

Blurring boundaries? Re-articulations of feminisms and gender politics in the context of right-wing mobilizations in Europe

23.-25. May 2019, University of Marburg

The workshop is a joint project of the Chair for Gender and Politics/University of Marburg, the research project 'REVERSE – Antifeminism as a threat to social integration' at the Center for Gender Studies of the University of Marburg, and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

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We are currently observing a shift in feminist and broader political debates in Europe: On the one hand, anti-feminist or anti-gender discourses, actions and campaigns target gender-study programs, gender mainstreaming, the liberalization of sexual politics and reproductive rights as well as feminist politics or LGBTI*-activism. On the other hand, some feminist positions are taken up by right-wing anti-feminists and turned into nationalist projects of in-/ exclusion – sometimes even with the support of parts of the LGBTI*-movement or by feminist actors. In this context, we observe efforts to include white gay men and white women into the construction of a national 'we', a racialization or externalization of sexualized violence, nationalist welfare state policies and policies that frame equality as a nationalist, exclusive practice.

Contributions deal with the question how recent right wing attacks, discourses and racist interventions have shaped – and altered – the agenda of politics with regard to progressive political feminist positions concerning sexual and reproductive rights including abortion. Also, politics around sexual orientations and trans* identities are questioned – and considered as a deviation from a model of the 'traditional' heterosexual family. Furthermore, there is evidence to the fact that antifeminist strategies and attacks are firmly interconnected via transnational networks. In this context, we also want to discuss 'blurring boundaries' between right-wing antifeminism and certain feminist concepts.

These adaptations of feminist positions by right-wing actors revolve around the intersections of gender, race, class and sexuality. Examples from recent debates include the following:

- Debates on homonationalism (Duggan), on femonationalism (Farris) or on the ethnization of sexism (Dietze) after the sexual assaults on the New Year's Eve 2015/16 in Cologne point to the promotion of racist attitudes and agitations in the name of gay or women's liberation. The discursive construction of Muslim men as sexually aggressive and homophobic serves to conjure up a threat to the allegedly 'liberal' (Western) stance to gay liberation and feminism.
- Right-wing actors mobilize 'white border guard feminities' (Keskinen) or contrive forms of 'care racism' (Sager et al.) to 'defend' white, autochthonous women against these mostly fabricated threats. While sexualized violence is increasingly considered an 'immigration problem', anti-violence projects serving victims from the lower strata of society are increasingly put under (financial) pressure.
- At the same time, Muslim women are constructed as victims of gendered oppression in their native 'culture'. Migration policies as well as integration programs for asylum seekers

target these women as (future) workers in the (informal) care sector, thus providing a truncated version of feminism as female labor market integration.

- Where right-wing parties already came to power such as in Poland, Hungary or Turkey, they conceived social policies for female constituencies that were among the negatively affected parties of the former neoliberal turn, such as (lone) mothers, pensioners or low-wage earners, thus improving the social situation for women from the lower classes. At the same time, they organized a backlash against feminist achievements – by cutting down governmental support for women’s shelters and counselling (Austria) or by redefining sexual violence (US, Russia).

Thus, we observe an increasing connectivity between discourses around gender and sexuality with nationalist and chauvinist positions against migration, which are fueled by conservative to right wing populism. After the „summer of migration“ in 2015, these debates culminated into the demand to close European borders entirely for migrants fleeing difficult situations in their home countries.

These descriptions raise disturbing questions which we want to tackle in the workshop. We aim to explore developments concerning feminist and antifeminist politics from an international comparative perspective.

- How are efforts to (re)naturalize power relations, such as binary conceptions of gender and heterosexuality or cultural racism, intertwined with a (de)thematization of social inequalities?
- How do gendered discourses by right-wing actors construct in-/exclusions into a national ‚we‘ along the intersections of gender, race, class and sexuality?
- Which conceptual and analytical tools are helpful to analyze these phenomena?
- Are there cross-national patterns concerning actors and strategies of antifeminist discourses and mobilizations? If so, how do context-specific factors interact with these general patterns?
- How and why do antifeminist discourses and strategies change over time?
- In how far did a lack of intersectional perspectives in mainstream versions of feminism open up the terrain for new, gendered strategies from the right?
- Is there empirical evidence for „blurring boundaries“ between feminism and anti-feminism? (How) should we rethink feminist concepts?

By raising these questions, we want to deepen our analytical understanding of these developments, to generalize the findings from single-country case studies and identify their effects and repercussions on gender research and on emancipatory political projects.

