distinguish between two levels of analysis: on the one hand, the internationalist dimension proper to feminist ideology, and on the other, the singular conditions of possibility in each context that enable or hinder the processes of collective mobilization.[29] 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 make possible the configuration of singular feminisms (popular, liberal, trans, communitarian, lesbian) many of which pose incompatible 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 *#NiUnaMenos* was linked to an organization which confronts private pension funds, or in Colombia and Paraguay, how the alliance was with the peasant and indigenous movements.

SECONDLY, GIVEN THE RECENT dissemination and polyvalence of the term "populism" – including "right-wing populism", "left-wing populism", "classic populism", "populism of the new millennium"– 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 identification* that constructs and gives meaning to "the people" as a political subject.[30] This does not mean that "the people" is an entirely fictional work of populism, but that as a political identity it is central to the understanding of populism – even though not all references to "the people" are necessarily populist. The "populist people" comes to represent those "from below", "subalterns", "poor and vulnerable" *vis-a vis* "the powerful", "the establishment", "the oligarchy". But also, according to Laclau, this populist people is always malleable, imprecise and wandering as it can never coincide with itself. Thus, there is always an inherent tension in populist articulations to the extent that this form of political construction makes visible the porosity of the frontiers that divides the "people" from the "non-people". It is this same tension that is transferred to the community as a whole, to citizen practices and to subjective experiences. In this sense, populist articulations not only bring a new identity into being but also prompt a process of disidentification with the *status quo* – as defined in the work of Jacques Rancière – and, in this way, it displaces the grid of identifications, of the parts that count as part of the community.[31] The disruption of the populist people exert on the community order opens up the possibility of inclusion and new subjective experiences. This brings unthinkable consequences which manifest themselves in the proliferation of challenging claims on the distribution of places in society and on the conformation of the legitimate demos.[32] It is in relation to these unthinkable effects that we argue local feminisms were eventually altered. That is, for the feminisms' framework of action, the disruption of the Kirchnerist people involved the dislocation and displacement of the surface for the inscription of their demands, as well as profound alterations to their traditional forms of identification.

Displacement effects

Taking into account the analytical effects of these two previous clarifications – the importance of the contexts of singular inscription of demands, and the dimension of the radical and subjective inclusiveness of populism – we can now go on to explain how the growing legitimation of feminisms in Argentina should be understood by looking at the political bonds that Kirchnerism established with the human rights movement, and by tracing the displacements effects that derived from that close bond. We consider that this initial link had unpredictable effects that extended to local feminist groups, which did not remain indifferent to the singular modulation of this new populist interpellation. Even though the new political discourse did not attempt to convoke feminists, nor did it have a feminist agenda in its origins, the structuring relationships of the political 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 interpellation of Kirchnerist discourse, but rather to a distorted appeal that worked and became successful, to a large extent, based on the contiguous relationship that linked feminisms to the human rights movement, in particular, to the *Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*. There lies part – not all – 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 interpellations, its distrust of state policies and its main forms of organization and mobilization. Hand in hand with human rights organizations, and under the populist footprint, feminisms inscribed their slogans and demands in the popular camp as never before.

"WHAT ARE THE LINKS BETWEEN KIRCHNERIST POPULISM AND THE CURRENT EMERGING POPULAR NATURE OF FEMINISMS?"

NOW, BEARING IN MIND that no demand emerges unaffected from a populist articulatory relationship – their inclusion into a set of other demands will ultimately partially transform their meaning – we are interested in pointing out at least four of the implications that this articulation had in the field of human rights, in their meanings and contents, and by contiguous displacements, on feminisms. In the first place, and as we have shown elsewhere in greater detail, Kirchnerism triggered among human rights activists a highly intense process of political identification with the presidential figure that eventually altered the perception of human rights organizations on the role and place of the state.[33] From that moment on, in the eyes of human rights groups, the state ceased to be the object of accusations and became a decisive ally in their struggle, and the state itself even became a legitimate place from which to act. Thus, the new government's impetus in matters of "truth, memory and justice" with respect to the crimes of the dictatorship was accompanied by an unprecedented participation of human rights groups in the decision-making processes and implementation of state policies. The creation and expansion of administrative areas and programs at the national level not only involved different human rights organizations but also positioned several of the most prominent 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 credibility and recognition by feminist activists of the government's inclusion in its agenda of some of their historical claims and their translation into law. We can mention, for instance, the Law on Gender Violence (26485), the Law on Integral Sexual Education (26.150), the law that allows retirement for housewives (Law 26970), the Law on Equal Marriage (26.618), and the Law on Gender Identity (26746). Although the mobilization and support around these legal initiatives was very diverse among feminist activists, what is undisputable is that the creation and enactment of these laws was quite surprising to feminists and eventually allowed for new political identifications with the government – some feminist activists even accepted positions in the state.[34]

