CRITIQUING GENDER AND ISLAM

Resisting Far-Right Politics in the Middle East and Europe

Queer Feminist Critiques

Edited by Tunay Altay, Nadje Al-Ali and Katharina Galor

RESISTING FAR-RIGHT POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION: ANTI-GENDERISM, HOMOPHOBIA AND FAR-RIGHT POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE

Nadje Al-Ali, Tunay Altay and Katharina Galor

Introduction

On 13 September 2022, twenty-two-year-old Iranian Kurdish Jina Mahsa Amini was arrested by Iran's morality police for breaching the Islamic dress code for women and, according to witnesses, severely beaten in a police van. She died three days later while still in police custody. The tragic death of Amini ignited a series of protests drawing attention to the widely felt discontent with the Iranian government and the worsening conditions of gender equality and human rights abuses in Iran. The protests quickly gained momentum and spread across the country, with millions of people taking to the streets to demand change on issues long shaped by authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism. The slogan 'Woman, life, freedom' (*Jin Jiyan Azadî* in Kurdish), commonly used by the Kurdish women's movement since the 1980s, reverberated at Amini's funeral, with women taking their headscarves off to protest the morality regime of the country (Khatam 2023). In the following weeks, protesters amassed in front of government buildings in Tehran, Isfahan and Pakdasht, among other cities, and faced a brutal response by the police forces, with around 10,000 arrests and 500 civilian deaths (HRANA 2023).

Globally, the Iran protests received widespread support, with state representatives, politicians, artists and activists expressing solidarity with the demonstrators and calling for an end to state violence and oppression. In December 2022, Berlin's historic Brandenburg Gate was illuminated in such an act of support, displaying the same slogan shouted by the Iranian activists: 'Woman, life, freedom'. The former Berlin Mayor Franziska Giffey addressed the crowd during the opening: 'It is an important sign of solidarity that we are standing here together at the Brandenburg Gate, at the landmark, Berlin's symbol of freedom, and that we are making clear: woman, life, freedom'. The mainstream discussions around the protests in Germany, however, showed a continued salience of colonial and Orientalist notions at work in understanding women's rights in the Middle East. For example, Georg Pazderski, a politician in Germany's far-right political party AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*), remarked about the protests: 'The headscarf is a visible symbol of Islamic women's oppression. In Iran, women take their headscarves off at risk of their lives, and in [Germany] the Green-Leftist elites celebrate the headscarf as an alleged sign of emancipation. What is going on in their heads?' (Beck 2022).[1] Failing to recognise that in both the Middle East and Europe women struggle for the choice to wear or not to wear a headscarf, Pazderski's comments further provoked moral panic around the so-called 'Islamisation' of Germany.

As the Iran protests and the following debate on women's rights illustrate, both the Middle East and Europe experience an increasing presence and impact of political constituencies that draw on nationalism, populism, religion and conservative familialism while attacking marginalised groups, democratic institutions, academia and queer and feminist movements, as well as wider notions of pluralism and equality. This political shift has introduced multiple challenges to the study of right-wing politics, as differences are so significant that no generalisations hold. In David Ricci's words, 'the right resembles a Rorschach ink-blot whose edges have no particular shape and whose center appears as a trackless region containing no detailed image of what is there' (Ricci 2009, p. 159). In recent years, many researchers have focused on the 'far right' as a set of politics aiming to promote and reinstall 'race, gender, and sexual hierarchies' (Anievas and Saull 2023) and to strip marginalised groups of their rights and protection in the process. While right-wing politics are often promoted by illiberal, populist, authoritarian and conservative political actors, they also increasingly find support in the mainstream.

Far-right ideologies are commonly perceived as being confined to specific regions, often drawing a line between Europe and the Middle East, despite their shared histories of migration, colonialism and globalisation. While some forms of right-wing politics are culturalised and seen as 'regional' in the Middle East, they are often treated as 'exceptional' to an otherwise democratic and 'modern' political system in Europe. It is here that *Resisting Far-Right Politics in the Middle East and Europe* makes its intervention. The contributions in this volume illustrate, with the help of different empirical case-studies from the Middle East and Europe, our conceptualisation of the broad spectrum of far-right politics and queer feminist critiques as manifested in a wide array of contexts, including academia, politics and everyday life. We recognise the complexities and variations of anti-gender, anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ discourses and policies addressed by the contributors to this volume.[2] Here, we are inspired by Elżbieta Korolczuk and Agnieszka Graff's (2018) notion of anti-genderism and Meredith Weiss and Michael Bosia's (2013) understanding of political homophobia (see also Ayoub and Stoeckl 2024) to denote the mobilisations opposing gender equality, LGBTQ rights and a range of other connected themes that are 'moralised' through similar patterns, including sex education, Gender Studies and queer intimacy.

In the contexts of the Middle East and Europe, far-right politics coincide with the dynamics of racism, colonialism and border regimes. The scholarship on homonationalism and sexual citizenship has demonstrated how ideals of gender equality and sexual rights have been used as part of the 'civilising mission' of the 'West' over the Middle East to justify invasive, extractivist and anti-democratic politics (Puar 2007; Sabsay 2012). Therefore, our intervention in the volume arises from the necessity to think about right-wing politics in a comprehensive manner while following two imperatives: firstly, taking into account both gender and sexuality as central components of far-right politics in Europe and the Middle East; secondly, de-exceptionalising the Middle East and encouraging transnational approaches to the study of far-right politics. Our analysis and the contributions are informed by our attention to the multifarious ways in which anti-genderism and homophobia are inextricably linked to racism, as well as to anti-migrant and anti-refugee sentiments, attitudes and policies. *Resisting Far-Right Politics* aims to offer a cohesive volume that encourages contributors to explore the interconnectedness of gender and sexuality in the Middle East and Europe beyond the narratives of homonationalism and sexual citizenship.

This edited volume is the outcome of a two-day digital conference on 24–25 September 2021, titled 'Queer feminist perspectives on political homophobia and anti-feminism in the Middle East and Europe', organised in collaboration with Brown University, Humboldt University of Berlin and the Heinrich Böll Foundation.[3] The conference's thirty-four presenters, including two keynote lecturers and four opening panel participants, all shed light on growing anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ mobilisations shaping policy and rhetoric in the Middle East and Europe. Some of the shorter versions of the papers from our conference have been published as a digital dossier on the website of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.[4]

The research collected in this volume is situated within different methodological and theoretical traditions that are informed by queer feminist critiques (Al-Ali and Sayegh 2019; Alqaisiya 2020; Amar and El Shakry 2013; Kandiyoti 2016; Mikdashi and Puar 2016; Puar 2007). Rooted in critical traditions of queer theory and feminism, queer feminist critique offers diverse pathways for a radical rethinking of social relations: contesting patriarchal ways of knowing, re-evaluating normative axioms and knowledge claims, dismantling essentialist and exclusionary conventions, inspiring research from the margins, accounting for intersectional struggles and signifying the centrality of gender and sexuality in research and activism. The queer feminist critiques that we showcase in this volume were actualised in research through scholarly methods of reflexivity, positionality, intersectionality, experience and auto-ethnography. The use of these methods by the contributors unravelled the complex ways in which gender and sexuality shape right-wing politics across the Middle East and Europe. The chapters are categorised according to three cross-cutting themes, focusing on 1) bottom-up interventions and resistance; 2) queer feminist perspectives in framing right-wing politics; 3) comparative perspectives between the Middle East and Europe.

In what follows, we provide an initial sketch of the empirical context of contemporary anti-genderism and homophobia in the Middle East and Europe before offering our conceptualisation of far-right politics and queer feminist critique. We will then discuss the methodological underpinnings for this project, including remarks about our respective positionalities, and turn to an overview and summary of the contributions before offering some concluding reflections. During the preparation of this volume, new developments posed further challenges for marginalised groups,

migrants, trans people, drag performers, sex workers, refugees, women and LGBTQ people.

Indicative of these trends is Russia's war in Ukraine, which has tilted the political landscape in Europe towards further militarisation, economic austerity and security measures. These developments have created the grounds for far-right politics to thrive, with many European politicians adopting nationalist discourses while mobilising their voters against migrants, refugees and other marginalised groups, as seen with the Netherlands' Party for Freedom (Dutch: *Partij voor de Vrijheid*) and Germany's AfD.

While we were finalising and revising this volume, on 7 October 2023 members of Hamas's armed wing, Izz ad-Din al Qassam Brigades, along with other Palestinian armed groups and civilians, carried out a coordinated attack on Israeli civilian communities and military bases in southern Israel, near the border with Gaza (UNHCHR 2024). More than 1,200 people were killed and 252 were abducted to Gaza, including civilians and members of Israeli Security Forces. The initial attack was followed by a heavy barrage of rockets and mortar fire into Israel, which was quickly met with Israel's wide-scale operation aiming to retailiate against the attackers. In the year since the attack, we have witnessed the escalation of the conflict into a genocidal war on Gaza, with repercussions of increased violence and forced displacement including in the West Bank, so far incurring over 40,000 deaths and 100,000 injured Palestianians, as reported by the Gaza Health Ministry. The war has expanded into Lebanon, Iran, Syria and Yemen, creating one of the region's worst humanitarian crises in recent history. While countries like Spain, Ireland and France have called for a global arms embargo, the Unites States, Germany, the United Kingdom and Denmark continue to support and enable Israel's far-right government and its conduct of the war despite UN reports and ICJ rulings pointing to clear evidence of human rights violations. Israel's war in the region has fuelled antisemitism, anti-Muslim racism and a broader anti-migrant rhetoric, particularly in Europe and North America.[5]

Both the initial attack and the wider war in the region entail various forms of gender-based violence. Reports of widespread and centrally organised sexual violence, including rape and the mutilation and burning of women at the hands of Hamas and other militants have been widespread, yet also contested.[6] Commentators have shown that accounts of rape and sexual violence have been instrumentalised.[7] Meanwhile, little attention has been paid to the

gender-based violence committed by the IDF in Gaza and in Israeli prisons both before and after 7 October 2023.[8] Simultaneously, we are seeing the proliferation of a discourse emphasising that two-thirds of the tens of thousands of Palestinian victims are women and children[9] – a discourse has also contributed to the further dehumanisation of Palestinian men.[10] These horrific challenges reveal the interconnectedness between the Middle East and the rest of the world, with global powers playing significant roles in shaping the conflict's trajectory and its humanitarian consequences. The war has intensified debates on international law, human rights, freedom of speech, academic freedom, media bias and the responsibilities of the global community, highlighting the selective nature of international solidarity and justice. The violence has not only deepened existing regional tensions but has also had ripple effects, influencing diaspora communities, migration policies and security measures worldwide. These new challenges reveal the limitations of research in the processing of social realities as events continue to unfold with situations on the ground, and discursive frameworks shift rapidly.

Cases of Anti-Genderism and Homophobia in the Middle East and Europe

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prominent Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr blamed the LGBTQ community for 'causing' the corona virus. On his Twitter page, he stated that 'one of the most appalling things that have caused this epidemic is the legalisation of same-sex marriage', calling on 'all governments to repeal this law immediately' (Fazeli 2020). Since then, members of armed militias, including those loyal to the Shia cleric, have been targeting anyone perceived to be gay or trans. Although attacks on LGBTQ people had already increased since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the popular discourse and incitement by influential politicians such as Al-Sadr took a turn for the worse as the pandemic began. More recently, Hadi al-Amiri, an Iraqi Shi'a leader of the Iran-loyal Badr Organisation, labelled 'manifestations of homosexuality' as one of the most prominent challenges facing the country (Sirwan 2022).

Various armed militias of both Sunni and Shi'a background see themselves as 'protectors of the nation' and enforcers of the '*status quo*'. They have been able to abduct, torture, rape and kill lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people with impunity, as the Iraqi government has failed to hold members of these armed

groups accountable (Reid 2021). At the same time, Moqtada al-Sadr and other political and militia leaders in Iraq have played an important role in increasing gender-based violence and challenging discourses around women's rights and gender equality. In 2023, women's rights activists and feminist academics were increasingly under attack, as the word 'gender' was being associated with 'obscenity' (Choman 2023) and seen as a Western imposition, forcing many activists and academics to avoid using the term 'gender' altogether. At the time of this introduction's completion, the Iraqi government had just issued a directive via the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) that all media outlets must replace the term 'homosexuality' with 'sexual deviance' in their published and broadcast language (Amnesty International 2023). Furthermore, the government banned and demonised the use of the word 'gender' in the media, in the contexts of education or activism.

The attacks on women and LGBTQ people might appear extreme in the Iraqi context, but different levels of restrictions, discrimination and targeting are evident in numerous other countries in the Middle East. Almost a month before Muqtada al-Sadr's sermon, Ali Erbaş, Turkey's most senior government-appointed Muslim cleric, took the stage and blamed adultery, sodomy and homosexuality for 'bringing illnesses', warning the community to protect itself from 'such evil' while insinuating a hidden connection between the HIV epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic (Altay 2022). As the country faces financial turmoil under record-breaking inflation, Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan announced his plans to introduce a new constitutional referendum to 'protect family values' against 'homosexual propaganda' with a law inspired by Russia's infamous 2013 anti-gay law (Michaelson and Narli 2023). In Israel, politician Bezalel Smotrich, who describes himself as a 'proud homophobe' and blamed one of Israel's COVID-19 waves on the Tel Aviv Pride Parade, heads the right-wing extremist Religious Zionism Party and has served as minister of finance since 2022. It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed fault lines of inequality, leaving some more vulnerable than others to infection and economic impact. Beyond these direct impacts, however, the pandemic also provided a political environment for right-wing actors to scapegoat, marginalise and attack minority communities. These attacks serve to advance their agendas through 'moral panics', where right-wing figures construct a marginalised and under-represented group as an existential threat to societal values to generate politically useful fear. Most recently, Lebanon – generally associated

with a more liberal social climate and an active queer night life – has banned the film *Barbie* (2023). Mohammed Mortada, Lebanon's Minister of Culture, backed by not only the Shi'a Islamist Hezbollah but also Christian far-right groups, has stated that the movie promotes homosexuality and sexual transformation (*The Guardian* 2023).

Yet, it is not only in the Middle East that we have seen debates becoming increasingly restricted and repressive: anti-genderism has also intensified alongside trans- and homophobia in Europe. Since the mid-2000s, anti-genderism has emerged in Spain, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia, mainly appearing as the opposition to same-sex marriage or sexual education in schools (Wittenius 2022). In 2012 and 2013, mass protests occurred in France – '*La manif pour tous*' (LMPT; in English, the rally for all) movement, an 'extra-ecclesiastic' catholic militancy operating outside of the official structures of the Vatican and church (Lavizzari and Siročić 2023).

In September 2024, Georgia's parliament approved a new law that further curbs LGBTQ rights, intensifying restrictions on LGBTQ activism and visibility in the country (*Al Jazeera* 2024). This legislative move follows a pattern of increased hostility and violence against the LGBTQ community, including the July 2021 attack on an office used by LGBTQ activists by far-right protesters and the cancellation of Tbilisi Pride due to lack of state protection. More recently, in 2023, 2,000 anti-LGBTQ protesters disrupted the Pride festival, burning props of rainbow flags and placards (Reuters in Tbilisi 2023). In 2021, a new law was adopted in Hungary which made it an offence to 'promote' sexual and gender differences to children in educational settings, films or adverts (Ayoub and Stoeckl 2024; Rankin 2021). The law requires that human rights education courses in schools do not 'propagate consensual same sex relations or the affirming of one's gender'. Courses on 'sexual orientation' may only be held when abiding by Hungary's 'constitutional identity' and its Christian culture (Vig 2021). In previous years, the Hungarian government systematically cracked down on Gender Studies and feminist scholarship, forcing entire courses to be shut down and contributing to Central European University's decision to relocate to Vienna. 'There is no such thing as gender!' exclaimed a high-level Hungarian politician when challenged about the government's ban on master's degrees in Gender Studies in 2018 (Fodor 2022, p. 2).

For many years now, right-wing politician Viktor Orbán has been portraying gender equality as well as minority and migrant rights as threats to the

Hungarian nation, accusing NGOs that work with minorities and women of being paid by outsiders to help foreign interests (Grzebalska and Pető 2018). Orbán's government stopped funding NGOs dealing with gender equity issues and suspended all government agencies associated with legislation to promote women (Fodor 2022, p. 2). Much like the Islamist government in Turkey under Erdoğan and the Russian state under Putin, the governments in Hungary and Poland have been emphasising the interests of the 'traditional' family to replace either individual or gender-based rights, using a nationalist discourse to discredit feminist and human rights discourses (Grzebalska and Pető 2018). In December 2020, the Hungarian parliament passed several amendments put forward by Orbán to 'protect heterosexual marriage'. The constitution now states that a family is based on 'marriage and the parent–child relation. The mother is a woman, the father a man' (Dunai and Komuves 2020). The new legislation includes a *de facto* ban on homosexual couples adopting children. Moreover, the amendments also targeted trans people by ending the legal recognition for gender self-identification and gender reassignment, stating that a citizen's sex was determined at birth.

Ultimately, in both Europe and the Middle East right-wing politics foster fear and legitimise their policies which seek to control 'outsiders', whether refugees or migrants, as well as ethnic, religious or sexual minorities, with an appeal to security (Norocel et al. 2020; Wodak 2021). While the anti-immigration platform is more pronounced in Europe (Rydgren 2007), in both regional contexts nativism and nationalism translate into anti-minority sentiments. Specific and local right-wing policies and discourses of exclusion frequently emerge by using a historical revisionist myth of a heteronormative and ethnically and/or religiously homogeneous nation that is constructed to be under threat by external forces – whether 'the West', 'the EU', or the 'gender lobbies'.

