

Gender Politics in Turbulent Times:

Rethinking Power, Agency and Resistance

21st-22nd July 2017
Freie Universität Berlin
Holzlaube, Room 1.2009, Fabeckstraße 23-25



Conference of the Center for Gender and Diversity,
Otto-Suhr-Institut



Program

Gender Politics in Turbulent Times: Rethinking Power, Agency and Resistance

Friday, 21 of July 2017

11:00-11:45 Registration and snack/coffee

12:00-12:15 Welcome

12:15-13:30 Keynote Lecture
Sara R. Farris (Goldsmiths University of London)

13:30-14:00 Snack and coffee break

14:00-15:30 Panel I

Politics in crisis: right-wing populism, religious nationalism and anti-feminism

Panelists:

Andrea Peto (Central European University),
Sikata Banerjee (University of Victoria)

15:30-16:00 Coffee break

16:00-17:30 Panel II

Institutions in crisis: gender politics in the EU and the UN

Panelists:

Mieke Verloo (Radboud University), Rosalind Cavanaugh (University of Edinburgh), Susanne Zwingel (Florida International University, USA)

17:30-18:00 Coffee break

18:00-19:45 Panel III

Economic crisis: austerity politics, social reproduction and care

Panelists:

Shirin Rai (University of Warwick), Gülay Çağlar (FU Berlin), Sonia Ruiz Garcia (Oxford Brookes University)

20:00 Conference Dinner, Restaurant "Alter Krug"

Saturday, 22 of July 2017

8:30-9:00 Welcome and coffee

9:00-10:45 Panel IV

Feminism in crisis?

Panelists:

Ilse Lenz (Ruhr Universität Bochum), Wendy Harcourt (Erasmus University), Elisabeth Prüg (Institute of International and Development Studies Geneva), Veronika Schild (University of Western Ontario)

10:45-11:15 Coffee break

11:15-12:15 Roundtable Discussion
Knowledge production and gender expertise: What kind of Master Program do we need?

12:00-13:15 Lunch

13:15-15:15 Panel V

Alternatives to the crisis narrative: spaces of resistance

Panelists:

Akwugo Emejulu (University of Warwick), Christine Bauhardt (HU Berlin), Eirini Gaitanou (King's College London), Bice Maiguashca (University of Exeter)

15:00-15:30 Wrap-up and Farewell

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Abstract

Gender Politics in Turbulent Times: Rethinking Power, Agency and Resistance

The world is changing at breathtaking speed and with it the normative and institutional parameters for gender politics. Unquestionably, as feminist scholars have shown, gender politics and the objective of gender equality are and were always subject to contestation and (re)negotiation. However, under the current political atmosphere, the pressure on gender equality norms and policies has increased enormously and the room for maneuver seems to shrink. The reasons for and dynamics of this trend are multifaceted and complex. They include the economic crisis, the rise of right-wing populism and authoritarianism, increasing contestation of democracy and global institutions, like the UN and the EU and last, but not least controversies within and between different strands of feminism:

First, the ongoing global economic crisis, the Eurozone crisis and lopsided austerity policies around the globe have exacerbated social inequalities across and within societies. Feminist scholars point to the disproportionate effects of austerity on those who are already disadvantaged due to structural inequalities at the intersection of gender, race and class. Moreover, the changes in the global economy and the related austerity policies have significantly reduced the room for maneuver, such as public investments in social protection, care services and infrastructure. These investments, however, are required, in order to actively pursue the goal of gender equality.

Secondly, feelings of insecurity in the wake of economic stress, terrorism and humanitarian crisis have fortified ethno-nationalist and racist sentiments in many countries of the world. The anxiety about the loss of economic security, social status and privileges coupled with an increasing distrust towards political elites and institutions fuels right-wing populist, homophobic and anti-feminist movements, who strongly oppose gender equality policies. In fact, resistance to feminism and gender politics has always existed, but has gained special momentum under the current upsurge of neoconservative forces. This seriously threatens standards and improvements in women's rights and gender equality, which had already been accomplished.

Thirdly, internationally accepted norms and commitments are under attack and at risk of being set back. International organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), which have provided important political spaces for feminist activism for many decades, are in crisis as they increasingly lack legitimacy, credibility and, as in the case of the EU, internal cohesion. Thus, the question arises whether these institutions are still important players for meaningfully promoting gender equality policies and women's rights. Transnational feminist activists,

for instance, seriously questioned the gains and effectiveness of holding a 5th UN World Conference on Women, pointing to the likelihood of backlash on existing international commitments.

Fourthly, besides these aggravating political circumstances, challenges also arise from debates and controversies within and between different strands of feminism. One of the problems widely discussed by feminist scholarship in the last decade, has been the relationship between feminism and neoliberalism or neoliberal feminism, respectively. Nancy Fraser unleashed the debate most prominently, criticizing second-wave feminism for having foregrounded questions of identity and recognition at the expense of questions of material inequality and redistribution and thereby having become capitalism's handmaiden. Meanwhile, the prevalence of pop-feminism means being a feminist is en vogue again, but entails aspects of elitism and social exclusion.

Though this list is not exhaustive, these are important dynamics that significantly change power relations and alter the conditions under which political agency and resistance become possible. This conference aims at bringing together cutting-edge research on both the current challenges and new opportunities for feminism and gender politics at international, national and local level. The conference builds on the rich scholarship of feminist political science that has critically examined the role of the state and of international organizations in promoting gender equality and justice. It seeks to explore the political, institutional and discursive dynamics that potentially reconfigure power relations, shape political agency and produce new forms and constellations of resistance.

The spaces and conditions for gender politics will be discussed in regard to the following topics:

- Political crisis: right-wing populism, anti-feminism and objection to gender politics
- Institutional crisis: gender politics in the EU and the UN
- Feminism in crisis? Current state of transnational feminism; neoliberal feminism
- Economic crisis: austerity politics, social reproduction and care
- Knowledge production and gender expertise: What kind of Master Program do we need?
- Alternatives to the crisis narrative: spaces of resistance