A SECOND IMPLICATION has to do with the fact that during Kirchnerism, the historical struggle of the human rights movement was intertwined with a new political project that, while drawing together various political forces, brought with it a strong Peronist footprint. That is to say, President Néstor Kirchner's interpellation brought human rights groups closer not only to his own figure, but also to a long-standing political ideology with which they had had little relationship until then. The political flags of historical Peronism[35] that reappeared with renewed intensity on the new president's political stage were articulated with his campaign against the impunity of the past and present. In this sense, in the new political language "inclusion, equality and social justice" were combined with the demands of "truth, memory and justice" related to state terrorism crimes.[36] With respect to feminist activism, this resignification of Peronism in the political imaginary of human rights and social movements had clear repercussions on the gradual collapse of the historical animosity between feminism and Peronism.[37] Under this new juncture, feminist historical demands found new avenues of convergence with Peronist feminine activism. On the one hand, feminism ceased to be a "foreign ideology", typical of women "who hate men", as Evita used to say, and many of their demands began to rise on Peronist and/or Kirchnerist fronts and groups. On

the other hand, new groups appeared that from the start were formed from a conjunction between a certain tradition of Peronism and feminism.[38]

A THIRD IMPLICATION is related to the Kirchnerist appeal to young people as new protagonists of democratic politics in the country. This had broad effects on the human rights movement, as well as on other social movements, as there was an important generational turnover that helped give organizations a renewed impulse. Returning to the idealized and valuable 70s generation, the Kirchnerist discourse gave young people a new role and protagonism in politics; a role that had progressively deteriorated during the post-democratic transition period. It is within this particular context that we have seen the emergence of "las hijas" ["the daughters"] as a new form of identification that expressed, once again, the close articulation between feminists and human rights activism. They introduced themselves saying: "*Somos 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.

Finally, we would like to point out that the linkage of the human rights movement to Kirchnerism also contributed to altering the historical demands of these organizations. That is, claims for "truth, memory and justice" began to represent other popular demands not just concerned with the crimes of the dictatorship. As we have argued in the above section, the articulation of the struggle against impunity with the struggle against exclusion and social inequality deepened during the Kirchnerist years, contributing to the renewed location of the mission and place of human rights groups in Argentinian society. Their mission expanded to include social issues such as housing, health and education. So it is not surprising that human rights organizations got involved in the development of a range of different projects, such as community house building or university management.[39] In the case of feminisms, the expansion of their limited agenda towards demands considered historically as "non-strategic"[40] 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 processes that took place during that year in the *Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres* [National Women's Meeting]. That is to say, prior to this particular situation, it was only at the beginning of the 1980s that Argentine feminisms had the possibility of achieving similar articulation fronts, although on a much smaller scale. In this sense, we consider symptomatic the reappearance of the very word "popular" among its ranks. As we have pointed out in previous writings, "popular feminism" today is a category disputed by broad sectors showing the amplitude and intensity of this interpellation.[41] Unlike other feminist identity labels such as "autonomous", "academic", "institutionalist", "political", "lesbian" – the use of "the popular" accounts for the heterogenous experience of the current activisms – something similar happens with "community feminisms" and "slum feminisms". That is to say, current feminist mobilizations display a very new feature: unlike the fierce disputes to define what corresponds to a "properly feminist agenda", the communications and manifestos of the current mobilizations reflect an enormous permeability to multiple and dissimilar political and social demands.[42] The boundaries between what is "feminist" and what is not have changed in ways unimaginable a decade ago. It is precisely this new openness of political horizons that has begun to annoy certain feminisms that are attempting, once again, to demarcate their trajectories in restrictive terms.

Final remarks

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 Peronists? 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*. That is to say, it has enabled multiple acts of identification that at the same time weakened its particular content; it has turned it into a universal demand with hegemonic pretensions. In this respect, we aim to emphasize that feminism no longer represents a specific claim, 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 only enabled by the trajectories of feminisms; it was also the result of a singular context of overdetermination 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 the making. It will be our task to point out the possibilities for a *feminist people*. ■

"THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN WHAT IS 'FEMINIST' AND WHAT IS NOT HAVE CHANGED IN WAYS UNIMAGINABLE A DECADE AGO."