Conceptualising Far-Right Politics, Gender and Sexuality

Globally, we have seen anti-genderism and homophobic attitudes and policies taken up by a range of politicians, movements and activists on the illiberal to extreme-right spectrum (Altman and Symons 2016; Gevisser 2020; Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Weiss and Bosia 2013). The particular strain of right-wing politics in which we are interested is characterised by the shift from individual rights to a focus on traditions, religion and the family as the basic societal unit, while LGBTQ rights and gender-equality policies are interpreted as a new

phase of 'global colonialism' (Korolczuk and Graff 2018, p. 815). Although conservative anti-feminism and homophobia with a focus on reproductive and sexual rights has a long history, contemporary anti-genderism and political homophobia constitutes a much broader ideological construct that combines a critique of liberal value systems (individualism, human rights and gender equality) with an opposition to contemporary global capitalism (Altınay and Pető 2016).

Historically, right-wing politics have encompassed a diverse ideological spectrum, including social conservatives as well as advocates for a capitalist economy, free enterprise and private ownership. Often, these views have been accompanied by nationalist, nativist, racist and antisemitic sentiments. Due to their connection to tradition and authority, right-wing politics have taken different forms in different national contexts, with core issues being shaped by majority–minority relations, religion, socio-economic conditions and the broader balance of political power. Far-right politics exist in this terminological variety as a set of principles that are promoted by illiberal, populist, authoritarian, right-wing and conservative political actors. While some right-wing politics are pursued by political parties that operate in opposition to the ruling parties, as in the case of Germany's AfD, other examples show groups that form a government and remain in control for decades, as in the cases of Israel, Russia and Turkey. Despite vast socio-political and historical differences, issues such as globalisation, migration, gender equality and sexual rights have strongly informed far-right politics in the past decade, both in the Middle East and Europe. As Deniz Kandiyoti discusses in her chapter in this volume, far-right politics could be seen through the lens of 'backlash': a form of resistance by groups who react to a perceived loss of power and position in society. The sense of perceived loss is aggravated by theories of demographic replacement, as seen in Elizabeth Berman's chapter, or the anti-nationalist lobbying of 'liberal elites', as examined by Maryna Shetsova in the context of the Ukraine. More recent far-right politics in Europe and North America are also characterised by a streak of anti-institutionalism and anti-establishment sentiment and the senses of 'contradiction, instabilities, and crises associated with neoliberal globalization' (Anievas and Saull 2023, p. 717), as well as a new wave of disruption and dislocation of ideals, such as 'multi-culturalism', 'pluralism' and 'equality'.

At present, the term 'extreme-right', often used interchangeably with 'radical-right', usually describes far-right political, social and religious movements – generally political parties and ideas that exist outside of mainstream conservatism. Some draw a distinction between extreme right and far-right to differentiate extreme-right terrorist organisations, such as ISIS or KKK, from those far-right political parties which, while showing sympathy towards the political ideologies of extreme-right groups (such as white supremacy or jihad), pursue their agendas within the lines of legality. Cas Mudde has offered a schema in *The Far Right Today* (2019), which conceptualises the far right as those who are 'anti-system' and hostile to liberal democracy. Mudde has divided the far right into two sub-groups: the first, the 'extreme right', rejects democratic or majority rule; the second, the 'radical right', does accept democracy but objects to specific aspects of liberal democracy, such as minority rights, the rule of law and separation of powers (Mudde 2019, p. 7). In this volume, we use the term 'far-right politics' broadly as an umbrella concept along the lines suggested by Cas Mudde (2019) and Andrea Pirro (2023), as a way to acknowledge the fluidity and growing transregional and international overlaps between liberal, populist, right-wing and radical-right parties and extreme-right movements and groups: '[T]he far-right includes all those ultranationalist collective actors sharing a common exclusionary and authoritarian worldview – predominantly determined on socio-cultural criteria – yet varying allegiances to democracy' (Pirro 2023, p. 103). At the same time, we wish to underline the fact that far-right politics are not exceptional or fringe in today's world, nor are they limited to extreme-right parties and political figures. Instead, far-right politics can and do appear in the demands of mainstream parties or movements. They create conditions for inequalities, discrimination, dispossession and violence, directly or indirectly, against marginalised and unrepresented communities, such as refugees, religious minority groups, sex workers and LGBTQ people.

Another important issue in the study of far-right politics is the rise of right-wing populism, which combines nationalism, as well as conservative and reactionary right-wing and extremist ideas, with populist ideology. Right-wing populist movements, parties and political leaders tend to pitch 'the people' against elites, outsiders and marginalised groups. At least in theory (Mudde 2019, p. 8) populism is pro-democratic but anti-liberal. The mainstream discussion around 'woke activism' and 'cancel culture' represents a similar pattern, where social justice movements are constructed as restricting 'freedoms'.

This has been instrumentalised by right-wing groups to discredit progressive politics, such as gender/sexuality-based rights or decolonial movements. They attempt to reduce complex social and economic phenomena and structures to simple explanations and policies, often evoking stereotypical and racist notions of 'Others' and strangers who threaten 'the true people' (Wodak 2021). In the European context, 'the people' typically refers to white Christians with traditional conservative values who tend to hold xenophobic, Islamophobic and Eurosceptic views (Poulin 2021). In the Middle East, right-wing populism frames an appeal to religious and ethnic majorities who hold conservative views with salient nationalist and illiberal political agendas. This leads us to a central question that guides our discussions in this volume: how do far-right actors in different socio-political contexts globally come to mobilise similar tools at the expense of women and LGBTQ rights?

As Deniz Kandiyoti argues in this volume, the link between gender, sexuality and far-right politics could be seen as an 'opportunistic alliance' in which anti-gender, anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ politics are used as ideological glue to bind the socially conservative bases with otherwise different goals and expectations. At the same time, anti-gender, anti-feminist and homophobic discourses and practices have become mainstream. Recent literature suggests that 'gender' has become an 'empty signifier', filled with variable content (Mayer et al. 2020) and used for political mobilisation around a range of issues such as education, reproductive rights, migration policies and sexual rights (Altınay and Pető 2016; Graff et al. 2019; Winkel et al. 2018). Meanwhile, anti-genderism not only effectively articulates itself through local and authentic political concerns, but also attempts to construct a universal vision of an illiberal civil society coordinated across borders (Korolczuk and Graff 2018, p. 798). Anti-genderist rhetoric constructs gender, feminism and challenges to heteronormativity as a colonial ideology, an imposition of a global elite fuelled by capitalism and economic neoliberalism. Yet, as eloquently argued by Elzbieta Korolczuk and Agnieszka Graff (2018), the anti-colonial critique expressed by right-wing movements is no longer about colonialism *per se* but has become a discursive device to attack 'liberal Western elites'. These developments have been explored more fully in the context of Europe; yet, as we argue in this volume, the mainstreaming of radicalism, far-right politics and populism has grown globally (Ramos and Torres 2020), and has also become evident in the Middle East.

Undoing the Division between the Middle East and Europe

As our book illustrates, the division between the Middle East and Europe is not as clear-cut in relation to the themes that we are addressing. In part, this is the result of the growing impact of Middle Eastern diasporas in Europe, but it is also more generally a consequence of the increasing social, cultural and economic exchange and interdependence between the regions. Extreme-right politics in Europe and in the Middle East are becoming increasingly tied to each other: ideas of 'Europe' or 'Europeanisation' as well as 'West' and 'Westernisation' are being promoted as 'degeneracy' and 'neo-imperialism' by nationalist and populist constituencies in the Middle East to discredit and challenge discussions on human rights, gender equality and LGBTQ rights. In Europe, however, extremist and radical discourses often employ the 'Middle East' or the figure of the 'Middle Eastern migrant' as the racialised Other of a religiously- and racially-defined European civilisation to advance their anti-immigration rhetoric and campaigns, especially those opposing Muslim migrants and refugees, most of whom are from the Middle East and Africa (El-Tayeb 2011; Jivraj et al. 2020). Despite their conventional attachment to traditional gender roles and heteronormativity, some right-wing groups present themselves as the protectors of LGBTQ people from the threat of homophobic 'Others' (Foster and Kirke 2023). They claim to be the true defenders of liberal democracy, contrasting themselves with an image of the left that privileges minorities, migrants and Muslim rights over gay rights. AfD politician Pazderski's comments, as previously stated, have at once attacked leftist members of Germany's Green Party and promoted anti-Muslim sentiments. The rhetorical synthesis of these presumably conflicting positions reflects the central role that gender and sexuality play in right-wing politics and the importance of developing a comparative and trans-regional critical perspective.

The existing academic literature on the Middle East tends to avoid the various terms associated with right-wing populism and rather references concepts such as authoritarianism, Islamism, nationalism, sectarianism and populism (Afary and Friedland 2018; Baban 2018; Moghissi 2008; Özyürek et al. 2018). This is partly due to the socio-political differences between the Middle East and Europe, which shape the histories and the positions of power of political leaders, parties, movements and rhetoric. Many right-wing parties have managed to achieve positions of power in the Middle East, either through democratic

elections or illiberal methods such military coups, and the study of far-right politics has become entangled with the study of state power. This elision has created the impression that right-wing politics have always been part of the Middle East and undermined the oppositional forces of civil society groups, activists and political actors. On another level, the separation between the Middle East and Europe in the study of radical right-wing politics is an effect of their historical separation as areas of scholarship and prevailing categorisations of the world, which exceptionalise both the Middle East and Europe. Migration and diaspora scholars have been at the forefront of challenging these geographically bounded approaches to either region (Adamson 2002, 2004, 2016; Moss 2022), and our edited volume contributes to the wider project of creating more space for dialogue and sharing comparative perspectives across disciplinary and geographical boundaries.

Israel, among other countries, exemplifies the blurring of boundaries between the Middle East and Europe. Despite its geographical location in the Middle East, Israel considers Europe to be its natural, cultural and social ally as well as a model of social and political reference (du Plessix 2011; Ram 2016). Claiming to be the only democracy in the Middle East (Yinon 2012), the country's ambiguous relationship with religious legislation has often led to policies determined by nationalist and theocratic principles, especially with regard to personal status and family law (Misgav 2015). In other words, Israel's religious hierarchy discriminates not only against non-Jewish residents and citizens, but also against populations that do not conform to Orthodox gender and sexuality norms. Gender segregation in public spaces, or courts that have only male judges – which we have seen increasingly in recent years and especially after the 2022 elections – are not commonly associated with democratic or progressive countries yet are part of the realities that exists in Israel (Rabin 2023).

Far-right politicians and movements in both the Middle East and Europe treat progressive rights as an obstacle to the realisation of their vision of the majority will. Claims of unfettered majoritarianism, as well as attacks on the checks and balances that constrain government power, severely endanger democracy, human rights and hard-won gender/sexuality-based rights and claims (Roth 2017). Erdoğan's increasingly dictatorial rule in Turkey is one of many examples of authoritarian populist leaders with far-right politics severely curtailing progressive and minority rights in the name of the majority (Savcı

2021; Tombuş 2013; Yavuz 2021). Meanwhile, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt has been pursuing a course of mass arrests, forced disappearances and torture to curtail spaces of political opposition (Grimm 2017; Hamzawy 2018). Yet, the new authoritarian strongmen phenomenon is also evident in other parts of the world, with Vladimir Putin in Russia leading the way. Indeed, authoritarianism and right-wing politics across the Middle East and Europe have been associated with a crisis of hegemonic masculinity and/or the emergence of a new 'hyper-masculinity' in search for 'masculinist restoration' (Kandiyoti 2016). Anti-genderism, as well as an increase in various forms of gender-based violence against women and LGBTQ people, might point not to the routine functioning of patriarchy or the resurgence of traditionalism, but to its threatened demise at a point when notions of female subordination and heteronormativity are no longer securely hegemonic.

Far-right politics, however, are hardly exclusively associated with men, masculinities or heterosexuality. These attributes might also include women, such as Giorgia Meloni, head of the Brothers of Italy party. Meloni describes herself as a 'woman, mother, Italian and Christian'. Her pro-family stance translates into opposing abortion and perceiving LGBTQ identities and movements as a threat to Western civilisation. Meloni also exemplifies the way in which support of and advocacy for women who have experienced gender-based violence is frequently expressed in racist terms, by blaming migrants and asylum-seekers (Torrisi 2022). Migrants and diasporas from the Middle East and North Africa in Italy, as in most European countries, are criminalised and frequently essentialised as perpetrators of gender-based and homophobic violence (Nadeau 2018). LGBTQ politicians advocating for conservative values – not unlike women such as Alice Weidel of the AfD in Germany, or Amir Ohana, Israel's first openly gay speaker of parliament – often serve as fig leaves for racist or sexist parties, values and legislations. Geert Wilders in the Netherlands has been most influential and successful in framing his campaign against Islam and Muslim migrants in terms of the defence of gay rights, a strategy similarly employed by Marine Le Pen in France. Increasingly evident is the development of anti-gender, anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ politics working alongside attacks on post-colonial studies and critical race theory. The latter becomes particularly obvious not only in the context of France and Germany, as discussed by Elizabeth Berman in this volume, but

also within the US context where two of the co-editors are based. The attacks on and criminalisation of critical race theory and equal opportunities schemes go hand-in-hand with anti-abortion legislation and the banning of gender-affirming care for trans children, as well as the so-called 'Don't Say Gay' bill which bars public school teachers from holding classroom instruction about sexual orientation or gender identity for students in kindergarten through third grade. However, in the context of the Middle East we find that a post-colonial and anti-imperialist lens has historically been used to discredit feminists and, more recently, LGBTQ and queer activists. The concept of gender itself, as well as the conceptualisation of gender equality, sexual orientation and LGBTQ rights, are frequently presented as alien to local cultures and as an expression of moral decline and Western imperialism (Naber and Abd El-Hameed 2016).

Against this broader background of far-right politics, our specific concern in this volume is the instrumentalisation of anti-genderism and homophobia to increase support and actualise politics of oppression and control in the Middle East and Europe. Issues such as homosexuality, sex work, drag and abortion rights have been used by right-wing political actors to perpetuate religious and conservative fears of societal and moral decay (Altman and Symons 2016; Weiss and Bosia 2013). Aside from their grievous consequences for marginalised groups, these attacks spotlight some of the dividing issues within feminist and LGBTQ movements, such as the rights and inclusion of trans people, intersectionality, anti-racism and decoloniality.

Queer Feminist Critiques in the Middle East and Europe

In the conjuncture of far-right politics and anti-genderism, we turn our attention to queer and feminist scholarship and activism that respond to and resist these attacks across regions. The critical encounter of queer and feminist scholarship has shown considerable disagreements, not only over the issues of gender, sex and sexuality, but also in the domains of representation and social movements. Issues of pornography, HIV rights, sex work and trans rights have been some of the contentious topics that frame the limits of queer and feminist theorising and have shown the difficult yet necessary work of alliance-building and activism. Since the 1990s, the dialogical relationship between feminism and queer theory has broadened methodological and epistemological questions

concerning sexuality, gender and other axes of power. We situate queer feminist critique as a toolbox to reflect on the legacies of queer and feminist scholarship, while making visible social inequalities and oppression.

How is the concept of queer feminism used in the context of this volume? A defining aspect of our approach to queer feminism is to employ 'critique' as a mode of engagement. We do not solely employ critique as a unitary method of complaint or accusation but as a dynamic and transformative tool for analysis and reimagining. In the context of this volume, the concept of queer feminism is utilised as a lens through which to critically examine right-wing politics and to build politics of resistance, refusal and resilience. Queer feminism is not, in our view, a simple mix or blend of queer and feminism where we disregard the disagreements and oppositions over politics and representation for the sake of an 'unhappy union'. It is not limited to the discursive inclusion of some queers into feminism or 'queering' a (hetero)normatively defined feminist theory. Queer feminism is not some 'anti-' or 'post-' homogenously defined feminism or queer theory. As Evren Savcı argues in this volume, the relationship between queer and feminist politics is not devoid of conflict and often exits 'without guarantees', which, according to her, means that they require a certain kind of faith in a possibility. Invested in this possibility, we understand queer feminism to be the work of alliance-building and solidarity among people who are affected and targeted by far-right politics. In other words, queer feminist critiques constitute a multi-faceted and complex intervention in the study of extreme right-wing politics as well as the normative scripts of gender and sexuality in the Middle East and Europe.

Another important task of theorising queer feminist critiques in the Middle East and Europe is to invoke the regional consciousness of queer theory and feminism. The works of scholars and activists bringing queer feminism into dialogue with critical race theory and decolonial studies have shaped queer theory by fostering the critiques of neo-liberal compliance in LGBTQ activism and politics (Duggan 2002; Ferguson 2019; Puar 2013), the US- and Eurocentredness of queer theory (Alqaisiya 2020; Haritaworn et al. 2014; Mikdashi and Puar 2016) and the role of neo-colonial formations within Western academia in sexuality research (Atshan 2020). By taking inspiration from this work, our use of queer feminist critique in this volume is more of an invitation to engage with its critical scholarship and praxis while also disrupting the

divide between the scholar/expert and activist/informant. We do so by prioritising lived experience and critical ethnographies to promote a productive and meaningful engagement with solidarity movements while exposing through comparative study the cross-regional formation of far-right politics.