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23.05.19, 18-20.00: Keynote: „Blurring boundaries? Re-articulations of anti/feminism in the context of right wing mobilizations in Europe”, *Maja Sager, Lund University, Sweden (Moderation: Annette Henninger, Institute for Political Science, University of Marburg)*

Public lecture; Location: Hörsaalgebäude, Biegenstr. 12, Room +1/0110 on the first floor

24./25.05.19: Workshop Blurring boundaries? Case studies across Europe

Location: Forschungszentrum Deutscher Sprachatlas, Pilgrimstein 16, Room 001

Friday, 24.5.19

9.30 Welcome & Coffee

10:00-10.45 Introduction into the workshop (*Annette Henninger & Juliane Lang/University of Marburg, and Katharina Pühl/Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Berlin*)

- **Germany:** „Research and activist perspectives on antifeminism” (*Annette Henninger, Juliane Lang, Katharina Pühl*)

Coffee Break

11:00-13.00 Panel I: South-Eastern Europe (*Moderation: Annette Henninger*)

- **Greece:** „I don't know really how many of the so-called feminists have understood what feminism is.’ Neo-Nazis claiming gender politics in contested times (*Marianthi Anastasiadou, Freiburg University of Education, Institute for Educational Science*)
- **Turkey:** „Ruling Bloc's Search for a Host Ideology? Counter-Gender Narrative and Anti-Feminism in Turkey” (*Funda Hülagü, Institute for Political Science, University of Marburg*)

Lunch break (Student Cafeteria, Mensa Erlenring)

14:00-16:00 Panel II: Eastern Europe (*Moderation: Ina Pallinger, Institute for Political Science, University of Marburg*)

- **Poland:** „Economic redistribution and challenging ‘gender ideology’ – a right-wing model for women's empowerment in Poland” (*Elena Zacharenko, Political Scientist & Policy Consultant, Brussels*)
- **Hungary:** „What went right is also what went wrong – Do progressives share some responsibility for the right-wing mobilizations against ‘gender ideology’?” (*Eszter Kovats, Institute for Political Science, Faculty of Law, University ELTE, Budapest*)

Coffee Break

16.30-18.00 Expert Discussion (*Moderation: Juliane Lang & Katharina Pühl*)

Possible topics:

- How are efforts to (re)naturalize power relations, such as binary conceptions of gender and heterosexuality or cultural racism, intertwined with a (de)thematization of social inequalities?
- How do gendered discourses by right-wing actors construct in-/exclusions into a national ‚we‘ along the intersections of gender, race, class and sexuality?

- Which conceptual and analytical tools are helpful to analyze these phenomena?
- Are there cross-national patterns concerning actors and strategies of antifeminist discourses and mobilizations? If so, how do context-specific factors interact with these general patterns?
- How and why did antifeminist discourses and strategies change over time?
- ... *tbc according to the topics raised at the workshop.*

19.00 Conference Dinner

Saturday, 25.05.19

- **10:00-12:00 Panel III: Southern Europe** (Moderation: Inga Nüthen, Institute for Political Science, University of Marburg)
- **Spain:** Nora Miralles (to be confirmed)
- **Italy:** "Antigender discourses in power and transfeminist reactions" (Carlotta Cossutta & Adriano J. Habed, University of Verona)

12:15-13:00 Expert Discussion: Wrap up of interim results (Small working groups; Moderation: Juliane Lang & Katharina Pühl)

Possible topics:

- In how far did a lack of intersectional perspectives in mainstream versions of feminism open up the terrain for new, gendered strategies from the right?
- Is there empirical evidence for „blurring boundaries“ between feminism and antifeminism?
- (How) should we rethink feminist concepts?
- ... *tbc according to the topics raised at the workshop.*

Lunch break

13:45-15:30 Expert Discussion: Further steps (Plenary discussion; Moderation: Annette Henninger & Katharina Pühl)

Possible issues:

- *Activist strategies:* Gender and LGBTI* activists, researchers in gender studies, media activists, NGOs and state institutions tackling issues of gender politics are increasingly targeted by organized antifeminism. What could be useful strategies to deal with this situation?
- *Further research and joint publications:* Are there ideas /is there an interest for joint (comparative) research projects and joint publications?
- *Social media networking:* Should we implement a virtual space (access for invited guests only) for further discussion?
- *State-of-the-debate-paper:* based on a protocol of our discussions on the workshop, we plan to document results and open questions which is conceived to prepare further meetings – who wants to join?
- *More workshops:* should we plan further meetings/real world events? If so: where and when?
- ... *tbc according to the ideas developed during the workshop.*