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1 *#NiUnaMenos* is a hashtag viralized on social media under which massive demonstrations were held in eighty cities in the country on June 3, 2015. These events emerged as a response to the violence against women and its most serious and visible consequence, femicide. It now stands as the name of a particular feminist front, the "Ni Una Menos movement".

2 Human rights groups that emerged in the search for "disappeared" persons during the last military dictatorship in Argentina.

3 So named because of their characteristic use of colored campaign scarves: violet as the historic color of feminism; green as the color chosen by the *Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito* [National Campaign for Free, Safe and Legal Abortion Rights].

4 Graciela Di Marco, *El pueblo feminista. Movimientos Sociales y lucha de las mujeres en torno a la ciudadanía*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2011).

5 See also Graciela Di Marco, "Social Movement Demands in Argentina and the Constitution of a "Feminist People", in Alvarez, Rubin, Thayer, Baiocchi, Laó-Montes (eds.), *Beyond Civil Society: Activism, Participation, and Protest in Latin America*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

6 During the years 2001–2002, the Argentinian economy collapsed, unleashing an unprecedented social, political and institutional crisis that ended with massive demonstrations on the streets, and the fall of the elected government.

7 *The movimiento piquetero* [piquetero movement] appeared on the Argentinian political scene during the second half of the 1990s, and its members are mainly unemployed people. Choosing to cut roads as the main tool of confrontation, these organizations have mobilized in diverse and massive demonstrations demanding the creation of jobs and unemployment benefits. Women have occupied a leading role in this movement because their overwhelming presence and active participation has been crucial, both in the origins of the piqueteros movements and in their identity configuration. See Andrea Andújar, "Mujeres piqueteras: la repolitización de los espacios de resistencia en la Argentina (1996–2001)", *Regional Scholarship Program*, CLACSO (2005).

8 The National Women's Meetings have been organized regularly since 1986. They were promoted by the III World Conference on the Women's Decade (UN, Nairobi, 1985) and inspired by the *Encuentros Feministas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* [Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meetings] that have been held since 1981. The interesting issue about these meetings is that, although the principles of their organization and functioning are clearly derived from feminist ideas, they have not been exclusively or mostly organized around feminist issues, at least until now. Since this year, in the last plenary meeting held in the city of La Plata, and after a decisive intervention of indigenous women's organizations, it was decided to change the name of the meeting to *Encuentro Plurinacional de Mujeres, Trans, Travestis, Lesbianas y Bisexuales* [Plurinational Meeting of Women, Trans, Transvestites, Lesbians and Bisexuals].

9 Ernesto Laclau, *La razón populista*, (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005).

10 In his later work, Ernesto Laclau introduced the category of 'empty signifier' to refer to a signifier that loses its direct reference to a particular meaning. As he explains, societies produced empty signifiers in order to fulfil the impossible ideal of full closure. Political forces compete in order to present their particular objectives as those which can carry out the filling of the empty signifier. See Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation*(s) (London: Verso, 1996) 36–46 and *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso, 2005), chapter 4, 46.

11 Di Marco, *El pueblo feminista*, 296.

12 Ibid, 18–20.

13 8M refers to the historic March 8 as the international women's day of working women. Since March 8, 2017, this date is commemorated as *International Women's Strike*. This movement was created at the end of October 2016 and was promoted by women's organizations from more than 50 countries. Since 2019, in Argentina, it is called *Paro Internacional Feminista y Plurinacional de Mujeres, Lesbianas, Travesti y Trans* [International Feminist and Plurinational Strike of Women, Lesbians, Transvestites and Trans].

14 We have analyzed some of the assumptions that informed Di Marco's reading on the legalization of abortion as a "popular demand" in Natalia Martínez Prado, "¿Pueblo feminista? Algunas reflexiones en torno al devenir popular de los feminismos", *Latinoamérica. Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos*, 67(2018): 173–202.

15 Understanding, as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau had argued, that the articulation logic establishes "a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice". See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 105.

16 Natalia Martínez Prado, *La política en disputa: Feministas argentinas en el Siglo XX*, (PhD diss., University of Córdoba, 2012); Natalia Martínez Prado "De la política como contaminación: "Las Políticas" y "las Puras" en los setentas" (paper presented at the *XI Jornadas Nacionales de Historia de las Mujeres, VI Congreso Iberoamericano de Estudios de Género*, San Juan, September, 20-22, 2012).