The Methodological Foundations of this Volume

As co-editors, our experiences with activism and academia in the Middle East and Europe inform our transnational approach to far-right politics. This edited volume is a response to the binary construction of 'regional' and 'global' in gender and sexuality research in which the Global South is seen as the location of raw data and the Global North as the site of theory. Our work is also informed by important insights into the multifarious ways in which anti-gender-based violence initiatives, campaigns and policies have been entangled with imperial projects, as illustrated eloquently by the editors and contributors of *The Cunning of Gender Violence: Geopolitics and Feminism* (Abu-Lughod et al. 2023). We recognise the destructive and racist tendency to construct a 'Muslim threat' – both in relation to the Middle East and migrants within Europe – as inextricably linked to gender-based violence and homophobia. At the same time, we agree that the focus on gender-based violence in the context of international and national projects to address narrowly defined feminist goals tends to normalise and legitimise imperial and repressive policies (Abu-Lughod et al. 2023, p. 3). Yet, as this volume shows, in parallel to the emergence of a global agenda of combating violence against women and gender-based violence, we see an emerging global increase in anti-gender/feminist and homophobic attitudes and policies as part of a broader growth in radicalised right-wing movements, political parties and groups.

Focusing on developments in the Middle East and Europe, our volume brings together junior and senior academics and activists. Methodologically, their fields encompass a wide array of disciplinary areas and research tools including Anthropology, Curatorial Studies, History of Art and Architecture, Law, Media and Culture Studies, Political Sciences, Post-colonial Studies, Religious Studies, Sociology and Transnational Studies. This interdisciplinary approach to engage questions of gender and sexuality employs critical theory, ethnographic methods, oral and historical approaches, critical analyses and visual and material cultural practices. The combined commitment to the Arts,

Humanities and Social Sciences allows the volume to do justice to the complex layers of our explorations and analyses, while maintaining the thematic focus on queer feminist critiques of far-right politics in the Middle East and Europe. Artivism, combining art and activism, to resist illiberal, authoritarian and right-wing encroachments and policies, appears to grow globally as an alternative to more traditional forms of political resistance.

Recognising the significance of positionality as it shapes our respective approaches and research agendas, we would like to briefly share what we consider to be relevant reflections by and trajectories of the co-editors of this volume.

Tunay Altay is a queer Turkish researcher based in Berlin. Informed by politics, art and activism, Tunay's academic work focuses on diverse experiences of queer migration connecting Germany to Turkey, and Europe to the Middle East. Tunay trained in Law and Sociology and worked for several NGOs advocating for marginalised groups in Turkey and Germany before starting his career as a researcher. Tunay's previous ethnographic research has delved into the everyday life of border politics and the power of queer performance in disrupting assumptions around migration, displacement and exile from the Middle East in Europe. As part of his research, Tunay worked with trans migrant sex workers, activists and queer migrant and refugee drag performers. He is the co-editor of *Queer and Trans Life: Anthropological Futures* (2025). Tunay's commitment extends beyond academia, as he actively uses his platform to advocate for queer feminist critiques and to contribute to ongoing conversations surrounding the rights and agency of marginalised groups beyond the narratives of victimisation, silencing and fetishisation.

Born to an Iraqi father and a German mother, Nadje Al-Ali has always straddled and tried to bridge different cultures, world views and approaches. Having lived in Germany, Egypt, the UK and, more recently, the US with regular visits to Iraq, Lebanon and other countries in the Middle East, she has developed a comparative lens and understanding. Nadje was trained as an anthropologist but has been working in an interdisciplinary manner as a feminist and Gender Studies scholar with a special interest in feminist and gendered mobilisations in the Middle East and its diasporas, as well as war, violence and migration. Her academic work is informed by her feminist activism and *vice versa*. Nadje was a founding member of Act Together: Women's Action for Iraq, an organisation that raised consciousness about the effects of dictatorship, sanctions, war and

occupation on women and gender relations in Iraq. She has also been active in Women in Black London (a feminist peace with justice organisation) and Women against Fundamentalism (a London-based group that highlights the conservative gender discourse of extremist positions across all religions). More recently, Nadje has been involved in a queer feminist online journal called *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*, which is published for free in Arabic and English. The journal is part of a wider initiative trying to provide a platform for and to mentor activists and young scholars from the Middle East and, increasingly, from around the globe, using a queer feminist approach to address not only taboo issues around the body and sexuality but also issues linked to labour, war, migration, health and beyond.

Born and raised in Germany as the daughter of refugees from Eastern Europe, Katharina Galor's childhood was marked by her family's legal and social marginalisation, shaped among other factors by their ethno-religious identity. This experience informed much of her later interests in understanding and fighting for socially marginalised populations. After moving to Israel as a young adult, and while studying and later working in both the Israeli and Palestinian sectors of Jerusalem, she discovered a whole new spectrum of racial and religious forms of exclusion, discrimination and segregation. While her early professional interests were focused on discerning the historical reasons for ethno-religious identities and conflicts, her more recent work engages current forms of bigotry and inequity, especially in Israel. Having lived in Europe, the US and in a Middle Eastern context has made her aware of the differences and parallels with regard to anti-feminist and homophobic currents. While Germany and Israel both perceive of themselves as liberal democracies, and even though in both countries in some areas of life women, queers and trans people benefit from progressive currents and legislation, a more nuanced picture indicates rampant discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality. Katharina's personal encounters with and knowledge of pink-washing in Israel (and how it relates to homonationalism) revealed to her the interrelatedness of gender and sexuality with politics.

While our positionalities are clearly distinct, there are several common traits to our personal and professional trajectories that determine our shared interest in and dedication to the subjects under focus in the present study. All three of us have lived in both Europe and the Middle East for extended periods

and have experienced first-hand the overt social and political tensions that surround minority and marginalised populations. While the politics of gender and intersecting inequalities and forms of injustice are central to our research interests, our commitments go beyond professional frameworks and include various forms of activism. In other words, each of us has experienced certain levels of risk as we have dedicated ourselves to subjects and values that often challenge conservative majority positions and policies.

Overview of the Chapters

Our book is divided into four parts. Following our introduction, Part I, titled 'Framing Far-Right Politics: Queer Feminist Perspectives', outlines empirical historical contexts as well as the conceptual tools useful to understand, analyse and resist right-wing movements in the Middle East and Europe. Deniz Kandiyoti and Evren Savcı offer different perspectives on how these debates have been shaped by various episodes and movements in different parts of Europe and the Middle East. Deniz Kandiyoti provides the opening platform with 'The Gender Wars: New Conundrums of Our Times', where she probes into the very dynamics that have propelled gender issues to the forefront of culture wars accentuated by the rise of authoritarian populisms. She argues that 'gender wars' are not only the product of *external* onslaughts that crystallise around so-called 'anti-gender ideology', but they are also embodied in the contradictions and dysfunctions that are *internal* to platforms claiming to have a feminist agenda. Kandiyoti shows how these flaws manifest themselves in the troubled encounters of feminisms with the global 'institutionalisation' of standards and mechanisms for gender equality, providing examples from Afghanistan, Iraq and beyond. Kandiyoti encourages readers, scholars and activists to forge new politics of feminist solidarity that transcend the parochial concerns of Northern academia and can resonate around the globe. In 'Feminist and Queer Politics without Guarantees: A Rejoinder to Deniz Kandiyoti's "Gender Wars"', Evren Savcı focuses on key components of this moment's 'predicaments', which she identifies as the politics of multi-culturalism and its effects on potential transnational and queer feminist comraderies, the virtues and limits of feminist self-critique and the fear of making mistakes. She delineates three encounters that have impacted feminist politics: the global 'institutionalisation' of standards and mechanisms for gender equality; the global turn to neo-liberalism and the resulting logics of

technocratic fixes to social justice issues and corporatist feminism; the geopolitical context post-9/11 where the US employment of 'saving Afghan women' as a justification for war has led to an equation of feminism with imperialism. She argues that, while the former two could be considered effects of the neo-liberal incorporation of feminist politics, the last one should be understood as an effect of the collusion of neo-imperialism with feminism. Ultimately, Savcı proposes friendship as a method of understanding queer and feminist politics, one that makes room for both conflict and genuine conversations.

Part II of this volume focuses on 'Anti-LGBTQ and Anti-Feminist Mobilisations in the Sphere of Politics'. By highlighting common concepts, as well as the role of institutional structures in support of right-wing politics, the different chapters examine how political homophobia and anti-feminism are diffused into power structures and political processes. In 'The Rise of Israeli Far-Right Politics: A Queer Feminist Analysis', Sa'ed Atshan and Katharina Galor show how the Israeli state is increasingly embracing extremist views and politics, rendering the lives of marginalised Jewish populations within its society, as well as Palestinians, ever more precarious. Forces that promote women's and queer rights in Israel, in tension with forces promoting misogyny and homophobia, so they argue, have all contributed to the far-right contemporary Israeli political landscape, especially apparent in the government formed in 2022. Maryna Shevtsova in '"For the Sake of Kids": National Security and Family Values in the Ukrainian Sexuality Education Debate' observes that, over the past decade, ever more activists and civil society organisations have been arguing for the need to introduce so-called 'comprehensive sexuality education' in Ukrainian schools. At the same time, however, conservative and religious groups who oppose these developments have also increased their counter-efforts. Overall, the insights that Shevtsova provides into the role played by religious and right-wing organisations and groups in preventing the promotion of sexual and gender equalities in Ukraine presents an example of these dynamics in a European country beyond the EU. While this competition for influence on the minds of younger generations is closely connected to the country's history, culture and values, similar processes are at play in neighbouring Hungary, Poland and Moldova. In 'Attacks on the Academy from Gender Studies to Post-Colonialism: Science, Secularity and the Far Right in France and Germany', Elizabeth Berman offers a media analysis addressing recent attacks on post-colonial

theory in France and Germany, which maps new discourses among radical actors as well as the shifting boundaries demarcating the extreme right. Her study follows how these attacks contravene the professed 'secularity' of the French and German states and scientific apparatuses, revealing how discourses and practices of sexuality, gender and intimacy are always already entangled with those of racialisation, migration and religion. Examining discourses about the Middle East in Europe through local case-studies, Berman underscores both the co-constitution and indeterminacy of these disparate geographies under conditions of hyper-globalisation and transnational exchange, and she ultimately illuminates how 'proper scientific citizenship' is constructed in two national contexts that consider themselves, and are widely considered to be, hegemonically secular.

Part III – 'Comparative Studies between the Middle East and Europe' – more explicitly establishes the transnational connections between the Middle East and Europe. The chapters of this section aim to de-centre both European and Middle Eastern far-right politics by tracing their local motifs, similarities and differences. All contributions are based on thorough analyses of local and national right-wing politics, as well as the attempts by local and national political actors to highlight the transnational connections of political homophobia and anti-feminism. The opening chapter by Nur Sinem Kourou and Victoria Scheyer, 'Anti-Feminist Strategies of Right-Wing Parties in Turkey and Germany: A Comparative Analysis of Gender and Sexuality Politics', works to analyse and compare how right-wing parties in both national contexts apply anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ discourses and thereby weaken democratic processes, consolidate conservative values and gain political power. Through this comparison, the authors extend the limits of the anti-feminist gender regime studies beyond Western radical-right parties in Europe and the United States. They argue that, despite the political, religious and social differences of the AK Party (Justice and Development Party or AKP) in Turkey and the AfD in Germany, both parties utilise the anti-feminist apparatus and conservative pro-family and anti-LGBTQ discourse in a similar way. Ahmed Awadalla, in their chapter 'Homophobia without Borders: Dismantling Homophobia's Architecture in Cairo's Bathhouse Raid and Berlin's Rave Crackdown', illuminates the structural phenomenon of homophobia employed by the state and media in two different contexts. Their[11] description establishes how queer

spaces and (sub-)cultures are often the target of moral panics which invite state surveillance, policing and control. The comparison between a case-study in the European context and another in the Middle East context reveals how certain homophobic dynamics can be universally applied. Hakan Sandal-Wilson concludes Part III with his chapter '"From Belfast to Diyarbakır": Transnational Conversations on Conflict and LGBTI+ Politics in the Archive'. He studies LGBTI+/queer activism in the Middle East in general and Kurdish LGBTI+ activism in particular, and he offers a powerful insight into the emergence of novel and radical imaginings of liberation in times of conflict.

The final section of this volume, Part IV, provides analyses of 'Bottom-Up Interventions and Resistance'. The authors here examine civil society and activist mobilisations against homophobic and anti-feminist discourses and legislation in a range of political contexts. The chapters together outline the dynamics between the institutionalisation of anti-genderism and homophobia and grassroots and social movements, highlighting bottom-up movements of action. Tomasz Kitlinski and Pawel Leszkowicz in 'Feminist and Queer Action and Art in Poland's Illiberal Democracy' ask: if feminist and queer cultural and activist initiatives are highly visible and, in that sense, impactful, do they have the power to really change the governmental agenda and balance of power. Their contribution examines Polish oppositional culture and civil society, drawing comparisons with similar examples of actions and images in other countries. At the centre of their study is feminism and queer artivism as a form of political critique, dissidence and aspect of civil society. Such queer feminist actions and culture, they argue, keep democracy afloat in a region that is engulfed in a new far-right authoritarianism. In the volume's final contribution, 'Neo-liberal Governance and Emergence of the Feminist Subject in Iran', Firoozeh Farvardin shows how anti-gender politics and the disciplining of feminised bodies through the obligatory hijab have become a core feature of the Islamic Republic. She argues that the shift toward neo-liberal governance and, therefore, neo-liberal gender/sexual subjugation has contributed to the emergence of the revolutionary movement. By contextualising the rise of neo-liberal governance and its related gender/sexual policies, she establishes how feminised bodies have become the primary subject and object of neo-liberalisation, while at the same time generating new forms of agency and resistance.

In summary, the different parts of this volume define the conceptual tools that help us understand right-wing politics through a queer feminist lens in various geographical and national contexts, with a focus on the Middle East and Europe. Despite its inherent contradictions and the clear differences between local contexts, the global climate of 'gender wars' shows signs of transnational solidarities. The chapters in Part I outline various empirical contexts in different parts of Europe and the Middle East. They focus on conceptual tools and present modes of forging new politics of feminist solidarity around the globe. Part II builds on the conceptual frame provided in the previous chapters and describes concrete examples of anti-LGBTQ and anti-feminist mobilisations in Israel, Ukraine, Germany and France, by highlighting common concepts, as well as the role of governments and governing parties in support of extreme-right politics. All of the chapters in this section focus on how political homophobia and anti-feminism are diffused into power structures and political processes. Despite claims of democratic, 'Western' and mostly secular foundations in these countries, the authors in this volume expose anti-LGBTQ and anti-feminist policies that transpire in various educational institutions and governmental structures. By highlighting similarities and connections between Turkey and Germany, Germany and Egypt, and Ireland and Turkey, further contributions in Part II not only de-exceptionalise the Middle East as a place which uniquely fosters conservative pro-family discourses and policies, but also underline once more the transnational dynamics between queer voices and spaces and homophobic and anti-feminist agendas and mobilisations. Whereas in Part II the chapters focus on specific countries, each chapter in Part III provides a comparative analysis between a European and a Middle Eastern country. While Parts I–III all highlight the realities and inherent problems of anti-genderism, homophobia and the far right, the contributions in Part IV provide hopeful tools and actions of resistance. Indeed, the bottom-up movements resisting legal and political instantiations of anti-gender pressure in the cases of Poland and Iran conclude this study on an encouraging note. These movements are the forces propelling civil society and act(art)ivism in the face of the rising threat of right-wing anti-genderisms. Together, this dialogue of theory and activism, of scholarship and practice and of threat and hope invites the reader to navigate the complexities of the political and social structures that try to diminish queer lives and values, providing tools and directions for resistance.

Notes

1. The original text was shared online in German on a social media platform: 'Das Kopftuch ist sichtbares Symbol islamischer Frauenunterdrückung. Im Iran legen Frauen unter Lebensgefahr ihr Kopftuch ab und in [Deutschland] feiert die Grün-Linke Schickeria das Kopftuch als angebliches Zeichen der Emanzipation. Was geht nur in deren Köpfen vor?'
2. We use the acronym 'LGBTQ' to refer to queer and trans people in Europe and the Middle East. We acknowledge the diverse experiences of non-normative sexualities and genders as well as the different adaptations of the acronym globally. We sometimes refer to trans, homosexual or lesbian to identify different instances that target a group under the LGBTQ umbrella. The decision to use the acronym 'LGBTQ' in our academic text reflects a balance between inclusivity and clarity. While other acronyms may encompass a broader range of identities and orientations, 'LGBTQ' is widely recognised and understood, allowing us to efficiently communicate our focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer experiences within the context of our research.
3. On the event, see https://www.boell.de/en/queer-feminist-perspectives-political-homophobia-and-anti-feminism [accessed 19 August 2023].
4. For the online blog, see https://www.boell.de/en/queer-feminist-perspectives-political-homophobia-and-anti-feminism [accessed 19 August 2023].
5. For different views on the use of the term 'genocide' in the context of Israel's post-7 October 2023 military action in Gaza, see Omer Bartov (2023) and Raz Segal (2023).
6. Among the reports on gender violence and rapes committed by Hamas, see Jeffrey Gettleman, Anat Schwartz and Adam Sella (2023), Debroah Lipstadt and Michèle Taylor (2024), Bethan McKernan (2024), and Joy Bernard (2024).
7. On the complexities of gender-based violence in Israel-Palestine and in war zones more generally, see Samah Salaime (2023). On how the public exposure and debates on the rapes in Israeli and international media affect victims of sexual violence negatively, see Orit Kamir (2023). Heidi Matthews and Tanya Serisier (2024) have written on the instrumentalisation of the rapes. Nata Elia (2024) and Randa Abdel-Fattah (2024) have stated that none of the rape accusations came from survivors or eyewitnesses. Jeremy Scahill, Ryan Grim and Daniel Boguslaw (2024) have questioned the veracity and professionalism of Jeffrey Gettleman, Anat Schwartz and Adam Sella's report published in *The New York Times*.
8. See, among others, Revital Madar (2023).
9. See the position paper published by Physicians for Human Rights – Israel on 26 November 2023, titled 'Gender-based violence as a weapon of war during the

October 7 Hamas attacks', https://www.phr.org.il/en/gender-based-violence-eng/ [accessed 4 January 2024]. See also the article on *reliefweb* titled 'Gaza: After two months of war, women last to eat and children first to die', 7 December 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-after-two-months-war-women-last-eat-and-children-first-die [accessed 4 January 2024].

10. See Atshan (2024).
11. Ahmed Awadalla uses the pronouns 'they' and 'them'. To learn more about the use of gender-neutral pronouns, see the Gender Sensitive Communication Guide of the European Institute for Gender Equality: https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/toolkits-guides/gender-sensitive-communication/practical-tools/pronouns.

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PART I

FRAMING FAR-RIGHT POLITICS: QUEER FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

1

THE GENDER WARS: NEW CONUNDRUMS OF OUR TIMES

Deniz Kandiyoti

The 'gender wars' of my title have gone through various transformations and shifts in meaning since the 1990s. The official recognition of 'gender' as a category for social analysis at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 ushered in both new mainstreaming policies and conservative trans-national alliances aiming to remove matters relating to sexuality and reproductive choice from the domain of civic deliberation and human rights by placing them in the realm of doctrinal imperatives. A decade later, contestations around the relations between sex, gender and gender identity created further cleavages within and among women's rights and LGBTQ platforms. These debates were by no means internal to feminisms but became central to the so-called 'culture wars' that came to define the politics of polarisation which accompanied the global rise of right-wing populisms. I use the term 'gender wars' in this broader context to highlight the increasing centrality of gender issues in mainstream politics. A few examples will suffice to illustrate my point. I was initially struck by an article in the *Financial Times*, titled 'Sex, violence and the rise of populism' (Rachman 2018), precisely because it appeared in a publication that does not ordinarily deal with gender issues. It noted the militantly misogynistic tone of populist movements in the US, Brazil, the Philippines and Italy, among others, referring to outrageous statements made by a variety of political leaders, including ex-US president Donald

Trump. Images of a bare-chested, horse-riding Vladimir Putin, the patron-saint of state-sponsored homophobia, and assorted sexual slurs in the political rhetoric of male leaders started appearing in the popular press. Even scholars of populism with little previous interest in gender issues started taking note of this strongly gendered discourse and its blatant appeal to a frail masculinity, threatened, as Cass Mudde (2018) has put it, by emasculating feminists, effeminate liberals or overly virile 'Others' (such as immigrants or blacks).

In the European context, former Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte in June 2021 declared that Hungary 'has no business being in the European Union anymore' after it passed legislation banning LGBTQ content in schools and the media. Admittedly, this came in the aftermath of a decade of systematic democratic backsliding. MIT economist Daron Acemoğlu (2021) has argued forcefully that the European Union should begin the process of expelling Hungary and reflect on the concerning trajectory of Poland, lest it makes a mockery of the European project and everything it stands for. Not coincidentally, the propaganda appeals made by Putin after his invasion of Ukraine in 2022 denounced the European Union and the West more generally as a seat of depravity, presenting Russia as the staunch defender of Christendom and traditional values. We now find ourselves in a twenty-first century assailed by the spectacle of deeply polarised societies around the globe, where vital issues such as our conceptions of citizenship, national belonging and the future of democratic governance are at stake. Co-citizens glare at each other with mistrust and sometimes revulsion across chasms that have often been wilfully cultivated by populist leaders hankering after unchecked executive power. In the conflict-torn societies of the Middle East and North Africa, victims of multiple foreign interventions, sectarian divides are weaponised with deadly consequences that feed flows of refugees and migrants to neighbouring countries and to Europe, further exacerbating xenophobic and exclusionary rhetoric in the receiving countries.

The Taliban's take-over of Afghanistan in August 2021 acted as a sharp reminder that the rhetoric which we use to talk about gender justice and women's rights can be worlds apart in different contexts. The invocation of abused women in Afghanistan (and later in Iraq) as a justification for US military interventions in the context of the so-called War on Terror following the events of 9/11, 2001, produced the effect of equating feminism with imperialism. Far

from inspiring an unqualified response of international feminist solidarity, these invocations provoked sharp critical reactions from many feminists in the North and beyond. Moreover, the designation of these interventions as 'cultural imperialism' had the unintended consequence of locking the women of Afghanistan into an essentialised concept of cultural indigeneity, reinscribing the categories of 'the Muslim woman' vs the 'West'.

One of the more disheartening features of the commentary that followed the Taliban take-over, almost a generation later, was that the terms of the debate had hardly shifted. While some analysts celebrated the victory of the Taliban as the definitive defeat of US imperialism, others declared the end of an alleged era of progress and freedom for Afghan women. The casualty has, as always, been a deeper understanding of Afghan society. While the dysfunction of US intervention and counter-insurgency operations prepared its own demise through its disregard for civilian lives and rampant corruption, the regime ushered in by the Taliban falls grievously short of representing the aspirations of the society of which it purports to be in control.

In these variegated gendered landscapes, debates range from concerns about the most basic rights to freedom of movement and education for women to the full recognition of LGBTQ rights. This leaves one with the sense that the term 'chasm' that may be used in relation to the polarising culture wars of the North almost calls for the metaphor of separate galaxies as we move to a more global scale. Is there any hope of finding a mutually intelligible language for claim-making and voice in a world where most women (and men) continue to be locked into coerced identities – while feminists in the North are engaged in sometimes acrimonious debates over identities, bodies and sexualities which have become evident in the tensions between so-called 'gender-critical' feminists and some trans activist platforms? Social movements and their demands are necessarily grounded in local histories of struggle, regardless of the global reach and dissemination of movements for gender equality or LGBTQ rights. How do we deal with the differences in language, meaning and temporality among them? In lieu of an answer, which I do not possess, I propose to revisit a number of key milestones on the road to our current predicament.

One of the most widely used frameworks to define our moment centres on the concept of 'backlash', which is far from new since it goes back to the work of Lipset and Raab (1970) and Susan Faludi's book (1991) of the same title

published three decades ago. This concept implies resistance by those who feel threatened by changes to the *status quo* and reactions to a perceived loss of power when marginalised or disadvantaged groups challenge entrenched power structures. In historical terms, the extension of recognition, voice and rights to colonial subjects, labouring masses, women, people of colour and non-normative sexualities throughout the twentieth century has arguably galvanised aggrieved majorities who have rallied around slogans laden with moral panic such as 'the end of White Christian America' or 'the death of the family'.

Backlash can take many forms, including overt force (violence or threats), 'divide and conquer' strategies (aiming to split up a movement) and the 'soft repression' of 'ridicule, stigma, and silencing' (Ferree 2004). All these strategies have been effectively deployed against feminist movements. More recently, sophisticated forms of co-optation, appropriation and subversion of progressive discourses by conservative platforms have been on display (Lewin 2021). Furthermore, backlash may have transnational, national and sub-national manifestations. For instance, Anne Marie Goetz (2020) has provided a forensic account of backlash in multi-lateral institutions, analysing the mobilisation of well-funded and coordinated alliances between right-wing and authoritarian interests who seem to have little in common except for their hostility to feminist platforms which give them a useful bonding function.[1]

A multi-sited project titled 'Countering Backlash' led by the Institute of Development Studies in the UK has developed frameworks that try to make sense of these changes (Nazneen 2021).[2] This work suggests that we are dealing with at least three different types of phenomena. The first centres on defensive responses that are *reactive* in nature and *restorative* in intent. Examples may be found in men's rights movements, such as fathers' protests against alimony and custody arrangements that they claim to favour women unfairly. Such movements are relatively new to the Middle East where legislation generally upholds male privilege. However, in Egypt even relatively minor reforms to existing divorce laws have triggered sharp reactions among organised male constituencies (El Kholy and Taher 2019). Likewise, in Turkey progressive legislation such as the Civil Code passed in 2001 and the Penal Code amended in 2004 have been under sustained attack by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) that aimed to gradually claw back existing rights (Kandiyoti 2019).

The second type of backlash is *offensive* and makes references to a lost paradise of patriarchal gender harmony and/or complementarity. Geographically diverse tropes such as references to a pre-colonial, indigenous past, an Islamic 'golden age', or a variety of Christian prelapsarian scripts may be deployed to justify male dominance. At the extreme end of this continuum, we find movements for male entitlement such as the so-called involuntary celibates or 'incels' who, on occasion, have resorted to violence and terrorism.[3]

The discourse of masculine victimisation resonates with feelings of rage and resentment that are used to fuel authoritarian-populist regimes and may be found in various combinations of reactive and offensive strategies. I broadly define these as the politics of *masculinist restoration*, a term I use to distinguish this type of politics from forms of patriarchy that are more securely hegemonic and can rely on tactics less heavy-handed than intimidation or indoctrination. As Manuel Castells, referring to the crisis of patriarchalism, puts it succinctly: 'Values that were supposed to be eternal, natural, indeed divine, must now be asserted by force, thus retrenching in their last defensive bastion, and losing legitimacy in people's minds' (1997, p. 242). The resources and personnel allocated to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) to refashion gender relations and family life in Turkey provide a striking example of the ramping up of indoctrination under AKP rule (Adak 2017). The loss of hegemony and legitimacy of the Islamic Republic in Iran could not be better illustrated than through the nation-wide protests under the slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom', leading to extreme forms of brutality and repression by the state, which continue to this day.

Finally, we have *opportunistic alliances* of actors with diverse agendas who deploy anti-gender ideology strategically as a 'glue' to rally their socially conservative bases. An excellent example of such instrumentalism is provided by Turkey, which was among the first signatories of the Council of Europe's 2011 Istanbul Convention to combat violence against women, coming into effect on 1 August 2014. Yet, five years later the convention became the topic of a heated debate among Islamist and conservative circles who claimed that it would destroy the family and undermine 'national' values. The assault against the Istanbul Convention occurred at a point in time when the AKP aimed to mobilise its pious base as its electoral popularity had started to wane. Turkey was the first and, so far, only signatory to withdraw from the

convention on 1 July 2021, despite soaring levels of gender-based violence and sustained country-wide protests.

Theories of backlash also raise the question of whether there are 'tipping points', whereby gradual shifts eventually result in more visible and threatening qualitative changes. Whereas the presence of 'token' minorities might have created little unease at a point when they were not seen as a threat to established orders, the critical mass represented by grassroots movements such as #MeToo or Black Lives Matter may constitute a new threshold for reaction. The anti-patriarchal and anti-authoritarian thrust of youth protests across the Middle East before, during and after the Arab uprisings of 2011 also indicated that patriarchal privilege may be contested in novel and creative ways (Kandiyoti 2013, 2014).

However, we must move beyond the concept of backlash if we are to interpret the current conjuncture in all its complexity. We also need to account for the fault lines running within feminisms and gender identity debates and not just instances of resistance external to them. It would be futile to deny that those internal cleavages have provided fuel and fodder to the various manifestations of backlash briefly sketched above. This calls for an examination of the internal contradictions and unintended consequences of a series of global encounters which have had major implications for rights advocacy in the global South.

The first was the encounter with the global 'institutionalisation' of standards and mechanisms for gender equality through the workings of the United Nations (UN) system and major international donors, especially after the UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, which was considered the high point of transnational feminism. The assumption that feminists would build alliances with friendly states and with insider advocates ('femocrats') to stimulate the universal acceptance of gender equality goals played out quite differently in practice. Among the hurdles which derailed and discredited transnational feminist agendas was the co-optation and instrumentalisation of their goals by corrupt, unaccountable, non-democratic governments. There are multiple accounts by scholars and practitioners of development of the diverse ways in which women's movements became depoliticised through co-optation by donor-assisted governments and their ecosystem of NGOs (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead 2007). In the Middle East and North Africa, for instance,

jumping on the gender equality bandwagon became a 'soft option' used by numerous authoritarian regimes to indicate their commitment to a democratisation process which they had no intention of honouring (Al-Rasheed 2019). Not surprisingly, part of the fallout of regime change after the Arab uprisings was that women's machineries and NGOs linked to ruling circles became tainted with the stain of collaboration with corrupt governments. The same instrumental logic was applied to other attempts to co-opt liberal norms, such as the *cause célèbre* of 'pink-washing' in Israel to burnish its permissive credentials, regardless of the human rights abuses perpetrated against Palestinians and the reality of its increasingly obscurantist and illiberal governments.

The second ill-fated encounter took place after the global turn to neo-liberalism began in the Reagan-Thatcher era. The objectives of women's movements, many of which were explicitly committed to social justice and redistributive goals, were transformed into technocratic fixes for the 'empowerment' of women within the parameters of a neo-liberal market economy. In the West, this gave rise to a triumphalist boardroom or corporatist feminism which extolled the virtues of the capitalist market for women who 'make it'. In the South, meanwhile, the spaces left vacant by the dearth of social safety nets were occupied by actors and social movements with conservative agendas and roots in faith-based organisations (whether Catholic, Evangelical, or Muslim). Populist and religious movements claiming to speak on behalf of the poor, the marginalised and the powerless in different regional contexts increased their appeal, regardless of the often authoritarian or dogmatic overtones of their political messages. Losing sight of the fact that feminisms cannot be divorced from a broader social justice agenda exacted heavy costs, including the trivialisation of feminist concerns as the preoccupations of a privileged elite.

By the time I started working in Afghanistan in the early 2000s, gender-mainstreaming was a well-established practice that was disseminated worldwide through various governmental and non-governmental apparatuses set up to monitor gender equality goals. I identified the top-down dissemination of new gender norms in Afghanistan as a form of *donor-driven gender activism* that necessitated a new technical vocabulary and new tools that were not yet familiar to local women's rights advocates. The shift from 'women' to 'gender' that took place over the successive UN Decades for Women between the mid-1970s and 1990s eventually led to a bifurcation between the social relations

approach prevalent in gender analysis frameworks used in development contexts and the post-modern, critical-theory-inspired corpus of scholarship that became canonical in Northern academe. The academic institutionalisation of Gender Studies was not entirely cost-free, to the extent that the canons of the discipline (emanating from the global North) could sometimes create a rupture between the lived realities of women in diverse societies of the global South and the preoccupations of their peers in the North. Queer Studies, which was an off-shoot of the critical theory strand, distinguished itself through its incisive focus on biopolitics and an expansive analysis of normalising regimes that also includes the liberal logic of sexual minority politics in the West.

This brings me to the final and possibly most devastating encounter that took place in the geopolitical context of the War on Terror from the events of 9/11 onwards. As I have pointed out earlier, the invocation of oppressed Muslim women as part of the rationale for military interventions in Afghanistan and beyond had provoked predictable outrage in the face of its naked instrumentalism (Kandiyoti 2009). This resulted in a cottage industry of critiques of 'feminism as imperialism' and of gender equality norms as tools in this arsenal of oppression. Governance feminism became a by-word for feminist infiltration into positions of institutional and cultural power and the notion that feminist ideologues have been playing gate-keeping roles around the globe, dictating agendas and funding flows (Halley et al. 2018). From this perspective, the movement against gender-based violence in the Middle East could be interpreted as a collaboration between upper-class feminists and a brutal security state colluding around a class-specific politics of respectability that marginalises and criminalises working class masculinities and demonises the so-called 'Arab street' (Amar 2011). The same logic applies to the area of LBGTQ rights, with some scholars locating imperial justifications for war in the Middle East in so-called homonationalist discourses that present Islam as inherently intolerant and violent, the very antithesis of an allegedly liberal West (Puar 2007).

Yet this much-vaunted moment of homonationalism (the assumed epochal shift from insistence on heteronormativity to increasing inclusion of homonormativity, albeit at the expense of racialised 'Others') is highly debatable. Myopia concerning the fact that the feminist foothold in global governance institutions is increasingly tenuous and that the so-called liberal West itself is

the host of multiple illiberal platforms is essential to the maintenance of this intellectual edifice. There is a deep irony in the fact that behind the façade of mutually antagonistic representations of a sexually liberated and tolerant West vs barbaric, repressive (often Muslim) 'Others' (and conversely Muslim commentators' frequent depictions of the West as a den of debauchery and sin) lies the reality of deeply divided and conflicted societies. The allegedly liberal West is the site of a proliferation of alarmist discourses about the 'endangered heterosexual family' and heteronormativity as the 'national' norm. Furthermore, anti-gender ideology that has been carefully cultivated since the 1990s is alive and well in the heartland of Europe and beyond (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). Such is the momentum of these platforms that the UN failed to pass a resolution for a Fifth World Conference on Women, for fear of the consequences of re-opening international agreements on women's rights. Ultra-conservative forces, diverse as they are, are better established, better organised and better funded than allegedly hegemonic governance feminism whose reach in the South has always been superficial and fragile (Goetz and Sandler 2015).