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22 One way of understanding the political dimension of this articulation between feminists and human rights groups is to examine the María Elena Oddone refusal of this alliance, a main referent of *Organización Feminista*

Argentina [Argentinian Feminist Organization]. See María Elena Oddone, *La pasión por la libertad. Memorias de una feminista*, (Asunción: Ediciones Colihue, 2001). 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*. 1984–1989, (Buenos Aires: Centro de Documentación sobre la Mujer, 1989).

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30 Ernesto Laclau, *La Razón Populista*, (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005), 153.

31 Jacques Rancière, *El desacuerdo. Política y Filosofía* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1996).

32 Sebastián Barros, "Despejando la espesura. La distinción entre identificaciones populares y articulaciones políticas populistas", in Aboy Carlés, Barros and Melo, *Las brechas del pueblo. Reflexiones sobre identidades populares y populismo*, (Los Polvorines: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, UNDAV ediciones, Universidad Nacional de Avellaneda, 2013), 41–64.

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36 For a thorough analysis, see Mercedes Barros and Virginia Morales, "Derechos humanos y post kirchnerismo".

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39 See Mercedes Barros and Virginia Morales, "Derechos humanos y post kirchnerismo".

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41 Natalia Martínez Prado, "El feminismo popular y sus cuerpos", (paper presented at the *XIII Jornadas Nacionales de Historia de las Mujeres, VIII Congreso Iberoamericano de Estudios de Género, Buenos Aires*, July 24– 27, 2017).

42 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.

ILLUSTRATION: KATRIN STENMARK

Sweden

DOING FEMINISM IN TIMES OF ANTI-GENDER MOBILIZATIONS

by **Katarina Giritli-Nygren** & **Angelika Sjöstedt Landén**

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, anti-feminist narratives are also promulgated by movements that hold feminism responsible for the "emasculation" of men and for the "collapse" of the Western values system through immigration and multiculturalism. As a result, (anti-Muslim) racism and anti-feminism often coincide.[1] Such discourses co-opt various achievements in (gender) equality won through women's struggles. Although nationalist movements usually propagate solutions and policies which are against women's interest, they are often articulated under the banner of the gender equality rhetoric.[2] Therefore, it is also necessary to take into consideration how elements of feminism are appropriated by anti-gender discourses, for example, the role of conservative women's groups in producing and reproducing anti-gender discourse under the label of feminism.

THIS IS A CORE reason for us to formulate how we do feminism guided by an ethic of solidarity. The different nationalist and conservative challenges we, as feminists, are exposed to qualifies Chandra Talpade Mohanty's[3] claim that it has never been so difficult, yet so necessary, to create feminist alliances across geographic, cultural, social, and religious boundaries. We see it as especially important to continue the discussion of what the differences in our experiences in the different countries can bring to the table when continuing our efforts to create feminist alliances and movements of solidary across various borders and boundaries of oppression. At this moment in time, we see that certain feminist arguments easily converge with some of the arguments within different mobilizations of civil rights/identity politics and anti-capitalism/anti-colonialism politics. We can see that exploring the forms and dynamics of gender and gender equality has been transformed into the production of forms of *femonationalism*, a term Sara Farris used to describe the mobilizations of women's rights and gender equality organizations that campaign against Islam and Muslim migrants, supported by both left- and right-wing political parties in Europe.[4]

The current situation of neoliberal capitalism, nationalism, anti-feminism, and racism poses similar (but not identical) threats in different parts of the world, which in turn structures parallel but locally performed resistance. Efforts to create feminist unity in the name of gender studies across different sets of borders also inevitably unveils the cracks and differences dividing feminist communities. How do we account for this while doing solidarity that can cut across regimes of oppression? What are the conditions for the possibility of engaging in cross-border scholarly cooperation? What are the ways in which we can challenge the different kinds of brick walls that we experience in institutional, national, and other contexts, and that we need to go up against when establishing transnational cooperation?

Multiple regimes of oppression

Together with established academics, 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 involved in the rise and development of anti-genderism across Europe, from an interdisciplinary and transnational perspective. Initially, a smaller group was formed from within the network, gathering feminist scholars from Hungary, Turkey, UK, Sweden and Poland. In some of these countries, anti-gender mobilization is well underway, and a turn towards elected authoritarian has been fairly successful. In other countries, this trend is less visible but, nevertheless, present. Our position as gender scholars is not directly threatened in Swedish universities at this time, and we have therefore tried to use the platform that we have at the Forum for Gender Studies (FGV) at Mid Sweden University to facilitate meetings where feminist experiences from different national contexts can be shared.