These internal debates have finally led us to a new epistemic cul-de-sac. Are there ways of critiquing US imperialism and Western hegemony without becoming entrapped, yet again, in the sterile binaries of East vs West, tradition vs modernity, secularism vs Islam? How do we avoid demonising and marginalising rights actors who fall foul of some implicit sanctioned notion of indigeneity? How can struggles for gender equality and sexual liberties conducted in many different idioms and in diverse locations become mutually intelligible and empowering? These crucial questions are beyond the scope of this article, although the work of Evren Savcı (2021) and her contribution to this volume may contain elements of possible answers.

In conclusion, the 'gender wars' are the product of both *external* onslaughts that crystallise around so-called 'anti-gender ideology' which manifests itself in familiar ways around the globe and of the contradictions and dysfunctions that are *internal* to platforms claiming to have a feminist agenda. The challenge before us is to find the imagination and wisdom to forge a new politics of feminist solidarity that resonates around the globe by harnessing the aspirations of younger generations whose anti-authoritarian impulses were on display on the streets of Cairo, Istanbul, Tunis and Tehran, not just San Francisco, Madrid, or Warsaw.

Notes

1. For an elaboration of the way in which gender can serve as a 'symbolic glue', see Grzebalska, Kováts and Petö (2017).
2. More details about the project can be found at https://counteringbacklash.org/feminist-protests-and-politics-in-a-world-of-crisis/ [accessed 27 July 2023].
3. These incidents have received attention in the media. See, for instance, 'Incels: A new terror threat to the UK?' *BBC News*, 13 August 2021.

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2

FEMINIST AND QUEER POLITICS WITHOUT GUARANTEES: A REJOINDER TO DENIZ KANDIYOTI'S 'GENDER WARS'

Evren Savcı

The writing and revisions of this piece have been accompanied by a ban on various feminist and LGBTQ events, including the 2022 Feminist Night March in İstanbul, the 2022 LGBTI+ Pride Week and the LGBTI+ and Trans Pride Marches in June 2002 and 2023.[1] These bans are now announced every year, and each year feminists and queer and trans and non-binary people do their best to gather and march in protest. They carry banners, shout slogans, sometimes disperse in order to march different routes in the face of proliferating police barricades, increasing violence, growing hate, rising poverty and precarity – in any case, they make it loud and clear that we will not stay or go home simply because the government, the police, or anyone else does not like the idea of a feminist and queer revolt, and of a feminist and queer world.

Yet, even though feminists, queers and trans people are all targeted by the same authoritarian right-wing regimes, as Deniz Kandiyoti's piece has so eloquently laid out, the contemporary terrain of gender and sexuality politics is complex and at times fraught with apparent dead ends. Kandiyoti has argued that we are faced with two simultaneous and significant developments: On the one hand, there are all over the world authoritarian and populist regimes that are increasingly making issues of gender and sexuality central to their conservative right-wing politics. On the other hand, feminist politics faces a crisis

within itself; for instance, criticisms flung at feminism for colluding with (neo-) imperialism during the US occupation of Afghanistan seem to have paralysed many feminist organisations and movements that might be interested in working across borders in solidarity and friendship. Another divide has emerged between issues that require a seemingly more traditional understanding of gender (I will call these 'women's' issues) and contemporary unease with the binary understanding of gender itself.

Kandiyoti has asked:

> Is there any hope of finding a mutually intelligible language for claim-making and voice in a world where most women (and men) continue to be locked into coerced identities – while feminists in the North are engaged in sometimes acrimonious debates over identities, bodies and sexualities which have become evident in the tensions between so-called 'gender-critical' feminists and some trans activist platforms? Social movements and their demands are necessarily grounded in local histories of struggle, regardless of the global reach and dissemination of movements for gender equality or LGBTQ rights. How do we deal with the differences in language, meaning and temporality among them?

Like her, I cannot claim to have answers to these questions, but I hope to provide some thoughts on the contemporary impasses that feminist politics seems to face. Since Kandiyoti has provided a thoughtful historicisation of these issues, I have the luxury to contemplate on a few of their key components. I do this as a scholar equally invested in feminism and queer politics, and with the understanding that analysis is what is deeply needed before we can imagine solutions.

I would like to start out by suggesting a slight re-grouping of Kandiyoti's three global encounters that have affected feminist politics: the global 'institutionalisation' of standards and mechanisms for gender equality through the UN system; the global turn to neo-liberalism and the resulting logics of technocratic fixes to social justice issues and corporatist feminism; and, finally, the geopolitical context post-9/11 where the US employment of 'saving Afghan women' as a justification for war has led to an equation of feminism with imperialism. I maintain that, while the first two encounters – the de-politicisation of the feminist movement via UN- and big-donor-led gender-mainstreaming

and NGO-isation, as well as the shift from an emphasis on social justice and redistribution to 'women's empowerment' – could be largely considered as effects of the neo-liberal incorporation of feminist politics, the third one – that is, the use of the quasi-feminist language of saving Afghan women in the US' alleged War Against Terror – is an effect of the collusion of neo-imperialism with feminism. This distinction is important, I suggest, because these two sets of global encounters produce two separate but complementary forms of individuation and isolation, which lay at the heart of the crisis of feminist politics today. Let me unpack each of these outcomes in turn.

To trace the first form of individuation and isolation, it is important to acknowledge that the first two global encounters have been accompanied by yet another effect of neo-liberalism: a particular and individualised understanding of harm that has shifted the focus from confronting one's own privileges to seeking remedy for one's personal injuries. The neo-liberalisation of social justice, equipped with redemptive capitalism, commodity activism and social media activism (also known as clicktivism) that focuses on the individual self and its transformative potential through consumption practices and social media behaviour has enabled the shift from thinking about *structures* of cisheteropatriarchy, racism, capitalism and one's privileges and complicities with them to focusing on how each individual member of any minority group is harmed by these systems.[2] In other words, we have witnessed a change of focus from how we *benefit* from these systems and our *complicities* with them to how we are *harmed* by them. Even the term intersectionality has become individualised and altered from Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) initial understanding of it as interlocking *systems* of oppression into an analytic for diagnosing levels of individual harm. This particular focus on individual harm and injury that is usually predicated on detecting and punishing individual culprits (individual sexists, racists, homophobes and transphobes) ironically works well within a liberal juridical system that prefers to promote a handful of token minorities in the midst of growing material inequalities, on the one hand, and feed its carceral system instead of addressing systemic issues, on the other.[3]

In order to unpack the damage that this shift has done to social justice politics, let us turn for a moment to the feminist and queer imaginary of a few decades ago. Grace Hong opens her book *Death beyond Disavowal* with a

speech delivered by Audre Lorde to the Harvard-Radcliff Black Student Association in 1982, where Lorde asked the students, as 'Black, feminist, lesbian':

> In what way do I contribute to the subjugation of any part of those who I call my people? Insight must illuminate the particulars of our lives: who labors to make the bread we waste, or the energy it takes to make nuclear poisons which will not biodegrade for one thousand years; or who goes blind assembling the microtransistors in our inexpensive calculators?

The spirit of feminism and queer politics at the time required a commitment to the radical transformation of the world through *a fundamental questioning and undoing of the self*. This required, and still requires, that we take a break from our injuries and focus on the ways in which our everyday survival might *structurally* depend on others' slow deaths: on the debilitation of various bodies by performing cheapened labour, on homelessness, on the unemployment of some that capitalism requires, all of which of course are entangled with structural racism, sexism and queer- and transphobia. No particular individual needs to be sexist, racist, classist, or phobic for their everyday survival to be intertwined with and indeed depending on someone else's less-than-survival. To risk stating the obvious: this is also true for those who themselves belong to minoritised groups.

When understood in this way, the uneven distribution of life chances is systematic and requires structural solutions. I do not dismiss acts of pointing out those who happily and willingly perpetuate racist, sexist, exploitative, queer- and transphobic systems as completely without value, but I do not see much transformative power in them. Further, I find that categorising people as racist, sexist or queer- or transphobic has a misleading redemptive effect: if I can point out that *they* are racist or transphobic, then that must mean that *I* am not. Instead, I suggest that we should understand oppression as structural and focus on our own roles in perpetuating it with an eye towards transforming these systems for all. This would also mean acknowledging that living in a racist, heterosexist and transphobic world means that no one stands outside of these structures; we would do better starting out with the assumption that we all may participate in these systems in one way or another, often unbeknownst to ourselves because that is precisely how structural oppression and normativity do their work – through 'business as usual'.

This political shift from a focus on structural oppression to individual harm is tied to a small disagreement that I have with Kandiyoti when she writes: 'The academic institutionalisation of Gender Studies was not entirely cost-free, to the extent that the canons of the discipline (emanating from the global North) could sometimes create a rupture between the lived realities of women in diverse societies of the global South and the preoccupations of their peers in the North'. I find that this 'chasm' that Kandiyoti has observed between 'the most basic rights to freedom of movement and education for women', on one hand, and 'the full recognition of LGBTQ rights, on the other', no longer neatly maps onto the (academic) preoccupations in the global North *versus* the lived realities of the global South, if it ever did. It is true that many people today understand 'woman' to be a useful and liberating category that names the inequalities, oppressions and violences that they experience, and that many others find the category 'woman' itself to be a form of oppression. Yet, what is happening today is a bifurcation of 'women's' and 'gender' issues *within* most countries, which maps onto a generational divide.[4] I suggest that the rupture which may appear as a result of the shift from women's issues to gender/LGBTQ issues is instead an effect of the individualisation of gender and sexuality politics, and of the fact that such a shift happened as LGBTQ politics have become more visible and powerful. This is a real issue that we need to find ways to address, but treating gender as a Northern and women as a Southern framework risks alienating those who experience their primary issues as stemming from a heteronormative gender-binary world very much within locations that would be marked as 'the South'. While this means that the conflict between 'women's' and 'gender' issues are more pervasive and perhaps harder to reconcile, the fact that they are genuine divides between different generations' needs and expectations means that they are more organic and therefore more worth our while to reflect on.

If the first two global encounters have enacted a neo-liberal individualisation of politics of liberation, Kandiyoti's third global encounter, the use of the quasi-feminist language of saving Afghan women in the US' alleged War Against Terror and the resulting association of feminism with neo-imperialism, has led to the isolation of feminist and queer movements around the world from each other, at a point when they needed a transnational front the most. If the first form of isolation is of the injured self from its privileges as well as from

thinking in terms of structures, the second form of isolation is of various feminist and queer movements, especially across the 'North/South' divide, from analysing, theorising and thinking about change in a collective way.

The use of the allegedly feminist discourse of saving Afghan women by figures such as Laura Bush during the US military occupation of Afghanistan has received significant and much-deserved criticism. The importance of feminism's complicities with (neo-)imperialism notwithstanding, I agree with Kandiyoti's assertion that an *equation* of feminism with imperialism, or an over-emphasis of this particular 'feminist' discourse has ultimately undermined other, anti-imperialist feminisms. Perhaps needless to say, most feminists in the US do not accept Laura Bush as a spokesperson, and neither does this discourse represent feminism at large. Taking the loudest (usually because they are the most privileged) voices as representatives of a multi-pronged ideology and a complex movement undermines the voices and labour of those who vehemently disagree with such a stance. Further, by hailing a homogenous 'Western feminism' as neo-imperialism, such a position not only perpetuates an Occidentalist understanding of a reified 'West' but makes any potential dialogue and collaboration across borders difficult for all sides. What ended up paying perhaps the highest price as a result of this has been transnational feminist solidarity, especially because this critique of 'feminism as neo-imperialism' has also been supplemented by a depoliticised cultural relativism. Cultural relativism, as the go-to (neo-)liberal response to neo-conservative Orientalism, passes as respect for 'cultural Others' while in the process *producing* certain geographies and their people as essentially different and de-politicising feminist issues as cultural ones. We have arrived, then, at our contemporary political moment that consists of a combination of (rightfully) shying away from coming across as trying to 'save' non-Western women and a culturalist-essentialist approach to our differences that makes social and political change redundant.

Solidarity between differentially privileged feminists has never been an easy or straightforward matter. In a section of Lugones and Spelman's 1983 article 'Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for "the Woman's Voice"', María Lugones writes:

> The only motive that makes sense to me for your joining us in this investigation is the motive of friendship, out of friendship. A non-imperialist feminism

> requires that you make a real space for our articulating, interpreting, theorizing and reflecting about the connections among them – a real space must be a non-coerced space – and/or that you follow us into our world out of friendship . . . I do not think you have any obligation to understand us. You do have an obligation to abandon your imperialism, your universal claims, your reduction of us to your selves simply because they seriously harm us.

While the goal of Lugones and Spelman's piece was to understand how feminist theorising and knowledge-production can be accomplished together, the suggestion for approaching the Other out of friendship, and without the obligation *or* the expectation to understand them also seems key to any attempts at political solidarity. What I hope queer feminist critique can contribute to this formula is to further the investigation into the role that 'woman' has been made to play in colonial and heteropatriarchal systems. In this endeavour, queer critique is very much in alliance with early feminist critiques of the category, such as Chandra Mohanty's 'Under Western Eyes' (1988). Such critique can be done, to repeat an earlier point, without undermining the fact that 'woman' still continues to serve as a useful name for the oppressions which some subjects find themselves experiencing.

It is worth noting that I am not assuming that there is a 'pure feminism' that then gets contaminated by imperialism, colonialism, racism or queer- or transphobia. In their introduction to a *TSQ* special issue on far-right movements, anti-gender movements and 'gender-critical' ideologies, Bassi and LaFleur maintain that the argument 'TERFs are not actually feminists' overlooks the historical complicities feminism has had with racism and other oppressive politics, and that 'the impulse to understand feminism as an incontrovertible political good is a form of purity politics that [. . .] refuses to engage the pressing problem of ambivalence' (2022, pp. 321–22). I would add to this the pressing problem of contradiction. Therefore, when I speak of the possibility of a transnational feminist solidarity, I do this neither from a historically revisionist position nor from one that does not see that feminism bears contradictions, like any other ideology. I do see a great deal of political promise to feminism, however, and find it worth pursuing a transnational feminist political praxis that follows out of the ethics of friendship, which means a feminist political praxis that does not act out of a duty to 'save', but out of a desire to make the world a more liveable place for everyone. I also believe that abandoning an

internationalist feminism – or at least its pursuit, no matter how imperfect – will be most costly to those who are most under-privileged.

In a world that places increasing emphasis on individual accomplishments and is full of caution against neo-imperial tendencies, how can feminists and queers approach each other out of friendship? This requires, among other things, that we reflect on a category rarely invited into our writing or theories – that of friendship. While I have no room to engage in a deeper reflection on it here, I can at least say that the kind of feminist and/or queer friend people might be open to, I imagine, is not one who gives unsolicited advice but one who asks you how they can support you. If we can approach each other out of friendship, we might also open up more room for not fearing to make mistakes, because a mistake made with a friend is an opportunity for confrontation, conversation and learning and not a path to abandonment. Friendship does not indicate a relationship devoid of conflict, but one that makes room for both conflict and genuine conversations about it. Feminist and queer politics have always been *without guarantees*, which means that they require a certain kind of faith in a possibility. If we cannot afford fellow feminist and queer thinkers and organisers what we have afforded life at large, which includes systems which we have been seeking to transform and sometimes dismantle, then this will be an unfortunate outcome of structures that benefit from us turning against each other – a world in which our rage is targeted at each other and not at structures and ideologies that maintain oppressions and injustices. Feminist and queer politics *without guarantees* means that some of our solidarities might not weather certain conflicts, and we might ultimately not find it possible to think with some or organise with others – but that needs to be a point at which we arrive and not one from which we depart.

Unlike some, I do not see the current political climate's main issue as one of censorship (I cannot say whatever I want because I worry about being cancelled, thus I am censored) but one of a heightened fear of mistakes. Since no one (actually) learns out of fear but people do learn from and grow out of mistakes, I worry that in the current climate, where cancelling and doxing seem to be on the rise as popular responses, we have less genuine dialogue. And since the world already suffers from a pedagogically failed education system based on punishing mistakes, feminists and queers could use this moment for a fundamental questioning of whether punishment has ever contributed to

meaningful social change. Approaching each other out of friendship could therefore also involve a commitment to make room for each other to make mistakes and learn from them.

Let me return to the conundrum that Kandiyoti has laid out and with which I have opened this piece: even though authoritarian and right-wing populist regimes are targeting feminists, queers and trans people, there seem to be more divides among us than solidarity between us. The historical conservative fear that both feminists and queers undermine the family is alive and well, not soothed by the short-lived uncritical rise of pro-family feminist politics and gay marriage. Perhaps it is time to understand this as a good starting point for a common political project, where we are reminded that the private heteropatriarchal family is what unites us as targets. The evocation of 'the family' with the biological and heterosexually reproductive couple at its centre assaults feminists and queers and trans people on all fronts – by defining 'womanhood', by drawing its limits and by establishing its meaning through a 'biological' body, reproductivity and motherhood. It is my hope that in the process we will find our ways back to understanding oppression as structural and focusing on our complicities in these systems, that we will find ways to see both the liberatory and oppressive ways in which the category 'woman' can operate, that social justice might not require the reconciliation of these, and that we will approach each other out of friendship and not have a punitive stance towards mistakes, thereby fearing them less. This will also be a future where we work together, not because we have the same 'enemy', but because the worlds we want to build have too much in common to disregard.

Notes

1. I am using LGBTQ as an acronym in the piece so as to follow the decision of the editorial team for the entire collection, although the term widely used by queer and trans groups in Turkey at the time of writing this piece is LGBTI+.
2. For some examples of analyses of this transformation, see Banet-Weiser and Mukherjee (2012); Bernstein (2016); Duggan (2003); Murphy (2012).
3. Here I want to distinguish the current focus on the individual in some social justice activism from a model of consciousness-raising. Where in the latter it was again individuals who shared their experiences, the point was to arrive at a structural critique and see the patterns of inequality for the purpose of transformative change. Under

neo-liberalism, grievances unfortunately seem stuck at the level of individual harm and injury – in fact, as Joan Scott (1991) has argued, instead of explaining the very categories that are mobilised as sources of subjection, oppression and inequality, experience *as a member of an already established category* is used as evidence, which further reifies and naturalises categories that feminist and queer scholarship seeks to interrogate.

4. Since my response concerns the fractures within the feminist and queer movements about which Kandiyoti writes, as well as possibilities for solidarity and working together going forward, the piece does not concern itself in any significant way with what has come to be referred to as TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminism). Yet, it is worth noting that 'gender-critical' movements overwhelmingly target trans women and their participation in 'woman's' things – ranging from bathrooms to sports. These positions essentialise the category 'woman' and often reduce it to an assumed essence marked by biology. In other words, they defend everything that feminism has tried to dismantle for a long time: that women are essentially this or that, that they are good at this or bad at that, that there are certain activities in which they should or should not engage, things that they should or should not wear.

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PART II

ANTI-LGBTQ AND ANTI-FEMINIST MOBILISATIONS IN THE SPHERE OF POLITICS

3

THE RISE OF ISRAELI FAR-RIGHT POLITICS: A QUEER FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Sa'ed Atshan and Katharina Galor

Introduction

This chapter demonstrates several fundamental contradictions at the heart of Zionism which have defined the state of Israel since its establishment and continue in the present. We argue that three ongoing major struggles involving gender and sexuality have animated domestic Israeli politics and society. The first is the push and pull between secular and religious forces. Second are the competing forces of democratic values and ultra-nationalist and anti-Palestinian ideologies and policies. Finally, there exist tensions between the progressive voices that advocate for women's and queer rights, on the one hand, and the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox forces lobbying for conservative, misogynist and homophobic frameworks, on the other. While there has been Israeli legislation advocating for equal rights between women and men, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel (recognised by law as the supreme rabbinic authority for Judaism in the country) continues to wield significant power in shaping gender norms and laws. Israeli law has included the Women's Equal Rights Law of Israel and other policies promoting gender equality since 1951. Yet, the Rabbinical Court (which constitutes an integral part of the judicial system of Israel) continues to determine personal and family status. The court, in other words, holds sole authority over the question of who qualifies as a Jew according to Jewish Orthodox law (*halakhah*), and it determines marriage and

divorce legislation based on gender norms that are anchored in principles dating back two-thousand years.

The increasing numbers of religious and nationalist constituencies in Israel have influenced the growing representation of ultra-right politicians in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), who since the elections in the fall of 2022 are included in the governing coalition. Despite formidable achievements related to feminist and LGBTQ rights in the cultural, social, political and legislative realms, the Rabbinic Court's hold on family law, marriage and divorce has largely hampered sustainable structural change towards equality with regard to gender and sexual orientation. While some progressive forces within queer and feminist Israeli social movements contribute to the projection of an appearance of Israel's democratic and pluralistic values on a global scale, internally, the social and legal authority of Israel's Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox populations reinforce sexism and homophobia. The Israeli state continues to focus on maintaining women as the 'bearers of the collective' (Yuval-Davis 2005).[1] This political landscape has little room for women, queers, Palestinians, or other marginalised groups in Israel/Palestine who are not figured in the hegemonic mainstream discourse. Indeed, discourses on gender and sexuality play a fundamental role in Israel's far-right politics, and increasingly so.

Our understanding of progressive politics, as the antithesis of far-right politics, in the context of Israel/Palestine combines resistance to the forces of both patriarchy and Zionism (Atshan 2020b). The failure of many feminist and queer Israeli activists to connect their struggles to the need for Palestinian freedom and equality reveals the limits – and problematic nature – of liberal Zionism. From the perspective of most Palestinians, the notion that this latest Israeli government is the most right-wing in the history of the country is a false premise, because it resonates with a liberal Zionist instinct to adopt a teleological approach to the history of Zionism and to search for redemptive aspects of Israeli politics in the past or present. Yet, Palestinians experience Israel, from its inception through the present, along a historical continuity where the Nakba and the concomitant catastrophes wrought by the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians since 1948 have been ongoing.[2]

From a scholarly vantage point, it is crucial to be analytically precise and to delineate the gradations of right-wing currents in Israeli political developments. We also trace the Israeli state's positions on the question of Palestine – and on the internal axes of gender/sexuality – and the connections between

the two. We engage in this intellectual work alongside a commitment to the priority of theorising Israel's settler-colonial nature. Thus, we reserve the term 'progressive' only for specific grassroots feminist and queer actors in Israeli society and politics, but not in reference to the Israeli state, past or present.

Zionism: Questions of Gender, Feminism and Virility

Zionism emerged in the late nineteenth century in Central and Eastern Europe as a national revival movement anchored in the ideal of establishing a home for Jews in Palestine. Before the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, a principal Zionist goal was to liberate Jews from persecution, discrimination, humiliation and antisemitism. Following the creation of the state, Zionism continued to advocate the maintenance of a safe haven for all Jews and to address the persistent threats against their existence and security. Albeit framed by social-democratic principles, including with regard to gender norms and regulations, the ambiguous role of religion has compromised both principles from the beginnings of Zionism through the present. Progressive currents, movements and discourses related to gender and sexuality, despite some definite accomplishments, have been increasingly countered by theocratic, nationalist and right-wing voices and policies. These include misogynist and homophobic expressions and regulations, intertwined with the colonial thought and praxis that defines Israel's relationship to the Palestinian people.

Women in the Zionist movement achieved a number of significant accomplishments (Figure 3.1). As early as in the Second Zionist Congress in 1898, women started to vote during regular meetings, a period when women's suffrage was far from standard practice around the world. Moreover, in emancipated Jewish circles, girls and young women were often highly educated, especially as higher education became increasingly accessible to women in general and to Jews in particular. In this regard, Israel's Declaration of Independence of 1948, ratified by legislation in 1951, which explicitly formulated the notion of equality between men and women, seemed like a logical outcome. Nevertheless, various obstacles, perhaps most important among them religious governance, paved the way for continued discrimination. Manifestations of discrimination have remained a permanent trait of Israeli society, from the labour and administrative set-up of the kibbutz to the army, and perhaps most clearly in the context of women's civic status as mothers and wives, roles closely regulated by Jewish Orthodox law.

Figure 3.1 The Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Israel, 1932. Its motto reads 'One justice and one constitution for man and woman'. Source: Sarah Azaryahu, *Hebrew Women's Association for Equal Rights in Israel* (Haifa: Keren le-Esrat ha-Ishah, 1977); public domain.

Other than the growing interest in the convergence (or lack thereof) of Zionism and feminism, critical research on gender and Zionism has equally focused on the movement's ideological concepts and expressions of hyper-masculinity. George Mosse (1996, p. 72) has examined various 'virile' foundational qualities of modern nationalism, including physical strength, courage, honour, dignity and fraternity (Figure 3.2). According to Mosse, these values were often understood as contrary to the negative attributes attached to uptight pariahs, homosexuals, gypsies and Jews. In his analysis of ideologies of virility, Mosse has addressed the relevance of these debates to the reconstitution of Jewish nationalism. One of the early goals of Zionism was to instil ultra-masculine traits among Jews, with the perception that these had 'disappeared' in the diaspora. Zionists embraced various beliefs and principles widespread in colonial European nationalism towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Figure 3.2 Hebert Sonnenfeld, Boxer portrait, Berlin, 1935, illustrating the quality of physical strength in the context of Zionist ideology. Source: Courtesy of the Jewish Museum Berlin.

Thus, despite certain feminist leanings, the close link between Zionism and hyper-masculinity can be viewed as ultimately leading to what Tamar Mayer (2000, p. 285) has referred to as the 'invisibility of women in Zionism'. While there have been prominent women in leadership positions in Israel, from Golda Meir to the present, and during the early decades of Zionism in particular, many have failed to prioritise women's rights.

Demographic Contestation

Closely linked to the concept of political Zionism, and in particular to the idea of a Jewish state, is the question of demography.[3] Following the founding of the State of Israel, one of the principal goals was to attract as many Jews as possible to establish a Jewish majority at the expense of Palestinian Christians and Muslims. This policy was circumscribed in the 1948 Proclamation of Independence and enacted in the 1950 Law of Return.[4] Described by Justyna Stypinska (2007, pp. 106–8) as the cornerstone of Israeli *raison d'être* or alternatively by Majid Al-Haj (2004, p. 35) as a purely 'ethnocentric

law', this stipulation provides a legal justification for the immigration into Israel exclusively for people of Jewish origin. Rooted in the notion that Jews had mourned their expulsion from the Land of Israel in Antiquity and suffered persecution for nearly two thousand years, and paired with the knowledge of the horrific human tragedy and loss of life as a result of the Holocaust, this law was perceived – not only by Zionists but also by various international organisations – as a reasonable outcome justified by multiple historical factors.[5] Additional measures taken by the Israeli government to counter what has been described as a 'demographic threat' or 'demographic panic' – referencing the fear of the loss of a Jewish majority in Israel and hence of the Zionist character of the state – include various immigration policies, the control of residential patterns of ethnic groups and geographic population distributions and, finally, the investment in fertility treatments for Jewish women (Stypinska 2007, pp. 117–19). It should perhaps not come as a surprise that Israeli society has the highest rates of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) interventions in the world, as well as the highest per capita consumption rate of infertility therapy (Shalev and Gooldin 2006, pp. 151–76). As Prime Minister Ehud Barak succinctly remarked in July 2000, in Israel demography is an '"existential" question' (Zureik 2003, p. 621).

Orthodox Hegemony

Here we will examine internal Israeli dynamics related to contestation over the notion of a Jewish State. The lack of a formal separation between religion and state has placed family law, and thus the governance of gender norms, under the control of the Orthodox rabbinate. While nearly half of Israel's Jewish population defines itself as secular and only about 20 percent as Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox, family law – and thus the politics of sexuality and reproduction – is controlled by the precepts of this religious minority.[6]

In their intersectional analysis of Israeli politics, religion and gender (in)equality, Ruth Halperin-Kaddari and Yaacov Yadgar (2010, p. 906) have established how the 'State of Israel has accorded the Jewish religion with the highest honor of defining its collective identity, through a combination of citizenship, immigration and personal status law'. And while the state promotes itself as a secular, democratic nation-state, there is *de facto* no separation of religion and politics, which makes, according to their formulation 'for

a complex intertwining of (at least nominally) secular-modern ethno-nationalism and orthodox-dominated religious traditionalism' (Halperin-Kaddari and Yadgar 2010, p. 906). In this regard, the 1953 Rabbinical Courts Jurisdiction Law, which stipulates that marriage and divorce of the country's Jewish population can only be conducted according to Jewish Orthodox law, is consequential. It precludes any possibility of intermarriage in Israel, prohibiting both Jewish women and men from marrying and having 'legally Jewish children' with non-Jews. The Rabbinical Courts Law, along with the Law of Return, is commonly viewed as the most essential cornerstones of the state's Jewish identity. The control of Israeli family law and personal status regulations is consequential for women and queers, discriminating against them in various ways.

The foundations of Jewish marriage and divorce law were stipulated towards the end of the second century CE and have remained close to their original principles within Orthodox Judaism to the present, defining the woman as the husband's property in marriage.[7] Israel's resolution to maintain certain aspects of the state's legal system under the control of the religious authorities partially stems from the time of the Ottoman Empire, in which legal affairs were handled by the religious denominations. Some domains – such as control of marriage and divorce – were adopted first by the British during the Mandate period and later by Israel after its establishment. The impact of maintaining these laws in the hands of religious authorities is significant in defining the boundaries of Israel's national collective, specifically as it relates to the religiously-ordained sexual binary between men and women, gender hierarchies and policies related to reproduction.

Under Jewish Orthodox law, marriage establishes property relations between the man and the woman. The man turns into the woman's owner – in Hebrew, *ba'al*, the word for husband, clearly indicates this status – through the transfer or acquisition of ownership (*ma'aseh kinyan*). While the married woman does have some limited property rights, the husband has exclusive control over divorce. In other words, women are considered as needing to be disciplined, guarded and safe-guarded by men. As Israeli researcher Zvi Triger (2012, p. 4) has aptly shown, '[f]amily law has been excused as a painful exception to the rule of gender equality in Israel, caused by the need to create unity among the various communities in the young state'. Similarly, Frances

Raday (1995, pp. 19, 26) has commented on the fact that the adoption of religious law in the realm of family law has had two major consequences. First, it has defined the position of women as subordinate to men, since the religious system is unequivocally patriarchal. Second, it has prohibited women from participating as judges in the religious courts' legal processes. As a result, until recently women were completely excluded from participating in the construction and shaping of the law in this domain. It is only since the late 1990s that we have seen the creation of new paralegal professions opened to women who as rabbinical advocates have gained at least some limited access to the judicial establishment of the Rabbinical Court.[8]

To avoid a religious marriage, numerous Jewish Israelis choose to get married abroad, in countries that permit civil marriage for non-citizens and non-residents. Based on a 2017 study conducted by Panim (Maltz 2018), the Israeli Judaism Network, 2,434 (out of a total of 35,810) Jewish marriage ceremonies were held in Israel outside the Rabbinate's authority that year, which was 8 percent higher than during the previous year.[9] Panim serves as an umbrella organisation for various Israeli non-profits that advocate for Jewish pluralism in the state. No official numbers, however, are available for marriages conducted in Israel outside the Rabbinate, since these couples, unlike those who wed in civil ceremonies abroad, are not entitled to register as married with the Population Registry at the Interior Ministry. Approximately 400,000 Israelis, most among them immigrants from the former Soviet Union and their offspring, are not allowed to get married in the country, despite their citizenship, since they do not qualify as Jewish according to the regulations defined by the Orthodox Rabbinate. Scholar and politician Susan Hattis Rolef (2021) has written on the 'perversions caused by inherent clashes between the Law of Return and the civil rights bestowed on, or denied to, those who become Israeli citizens on its basis'. An example of this clash is the case of twenty-four-year-old Artem Dolgopayat, who won a gold medal at the 2020 Olympics for his floor exercise in gymnastics. Dolgopayat had immigrated from Ukraine to Israel in 2009 and received citizenship on the basis that his father's mother was Jewish. But since his mother is not Jewish, he is not formally recognised as Jewish. Despite having turned into a national hero, he cannot marry his non-Jewish girlfriend of three years in Israel.

A much smaller percentage of individuals who choose to marry outside of the Rabbinate are gay couples, estimated to make up 8 percent of this group. An additional 4 percent are individuals who are on the Rabbinate's blacklist of 'unmarriageables'. This list defines people who are considered Jewish by the Population Registry but who according to *halakhah* are forbidden to marry in Israel for a number of reasons. Among those considered 'unmarriageables' are 'bastards' (*mamzerim*) – that is, off-spring of relationships forbidden by Jewish law, as well as people who are suspected of still being married, or divorced couples who have resumed living together. According to the same study (Maltz 2018), the majority of couples who choose to marry in Israel outside the Rabbinate are motivated by 'ideological passion' and want to make a 'political statement'. More recently, however, it seems that more individuals view their decision as a consequence of 'personal style and values' (Maltz 2018). Perhaps more surprising is the result that, even among secular individuals who opt to marry outside the Rabbinate, most ceremonies feature traditional Jewish wedding rituals, including the blessings and the breaking of a glass underfoot by the groom in memory of the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple. Many individuals of Russian background show a preference for Orthodox-style ceremonies, some among them insisting that the officiating rabbi have a beard (Maltz 2018). The study's comment on this phenomenon is that '[i]t seems that the main reason for this is their perception of the wedding ceremony as ratification of their Jewishness and their (status as) equal citizens in the state and society' (Maltz 2018). Most gay couples, so the study found, choose to hold private ceremonies when getting married in Israel, or instead opt to get married abroad. The majority of gay marriages is not officially registered in Israel.

Perhaps the most striking indication of the Rabbinic Court's hold on marriage and divorce legislation is the fact that Jewish couples who get married outside of Israel – whether in a religious ceremony, including in the Orthodox tradition, or in a civil ceremony – still depend on the Rabbinic Court system for an officially recognised divorce status. It is mostly Orthodox feminist women's organisations who try to challenge and change the system.

As Amihai Radzyner (2010, pp. 271–355) has shown in his study of Israel's legal system, the Supreme Court has tried to reduce the extent of the Rabbinic

Courts' jurisdiction. It has repeatedly declared that, on matters not related to personal status, the Rabbinic Court is obliged to apply Israeli civil rather than Jewish law. Yet, despite the fact that the Supreme Court is considered the highest authority in the Israeli state, the religious courts repeatedly bypass or ignore its rulings. The reach of this power struggle that is based on a dual system of justice is not only indicative of the country's legal framework but also symptomatic of the much more general tensions that exist between progressive, feminist and egalitarian trends in some sectors of Israeli society and the Rabbinate and the ultra-Orthodox communities. Ultimately, however, despite tensions, clashes, confrontations, activism and legal battles, the dual system of Israel's judicial set-up has remained in place since the country's foundation.