The work done in the network is first and foremost focused on exploring the ways in how we could act in solidarity across different borders. This border-crossing work includes crossing national borders, but also disciplines, research fields and various cultural borders. We gather experiences across Europe; east to west, south to north. The group initially met for workshops and planning meetings in Stockholm in 2017 and in Ankara in 2018 under the title of *Building a European network for feminist solidarities across regimes of oppression*. By the time our first workshop began, the situation in Turkey had grown urgent. From the time the declaration of emergency was declared in July 2016, universities have witnessed a tremendous purge in Turkey. Derya Keskin, formerly at Kocaeli University in Turkey, summarized the events in a commentary in Baltic Worlds 2018, noting that in line with the government's views, most of the university administrations around the country had been trying to get rid of critical voices and the state dismissed thousands of university staff, mostly academics.[5] In a Nordic, and specifically Swedish context, anti-genderism has its own peculiar and complex figuration that transcends and challenges political divides beyond conservative and nationalistic ideologies. During the last few years, we and other scholars have noticed how such mobilisations are articulated in the Swedish context.[6] One example is the increased mainstream media space given to anti-gender writers and debaters. Although anti-gender protests are central to the formation of nationalist and conservative political agendas, in the Swedish case, the perception that "gender ideology" as a threat to universities, education and freedom of expression is also especially salient. We also followed the events in Poland where massive marches for women's rights were being held during this time. Much of the feminist response to anti-gender politics was focused around abortion rights, since this was, and still remains, a core topic in Poland. Following the Polish case, Agnieszka Graff and Elzbieta Korolczuk illuminated that a common rhetorical trope in anti-gender politics is that gender ideology is an 'import' from abroad (in other words western and 'globalist') that is being 'imposed' from above by the UN or EU, or in some countries through the state itself. The sense of threat is commonly instilled by the use of effectively laden metaphors related to extinction, such as disease, war, and genocide.[7]

"EFFORTS TO CREATE FEMINIST UNITY IN THE NAME OF GENDER STUDIES ACROSS DIFFERENT SETS OF BORDERS ALSO INEVITABLY UNVEILS THE CRACKS AND DIFFERENCES DIVIDING FEMINIST COMMUNITIES."

ONE OF THE WORKSHOP'S strengths was the ability to compare events in different countries as they evolved. At that time, gender studies were under threat at Hungarian universities but had not yet been banned, as happened later in 2018. The first-hand awareness of the situation in Hungary created through the project, however, made it easy to stand in solidarity with Hungarian university professors against the banning of gender studies programmes. The experiences from this project revealed both the similarities and differences in the challenges feminist activists and gender scholars faced on local levels in terms of resisting anti-gender campaigns. Some workshop participants felt that their former activist repertoire of resistance needed to be expanded to include new strategies since their space for action had become so reduced. Our standpoint is that these challenges need to be addressed through transnational solidarity among the variety of feminist- and anti-racist struggles in local settings, and it needs to be guided by awareness of the different conditions that anti-gender initiatives create under different contexts. Locally based struggles that develop in response to specific oppressive regimes are important sites, but they might be limited when it comes to challenging the extra-local processes that shape them.[8] As feminist scholars, we have the responsibility to promote a just and equal society beyond our own national contexts,[9] but we also have the responsibility to act in the present and to voice criticism against the culture of extreme individualism and competition and against sexism, racism, and fascism. This will contribute to strengthening and supporting the peaceful movements for human rights – including women's, children's, and LGBTQI+ rights – that are crucial in order for democratic societies to flourish. We therefore need to further explore the ways in which we can share this feminist space beyond the borders of the university as well as beyond national contexts.