As Triger (2012, p. 13) has speculated, the majority of Israeli Jews may not *want* to change the system because they believe that 'the religion-nation nexus is too important and that, despite their own secularism, Orthodox Judaism has come to be a natural and taken-for-granted component of the Jewish-Israeli identity'. According to a 2011 survey, only 44 percent of Israeli Jews believe that, in the case of a conflict, democracy should over-ride Judaism (Arian and Keissar-Sugarmen 2011, p. 18). According to the same source (Arian and Keissar-Sugarmen 2011, pp. 16, 42), only 51 percent of Israeli Jews support civil marriage, while 80 percent state that 'it is "important" or "very important" to be married by a rabbi'.

In her study on religious and secular forces in political structures, Seval Yildirim (2005, pp. 327–71) has argued that secularism as an ideology and a political system came from Christian Europe. Yet, she also points out that secularism does not necessarily imply gender equality. In fact, there are numerous indicators that the current legal and political structure in Israel, which tightly holds on to the system of religious monopoly over marriage and divorce, is the result of secular male interests as much as it is the result of religious lobbying (Blecher-Prigat and Naaman 2022).

Women in Israel, as the bearers of national identity, have not been able to fundamentally challenge the male monopoly over a system in which their bodies and reproductive lives are overseen, and indeed controlled, by a system that is anchored in rulings established nearly two millennia ago. Men have done even less. There are those who do critique and even fight various problems related to Israel's religious patriarchal rulings. While often impactful in

their gender politics, they are limited by the larger political structure built on the unbridgeable gap between democracy and the ideology of maintaining a Jewish state.

Contemporary Israeli Politics

By December 2022, Israel had elected and solidified what has widely been described as the most right-wing government in its history, the culmination of five parliamentary elections in less than four years. During the brief time-span of a relatively more centrist-right government between 2021 and 2022, the more radical right-wing forces were in the opposition. In the current government, they have become part of the governing coalition. These reactionary forces now hold important ministries and portfolios with the power to shape Israeli society, legislation and facts on the ground, with significant impacts on education, economy, domestic policies and life conditions more generally in the occupied territories. These developments intersect with the experiences of women and LGBTQ communities within Israel who now face increased vulnerabilities.

This gap between democracy and Zionism plays itself out in the current political climate, specifically in the context of recent elections and the related complexity of forming alliances and coalitions. The struggle is between forces that advocate 'progressive Western values' on gender and sexuality and radical right-wing voices that promote ultra-conservative and openly homophobic and anti-feminist policies. The Israeli state largely showcases the former on international media and diplomacy platforms, while the latter are usually downplayed and represented as marginal groups or organisations with little or no impact on Israeli legislation. This struggle resonates with Deniz Kandiyoti's notion of 'gender wars', referring to 'the increasing centrality of gender issues in mainstream politics' (see her chapter in this volume).

The power and influence of sexist and homophobic right-wing forces on Israeli policies should not be underestimated. The presence of the ultra-right in the Knesset, and as of December 2022 in the governing coalition, is proof of their authority. The more moderate voices among Israeli politicians are ultimately dependent on – if not outright supportive of – the extremists' contributions to shaping Israeli society and policies.

In May 2021, the 120 members of the Knesset were given the option to select Miriam Peretz to become Israel's first woman president, yet the

majority ultimately decided in favour of Isaac Herzog to replace outgoing President Reuven Rivlin (Kaplan Sommer 2021). Even more enlightening is the fact that the same year's cabinet featured a record number of women. Among the twenty-seven ministers who took office in the newly established government in June of 2021, nine were women. Yet, having women leaders does not necessarily signify increased gender equality and justice. The majority of women elected to the Knesset have not explicitly advocated for gender equality.

Women's rights and gender equality came under threat as the newly formed government by Benjamin Netanyahu took shape following the election of November 2022. The number of women in the Israeli parliament dropped for the first time in recent years, to less than 25 percent. And although some previous political parties had excluded women entirely from their platforms, the Religious Zionism party – a far-right, ultra-nationalist, Jewish supremacist party which has become a powerful coalition partner – is forcefully advocating for legislation that will clearly discriminate against women. Previously, the ultra-Orthodox parties were primarily concerned with their own communities without focusing on Israeli society at large. Currently, their politicians and legislators are advocating for gender segregation in the public domain, aiming to expand the power of the religious courts that exclude female judges and follow discriminatory practices towards women (Kaplan Sommer 2022). The coalition agreement between Likud and the Religious Zionism party includes a clause 'that prevents Israel from joining the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women' (Hecht 2022).

During the brief interlude of the last centre to centre right-wing government in 2021 and 2022, the Israeli political establishment saw the largest female contingency (who were still outnumbered by their male counterparts). This has since been reversed in the most recent elections. Among these women were Karin Elharrar of the Yesh Atid party, who acted as Energy Minister; a forty-three-year-old lawyer specialising in disability law, she herself suffers from muscular dystrophy. Elharrar was the country's first disabled cabinet minister. Another woman was fifty-four-year-old Merav Michaeli, chairwoman of the Labour party since 2021, who served as Transportation Minister. Prior to her political career, she worked as a journalist and was known as an activist

for both LGBTQ and women's worker's rights. She is among the founding members of Ezrat Nashim, a non-profit organisation that assists victims of sexual assault. Additionally, thirty-nine-year-old Pnina Tamano-Shat of the Kahol Lavan party, appointed in 2020 as Aliyah (Immigration) and Integration Minister – a position she had maintained in the last government – was the first Ethiopian-born woman elected to serve in the Israeli cabinet (Sokol 2021). While these were indeed significant achievements during the previous government, first led by Naftali Bennett and then by Yair Lapid, the radical forces of the homophobic and anti-feminist members of parliament, together with similarly nationalist and right-wing parties (that is, Yamina, Shas, United Torah Judaism, Yisrael Beiteinu and Ra'am), form the overwhelming majority of the Knesset and since the elections in November 2022 constitute part of the governing coalition.

Among those figures most outspokenly prejudiced against queers and feminist individuals and groups are the current Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich and Deputy Minister of National Jewish Identity in the Prime Minister's Office, Avigdor Maoz of the Religious Zionist Party. Forty-one-year-old Smotrich is the son of a rabbi; like his father, he is a hard-core settler. Born on the Golan Heights, he was raised in Beit El and moved to Kedumim, a settlement on the West Bank, where he lives with his wife and five children. From his early days as a young activist, he has proclaimed himself a 'proud homophobe' and is known for initiating the 'Beast Parade', an anti-gay demonstration in Jerusalem in 2006. This campaign was meant as a protest against the Pride Parade, which had been scheduled in Jerusalem for the same day. In an interview before the protest with *Artuz Sheva*, an Israeli media network, Smotrich was quoted (Levinson 2015) as saying that the Pride Parade is 'worse than the acts of animals', adding: 'This is a group of deviants carrying out an act that the Israeli public is revolted by'. Further statements in this period included his support for segregation between Jewish Israeli and Palestinian women in hospital maternity wards, his accusation that 'radical feminists' are infiltrating and harming the Israeli military and his blaming of the LGBTQ community for 'controlling' the media (Kaplan Sommer 2019).

Avigdor Maoz is the sixty-four-year-old head of the far-right Noam faction and member of the Religious Zionist party. Between 1999 and 2001, he first served as Director of the Ministry of Interior under Natan Sharansky and

then as Director of the Ministry of Housing under Effi Eitam. His advocacy concerns the bolstering of the Jewish character of the State of Israel by insisting on stricter national measures regarding the observance of Shabbat and the consolidation of the Rabbinical Court's hold on religious matters, specifically with regard to promoting Jewish family values among the broader society. He established the Noam party in 2019 and promoted its homophobic views on billboards and video ads, stating: 'Israel chooses to be normal' (Figure 3.3).

According to his party, the LGBTQ community imposes its agenda on the rest of Israeli society, which naturally believes in a 'normal' (heteronormative) family structure. One of Noam's promotional videos compared Reform Jews, left-wing activists and gay rights advocates to Nazis and Palestinian suicide bombers, stating that they all are out to 'destroy us'. The party is ideologically supported by Rabbi Tzvi Tau, the co-founder and president of Yeshivat Har Hamor in a Jerusalem settlement. The eighty-one-year-old is one of the most important religious figures in combating the acceptance of the LGBTQ community in Israel. In 2017, he was quoted as commenting on homosexuality as the 'ugliest deviation, which breaks down family life [. . .] and contradicts the

Figure 3.3 A Noam campaign billboard reading 'Israel chooses to be normal', July 2019. Source: Photo by Tomer Appelbaum, courtesy of *Haaretz*.

first basis of human existence' (Magid 2021). Along similar lines, Maoz has stated (Magid 2021):

> There is an attempt to engineer our consciousness, to change our concepts. Until a decade ago, you could ask any child: 'What is a family?' He would tell you, 'A father, a mother and children'. You could ask him, 'What is the nation of Israel?' Every child once knew what is a Jew and what is a goy [a biblical word meaning 'nation' used primarily to denote non-Jews].

Maoz also expressed the view that women's greatest achievement in life is to get married and have children. In *Makor Rishon*, an Israeli newspaper associated with religious Zionism and the conservative right-wing, Maoz (Magid 2021) was quoted as asserting that '[t]he State of Israel is first and foremost Jewish and only afterward democratic'.

In the coalition agreement reached between Likud and the United Torah Judaism parties, it was determined that non-governmental agencies could refuse to provide a service 'due to religious faith' (Kashti 2022; Lynfield 2022). Religious Zionism party members Orit Strock, Minister of National Missions, and Simach Rothman were interviewed on the Israeli public radio *Kan* commenting on this agreement. Strock stated that a doctor should not be forced to provide treatment that contradicts his religious beliefs 'as long as there are other doctors who can provide the same service', adding that she 'cannot fathom the thought that the Halakhic law will be seen as a discrimination on religious grounds in the Jewish state we established after two thousand years of exile and self-sacrifice' (*Haaretz* 2022). Rothman, when asked in an interview on the same public radio station whether a religious hotel owner could refuse to host a group of homosexuals, replied: 'If it goes against your beliefs, and it hurts your religious sentiments, and it's your private hotel, then the answer is yes, that's the law' (*Haaretz* 2022). Strock, who has been designated to draft a programme to deepen Jewish identity, will focus on 'strengthening and consolidating the family unit' among others for students and 'leaders in public service' (Kashti 2022), an effort allocated a record-breaking budget of some 2.5 billion shekels over three years.

While these political and legislative realities will certainly transform the realities on the ground, certain forms of counter-movements can be detected within civil society, NGOs, academia and the arts (Ziv 2021; Hitron 2021;

Hovav 2022; Izikovich 2022). Still, feminist and queer resistance to right-wing politics has not stymied the rise of ultra-nationalist and patriarchal wielders of power. For instance, Maoz, responsible for ties with civil society organisations, expressed his intent to cancel the Jerusalem Pride Parade in the future. The public announcement of his plan has mobilised a campaign led by the Jerusalem Open House to collect private donations to 'honour' the politician in a special way (Maltz 2022). They created a new charity fund in his name, announcing that homophobic Maoz would be notified of every donation with a personal thank-you note. Within less than forty-eight hours of their announcement, they collected 700 donations. Additionally, in response to Maoz's statement that 'the greatest contribution women can make for the state is to marry and raise an honourable family', Israel Hofsheet, a non-profit organisation dedicated to religious freedom and Jewish pluralism, proclaimed that it would offer 'women the opportunity to wed free of charge beginning in 2023 – provided they marry other women' (Maltz 2022).

Amidst this alarming political landscape, many Israelis have celebrated the rise of Amir Ohana as the first openly gay speaker of the Knesset (Hecht 2022). Yet, Ohana's political affiliation is with Netanyahu's Likud party, and he will serve in the context of parliamentarians promoting discrimination against women and queer communities. As a result, the presence of women or queer representatives in Israel's political system – particularly those squarely grounded in ultra-nationalist, ultra-conservative, racist, misogynist, anti-LGBTQ values – highlights how complicity in this political landscape includes individuals from countless sectors of society.

Impact on Palestinians

After tracing the rise of far-right politics in Israel/Palestine and their intersections with gender and sexuality, we have accounted for the political ideology of Zionism, demographic contestation, Orthodox hegemony and contemporary Israeli elections and politics. All of these features have either marginalised or disenfranchised the Palestinian people as a collective. Palestinians understand their experiences of displacement and dispossession as being a direct result of the Zionist project, which has historically and in the present privileged Jewish subjects at the expense of Palestinian Christians and Muslims.

Israel's efforts to maintain a Jewish demographic majority have led to the state-sanctioned stigmatisation of all Palestinians, stereotyping each Palestinian

as a potential security threat. Zureik, in his analysis of the Israeli demography debate (2003, p. 620), references the legendary cartoon 'depicting Golda Meir's nightmares and sleepless nights over the number of newborn Palestinian babies'. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is thus not just about land, but also about population, which is linked to Israel's system of control, domination and oppression. This has led to Israeli political discourses which suggest potentially 'transferring' the Palestinian population (Zureik 2003). Additionally, legislation such as Israel's 2018 Nation State Law, which defines Israel as exclusively belonging to its Jewish population, renders further invisible its minority Palestinian Arab communities. This persists even while demographic models predict that Palestinians will inevitably outnumber Jewish residents of Israel/Palestine (Zureik 2003). It is therefore no surprise that Israeli leaders have been openly calling for a mass killing and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza after 7 October 2023, including proposals to transfer the population to the Sinai or elsewhere.[10]

Furthermore, as the entrenchment of Orthodox hegemony in Israel continues, it contributes to heightened discrimination not only against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories but also against Palestinian citizens of Israel. The latter face structural violence and inequalities, including inferior 'government budgetary support, infrastructure, and acquisition, welfare and education', as well as barriers to family reunification (Halperin-Kaddari and Yadgar 2010, p. 907). Jewish individuals from around the world benefit from Israel's Right of Return, while Palestinians are denied the right of return to their ancestral homes in Israel/Palestine. Palestinians continue to be fragmented between the diaspora, Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Thus, Palestinians do not experience Israel as a democratic state, but rather as an ethnocratic or theocratic state that largely excludes them from social and political recognition. The most recent moves towards settlements and building initiatives within the West Bank, as well as administrative measures taken towards annexation, following the 2022 elections, have only further exacerbated the situation for Palestinians (Shezaf 2022).

Israel's elections reveal the second-class status of Palestinian citizens of Israel. While it is true that this population does have the right to vote in Israeli parliamentary and other elections, their relegation to the status of permanent minority diminishes the power and influence that they can wield in Israel's political system. They must confront radical Israeli politicians who would never forge coalitions with Arab parties due to extreme racism. The small minority

of peace-and-justice-oriented Jewish Israeli elected officials are increasingly losing their influence as well, with, for example, the gradual decline of Meretz (Barak 2021) and their exclusion from the Knesset altogether (Glazer 2022). Many Palestinian citizens of Israel had hoped that the Joint List, an Arab coalition of elected officials, would deliver progress for their communities, but the Joint List has essentially dissolved over time, with no single representative of their community left within the governing coalition since the 2022 elections.

Arab politicians in Israel have also been deeply divided over questions related to gender and sexuality, revealing the contestations by Palestinian citizens of Israel over feminism and queer rights. The rise of feminist Palestinian elected officials in Israel's parliament – including Haneen Zoabi, Aida Touma-Suleiman and Ibtisam Mara'ana – highlights the presence of formidable women in Palestinian society, women who are challenging the patriarchy and insisting on the place of women in political life. They have identified allies in male Arab Knesset members such as Ayman Odeh, who also has taken positions against homophobia, including his public opposition to conversion therapy as a form of torture against gay people in Israel, both Arab and Jewish (Atshan 2020a). Yet other Arab Knesset members, including Mansour Abbas and Ahmed Tibi, have instrumentalised homophobia for the political objective of garnering political followers. United in their homophobia, Abbas stands closer to some Zionist politicians than to fellow Palestinians who disagree with his stance on LGBTQ issues. In other words, his anti-LGBTQ views were far more dominant in his political agenda than his commitment to Palestinian rights. Subsequently, gay rights have emerged as a 'litmus test' within Palestinian society (Konrad 2021; Glazer 2021).

Palestinians within Israel and the Occupied Territories continue to bear the brunt of so much of Israel's far-right politics. However, women and LGBTQ populations within Palestinian society face particular vulnerabilities from their own communities, including both structural and physical violence as a result of misogyny and homophobia (Zoabi 2021). Nonetheless, many individuals, activists and politicians battle both external and internal systems of oppression, forging the path for freedom and liberation from the forces of Zionism, patriarchy and heteronormativity. This is evident with the mushrooming of women's and queer civil society and grassroots efforts among Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank (Atshan 2020b).

Conclusion

In his analysis of queer of colour critique, Roderick Ferguson (2018) has traced the rise of this modality of thought as a response to militarism, capitalism, racism and their disproportionate impacts on communities of colour. As Ferguson has recognised (2018, p. 15), scholars who bring together considerations of race, gender and sexuality have looked to 'political and cultural formations as locations for imagining alternatives to the social arrangements prescribed and authorized by state and capital'. Furthermore, Evren Savcı and Deniz Kandiyoti (see their chapters in this volume) have reminded us of the formidable challenges to the emergence of such feminist and queer alternatives. Savcı has raised concerns about the potential for feminism to be co-opted by forces of imperialism, NGOisation, depoliticisation and neo-liberalism. And Kandiyoti has acknowledged the realities of backlashes against queer feminist organising as well as the 'opportunistic alliances of actors with diverse agendas who deploy anti-gender ideology'. All of this is relevant to the contemporary context of Israel/Palestine, where queer and feminist Israelis and Palestinians aim to build alternative realities to racialised violence, while others are complicit in systems of oppression. Strange bedfellows emerge, such as in opportunistic alliances of Mansour Abbas and ultra-nationalist and ultra-Orthodox Knesset members based on opposition to queer feminist liberation. Additionally, there is a re-politicisation of some aspects of queer and feminist representation to advance far-right and racist Israeli political agendas.