Feminist scholars around the world have discussed the question of how to make networks of solidarity that are effective across different kinds of regimes of oppression; we are by no means the first to take on the issue. We also know that efforts to create feminist unity in the name of gender studies across different sets of borders inevitably unveils the cracks and differences dividing feminist communities. But we believe that cross-border scholarly cooperation to build alliances which can counteract threats to democracy is necessary. The struggle for a more just, equal and democratic world is not over, and there is a need for alternative visions, as well as various alliances where such visions can be developed and practiced. Philomena Essed points out that social justice work is a kind of leadership. The network has been a way for us to explore how we can actually build such alliances and take on that kind of leadership role.[10]

Actions of solidarity

An outcome of the project was that we identified a set of questions that can guide transnational feminism and solidarity across regimes of oppression and anti-genderism. These questions addressed 1) What the connections between current illiberal trends and opposition to gender equality and human rights are in different contexts. 2) What the most important points of critique and strategies for resistance against anti-genderism and illiberal movements can be and how they can change across time; 3) What the similarities and differences in the patterns of threats against gender studies and feminist activists across national and institutional borders are and; 4) How feminist theory and practice contribute to counteracting anti-gender mobilizations.

SPEAKING FROM the context of Swedish academia, the pilot project has been a very important means for us to compare and mirror the different experiences of anti-gender mobilization and conservatism in different national and regional contexts. When working with colleagues from, for example, Russia, Hungary, and Turkey, we have become aware of the fact that in the ongoing struggle for discursive-material power, we must acknowledge and use the institutional positions we currently occupy to create space across regimes of oppression. We have seen that when universities ban gender studies or when scholars are deemed criminals for asking for peace and freedom, cooperation between large scale institutions is not enough. More flexible forms of cooperation need to be made possible. We believe that one of the ways to build solidarity across different regimes of oppression is to decolonize the hegemonic feminism and instead identify, acknowledge and share our different spaces for action.

Our overall comment to the ongoing and diverse processes of multiple anti-gender mobilizations is however that research that map and define the differences between them will continuously be extremely important. But at the same time, for constructive resistance against them, we need practices of solidary that also can go across these differences. ■

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Sweden

by **Anna-Maria Sörberg**

GENDER HATE

As the new global family fundamentalism celebrated another victory while taking over the historic Gran Guardia Palace in Verona, Italy in March, the US' news site *Buzzfeed* proclaimed "Italy is the clearest test of whether the same formula that brought the religious right back 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.

There is Brian Brown from the eager 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, who has worked intensely, and for years, to find a way into European neo-fascist movements. In Italy he finally succeeded through Lega, the populist and fascist party that until recently was called Lega Nord. And there is Lega's party leader Matteo Salvini – the third name – who swims like a fish in the water of the polarized media landscape 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 three 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 large collection of anti-feminists and homophobes, conservative religious men, right wing populists and pure fascists. Sociologist Elzbieta Korolczuk, who was present in Verona and follows the anti-gender movements in her research, points out that the diverse and radical elements also caused problems for the organizers.

"In countries like Italy, they don't want to present themselves as homophobes or against women's rights, but rather emphasize that they are 'only' looking for ways to defend the family. The organizers subsequently had to apologize for the conference's more extreme statements, such as "hell is waiting for the gay world", says Elzbieta Korolczuk.

THREE WEEKS AFTER the meeting in Verona, Lars Adaktusson of the Christian Democrats in Sweden sat on a flight to Colombia's capital Bogotá en route to a conference organized by the Political Network for Values – a close ally of the Verona conference organizer, WCF. The Christian Democrats' foreign policy spokesperson was there to discuss an urgent subject: the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. But the meeting in the capital also meant that Adaktusson was able to assume the role of Swedish representative for conservative family alliance-building.

Here he was able to mingle with the country's ex-president Alvaro Uribe, the family ministers of Hungary and Poland, and a number of representatives from the religious right in the US. Criticism in Sweden was nearly instant, indicating that mingling with homophobes, abortion opponents, and right-wing nationalists still

Brian Brown.

Alexey Komov.

Matteo Salvini.

"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."

still comes at a political cost in Sweden.

"It is nothing new that ultra conservatives and religious alliances meet across party or organizational boundaries. But the force that today unites movements that have not previously been linked to each other is something new," says ethnologist Jenny Gunnarsson Payne at Södertörn University, who has been tracking the global emergence of anti-gender movements for several years.

"In an environment of increasing authoritarian forces, we must stop rejecting them as disdaining of knowledge or as ignorant. They have their own form of knowledge construction with books, media, and conferences and their view of themselves is that *they* stand up for truth and knowledge. A truth that often overlaps with God."

VERONA AND BOGOTÁ are two examples of an escalation of global revivalist meetings in which a number of requirements 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, 2019), 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 national 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 nationalistic 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 LGBTQ 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 Petö, 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."

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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/

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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.

BALTIC WORLDS

commentary

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 have 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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