Ethnic, racial and gender discrimination have proven to be integral parts of the social and political landscape of Israel/Palestine. In fact, sexism and homophobia appear to be an integral and natural component of far-right currents in the Israeli political sphere. While there are progressive social and political forces within Israeli society, some women and queer populations in Israel implicate themselves in support for right-wing policies. Zionism, as the ideological foundation of the Israeli state, professed social-democratic principles for the Jewish population. These principles were defined by secular values and a theoretical commitment to gender equality, which largely proved to be an illusion. Defined by a hetero-patriarchal structure, Israeli society is now torn between ancient and modern histories, increasingly accommodating radical-right voices that create platforms for misogynist and homophobic statements and policies.

The presence of progressive feminist and queer movements has not stemmed this tide. While having achieved public visibility, their aspirations and achievements have completely failed to be intersectional. This is particularly acute in the case of Palestinian rights; most queer and feminist activists in Israel today do not connect their struggles to the struggle for Palestinian freedom. Those who do advocate for Palestinians are primarily Ashkenazi secular women who, despite their proclaimed feminist advocacy, neglect and exclude Mizrahi women. In other words, their support for the Palestinian cause deflects their attention from their responsibility for and participation in the racial and economic oppression of the non-European Jewish majority citizenry with Israel (Smadar Lavie 2011, pp. 56–88).[11] Mizrahi (who constitute about 63 percent of Israeli's Jewish population) feminists, and Palestinian (who make up about 20 percent of Israel's global population) feminists, devote their energies largely to their own communities' struggles. Beyond these largely separate efforts of feminist groups in Israel, there are only few joint efforts between secular society and the various Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities, and between Jewish and non-Jewish communities. Despite some anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox communities, feminist struggles within Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox circles focus mostly on improving women's rights within the context of their conservative religious worlds. Their concerns include primarily their ability to study Talmud (Shubowitz 2010), to change the law regarding *agunot* (a Jewish woman who is stuck in her religious marriage as determined by Jewish law; Zion-Waldoks 2015, pp. 73–97), or their right to run for public office in the political arena (Maltz 2021).

Far-right politics are intimately linked to demographic anxieties. Israel's preoccupation with demography is largely anchored in the traumas of the Nazi genocide that exterminated six million Jews. In the contemporary context, one of Israel's priorities has been to create, maintain and develop a Jewish demographic majority. This has led to racism and xenophobia against other populations, through a set of more than fifty laws that discriminate against Palestinian Christians and Muslims. The Right of Return, as we have seen, is denied to Palestinian refugees, while the Law of Return is enshrined for Jewish populations worldwide. The realities of gender, in particular control over women's bodies and reproduction, form another pillar of Israel's demographic concern.

Demographic social engineering and gender norms intersect with contestations over the notion of a Jewish State. The lack of formal separation between religion and state has placed family law and the governance of sexuality and gender under the control of the Orthodox rabbinate. While nearly half of Israel's Jewish population defines itself as secular and only 20 percent as Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox, family law (and thus the politics of marriage and divorce) is controlled by the precepts of this religious minority.

Israel's demographic, theocratic and legal regimes of control have had devastating impacts on the Palestinian landscape. Given Israel's control over Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories, the most recent steps towards the annexation of the West Bank, current military actions in Gaza and attempts to control Palestinian society and politics overall are dramatically shaped by the far-right forces emanating from the Israeli state and its policies. Meanwhile, Palestinian society must grapple with formidable conservative forces internally working to suppress rights for women and queer populations, alongside the rise of feminist and queer movements in Palestinian civil society.

The Israeli state projects a public image and public relations campaign of liberal values to its own citizens and to the rest of the world. Israeli diplomacy, particularly in Western contexts, is invested in projecting an image of democracy in terms of political rights and progressive social values on questions related to women and LGBTQ populations. There is no doubt that a significant part of Israeli society is committed to these values and political projects. Yet the public emphasis on these efforts elides the realities of conservatism, racism, misogyny and homophobia that also exist in Israeli society, in addition to those women and queers who support extremist political currents, especially against Palestinians.

Since 2019, Israel has endured five rounds of elections for their Knesset, revealing the political pendulum between liberal democratic and ultra-nationalist values. Israel's radical religious and social views remain at the centre of power, as evident in the election outcomes, which give anti-LGBTQ activists visible platforms. Furthermore, Palestinian-Israeli politicians are divided on questions of gender. Some support progressive policies, and others combat feminism and queer rights and therefore choose to embrace ultra-nationalist and ultra-religious politicians for their shared commitment to conservative social and religious norms.

Our research highlights the place of gender and sexuality in far-right Israeli politics and the nexus between Israeli domestic policy and policies towards Palestinians. Nonetheless, there are Israeli and Palestinian political forces building efforts toward resistance, democracy and social pluralism and combating political extremism and the Israeli state's increasing hold on the dissipating progressive voices among civil society, NGOs, the arts and academia.

Notes

1. The term 'bearers of the collective' and the concept that women in Israel have carried the weight of the state's Jewish identity has been defined by Nira Yuval-Davis. See Yuval-Davis (2005), pp. 121–32.
2. This chapter does not address current developments as they are too challenging to capture and analyse properly at this time.
3. On the Nation State Law, see Sharvit Baruch (2018).
4. The Law of Return was followed by the Citizenship Law enacted in 1952, which granted automatic citizenship to any Jew entering the country on the basis of the Law of Return. See Herzog (2019), pp. 383–94.
5. The international community was largely in favour of establishing a Jewish State, which they understood as a compensation for the hardships that Jews has experienced during the Second World War. On this, see, for instance, Herman (1977); Kimmerling (2002), pp. 1119–44.
6. See statistics published in 2020 by the Jewish Virtual Library, based on the 'Israel Central Bureau of Statistics': https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/latest-population-statistics-for-israel [accessed 1 August 2023].
7. On the roots of biblical and rabbinic marriage and divorce laws from a gender-sensitive perspective, see, among others, Adler (1998), pp. 169–208. On how Reform and Conservative movements in Israeli began to impact the Orthodox establishment beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, see Tabory (2000), pp. 183–203.
8. On the male-dominated court and its control over the Commission to Appoint Religious Court Judges, which since early 2002 includes women, see Shenhav (2006), pp. 141–49.
9. For the statistics on Jewish marriage ceremonies registered in Israel between 2009 and 2021, see the graphs published by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, Population and Immigration Authority. Available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1288961/number-of-jewish-marriage-ceremonies-registered-in-israel/ [accessed 28 February 2024].

10. On ethnic cleansing, see Roth (2023) and Leal (2023).
11. On the gap between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi feminists in Israel, see also Dahan-Kalev (2001), pp. 669–84.

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4

'FOR THE SAKE OF THE KIDS': NATIONAL SECURITY AND FAMILY VALUES IN THE UKRAINIAN SEXUALITY EDUCATION DEBATE

Maryna Shevtsova

Introduction

In the last decade (2012–22), the idea of introducing so-called Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into the curriculum of Ukrainian secondary schools provoked intense political debates often covered by the media. The United Nations Population Fund defines CSE as a 'rights-based and gender-focused approach to sexuality education, whether in school or out of school', which is expected to include 'scientifically accurate information about human development, anatomy, and reproductive health, as well as information about contraception, childbirth, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV' (UN Population Fund 2021). While welcomed by some educators and policy-makers, CSE faced strong resistance not only from religious groups but also from the actors that the present chapter defines as 'heteroactivists' and 'heteroactivist scholars'.

Ukraine is among those countries that, mostly thanks to political pressure from the European Union (EU), since 2012 have enacted laws to prevent and eliminate discrimination, protect women from domestic violence and promote the rights of LGBTQ people. Nevertheless, these attempts

at the Europeanisation of domestic gender-equality and LGBTQ policies have met opposition. For years, legislators and various political actors in Ukraine have resisted anti-discrimination legislation, either by ignoring its existence or openly opposing it. More recently, as civil society activists and international organisations have started pushing for something more than declaratory statements and insisting on the implementation of human rights legislation, opponents of gender equality and LGBTQ rights have come forward (Shevtsova 2020). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 made the Ukrainian government rely even more on Western countries' support, opening new opportunities for human rights activists to push for the adoption of the gender and sexual equality policies promoted by the EU. At the same time, the militarisation of society and rising nationalist spirit have created a favourable context for religious and conservative groups to advance certain 'traditional family values'.

According to Gacoin (2017, p. 2), sexual education itself is always a 'political project', and a focus on the specifics and goals of the approved curriculum only serves to obscure this fact. Feminist scholars have gathered substantial evidence for the crucial role that gender plays in defining a nation's continuous genealogy as a family construct (Norocel 2016). Women's sexuality and motherhood, expressed in a legally sanctioned, heterosexual and strictly monogamous union with a man from the same ethnic nation, are central in this construct (Cinpoes and Norocel 2020). A successful ethno-nationalist project, therefore, would reproduce the nation while also excluding foreign influences. Along these lines, another essential part of shaping a 'good citizen' is an educational system, a network of institutions tasked with conveying a set of 'proper' national values to the country's growing young citizens. As Al-Ali, Tunay Altay and Katharina Galor have pointed out in the introduction to this volume, this task is often fulfilled by creating a discourse on exclusion and a myth of a heteronormative and religiously homogenous nation.

Collins and Coleman (2008, p. 281) have referred to schools as a setting where home, family and community intersect; they speak of the 'social geographies of everyday life'. Nash and Browne have pointed out that schools are the places where children are separated from their families and teachers are responsible for making sure that the children learn values and norms – ideals that may not always coincide with those of the child's family or (religious)

communities. It is no surprise, they conclude, that in many countries schools have become places that oppose any moves toward gender and sexual equalities (Nash and Browne 2021).

There exists enough literature from the Western and North American context on how education becomes the channel through which the state communicates standards for 'good citizenship' (Gacoin 2017; Horst et al. 2020; Mitchell 2003) and provides the conditions to train a new generation of responsible citizens ready to participate in nation-building and cultural preservation. A few authors have addressed the question in the Middle Eastern context as well (İlkkaracan 2015; Sinha 2021). However, there are only a handful of studies on Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Rawłuszko 2019). This chapter offers an examination of the debates around Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Ukraine, in order to contribute to a better understanding of Eastern Europe's developing opposition to LGBTQ rights. Following the research design proposed by Nash and Browne (2015), it focuses on four thematic areas – national security, the family, religion and anxieties about the safety of children. The chapter aims to explain the cultural specificities of transnational discourses that emerge in the complex Ukrainian context shaped by the vicinity of the EU, a promoter of liberal human rights values, and Russia, a self-proclaimed defender of so-called 'traditional family values'.

I begin by discussing current trends in the scholarship on the resistances to gender and sexual equalities, gender, sexuality and nationalism, as well as by introducing the theoretical framework and central concept of 'heteroactivism'. I then outline the context and the methods used. The empirical section contains the analysis of a case-study of the debate around the introduction of CSE in Ukraine. I argue that local resistances, inspired by transnational networks, are still largely shaped by their local cultural and historical context. The conclusion discusses the implications of these findings for policy-making and questions for further research on heteroactivism and the resistance to LGBTQ rights in Eastern Europe and beyond.

Schools as Spaces for the (Re)Production of and Resistance to Norms

Scholars seem to agree that schooling and citizenship are closely connected (Kahne et al. 2013; Keating 2016). Some see schools as an instrument to fix the problems found in the local community or society (Gorard 2010). In this

view, schools are places where social norms are (re)produced, the institutions through which young citizens are 'both controlled and disciplined by adults and within which distinct identities are (re)produced' (Collins and Coleman 2008, p. 284). In other words, the citizenship taught in schools is not limited to what is understood as a legal political status but rather encompasses a much broader domain of everyday social and cultural life (Schuitema et al. 2018). Classrooms are spaces where a particular kind of citizen is created, 'schooled in the norms and proper codes of behaviour related to national citizenship' (Mitchell 2003, p. 390).

Feminist educational scholars have paid much attention to the place and role of gender in democratic schooling and to the ways in which education genders numerous areas of social interaction, including work, health, (il)legality, socio-economic inequality and political representation (Arnot 2009; Naseem 2010). Sexuality education, more specifically, addresses a separate area of social life and presents a 'range of pedagogical interventions with children and young people around sexualities, reproductive biology and rights, sexual health and issues concerning sexual consent and protection' (Alldred and Fox 2019, p. 670). Alldred and Fox (2019, p. 701) have argued that CSE may 'produce a variety of capacities that affect how bodies participate in a social context' and that educational practices, therefore, may open up radical possibilities for becoming a citizen. Not surprisingly, as Nash and Browne (2015, p. 568) have pointed out, schools turn into 'contentious locations where disputes over the nature of citizenship and national values are contested through the figure of the child'.

If unravelling the micropolitics of sexuality education allows one to understand the capacities and possibilities produced by educational institutions for the process of becoming a citizen (Alldred and Fox 2019, p. 670), a closer examination of the resistances to sexuality education (or to parts of it) offers us a better understanding of what kind of citizen is undesirable or what kind of citizen a child should (not) become. In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate how particular forms of (hetero)sexuality are presented as those in need of privileging and protection by the Ukrainian state, while others are deemed worthy of exclusion from the national imaginary (that is, from schools) to protect the minors – and the security of the nation.

Resisting Gender and Sexual Equalities: Heteroactivism as Theoretical Framework

The 2010s saw a rapid growth in the body of the literature on mobilisation against gender and sexual rights in Europe and well beyond it (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; McKay and Angotti 2013; Weiss and Bosia 2013). It soon became clear that the protests and campaigns against so-called 'gender ideology' should not be analysed as solely national phenomena but as one that spanned continents with numerous similarities in forms of resistances (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, p. 4). According to the literature, there are multiple cases where local political actors have chosen societal homophobia as an instrument to provoke strong emotional reactions from the population and deflect attention from other issues, such as corruption or a lack of democratic progress (Shevtsova 2020; Sleptcov 2018). Weiss and Bosia (2016, p. 2–3) have referred to such cases as political homophobia, a term that they have defined as 'a state strategy, social movement, and transnational phenomenon' which consists of 'the scapegoating of an "other" that drives processes of state-building and reduction [. . .] as the product of transnational influence peddling and alliances' and a 'part of the legitimation of political and economic power'.

While the concept of 'political homophobia' proves analytically useful for studies on the actions of governments and political elites, for the present study 'heteroactivism', a concept proposed by Browne and Nash (2017), serves as a better theoretical foundation. The authors understand 'heteroactivism' to refer to 'an increasingly coordinated ideological and strategic response to LGBTQ equalities positioning "heteronormativity" (the confluence of gendered, classed, and racialised norms within man/woman divides that come together in normative heterosexual relationships) as foundational to a healthy and sustainable society' (Browne and Nash 2017, p. 645). Browne and Nash have advised viewing heteroactivism as both ideology and form of activism, since the term includes various oppositions to LGBTQ equalities that are framed as the freedom of religion, protection of minors, parental rights and reproductive rights, as well as so-called gender ideologies (Browne and Nash 2017, p. 645; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017).

Heteroactivism serves the purpose of this study better since it suggests, at its core, various forms of activism and mass mobilisation based on the notion

of the superiority of normative heterosexuality over all other sexualities. Importantly, in comparison with more traditional resistance to LGBTQ rights or gender equality, heteroactivism is well informed, frequently employing modern arguments for the freedom of religion and of expression, and protection of minors and parental rights, among others (Nash and Browne 2021). As the empirical section will show, this is the case with Ukraine's sexuality education debate, in which heteroactivist communities have visibly progressed in creating new modes and forms of resistance. Using Ukraine as an example, this chapter demonstrates how groups, organisations and initiatives that can be defined as heteroactivist move from reactive positions to proactive ones across various spheres of public life, including education, in which heteroactivism becomes an alternative source of knowledge production.

Heteroactivism is geographically conditioned and has to be studied within a specific cultural, historical and geopolitical context. In the case of Ukraine, the transformations taking place in the country regarding gender and sexual equality cannot be analysed without taking into consideration the country's past. For many years, Ukraine has been a battlefield between so-called 'European human rights norms' and 'traditional family values', a dominant national and foreign policy of neighbouring Russia (Shevtsova 2021; 2022). Approaching education as the channel through which the Ukrainian state communicates the standards for 'good citizenship' and provides the conditions to train a new generation of responsible citizens ready to participate in nation-building and cultural preservation, I will examine the clash between the intention to teach inclusion, diversity and multi-culturalism and the intention to preserve 'traditional values', resulting in specific policies or modes of state-sanctioned discipline and surveillance. In doing so, this chapter relies on a queer feminist perspective as it strives to demonstrate how gender and sexuality, intertwined with other social conditions such as religion or nationality, have become central for understanding the 'value clashes' in Ukrainian secondary education against the background of broader (geo)political processes.

Context: Gender and Sexual Equalities in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine

The development of the broader public discussion of inclusive legislation and practices regarding sexual and gender equalities in Ukraine can be traced to the early 2010s. Although Ukraine was the first of the former Soviet republics

to decriminalise homosexuality in the early 1990s, almost no public discussion of the topics of sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual harassment, gender-based violence and comprehensive sexuality education took place until 2010–12. Civil society organisations had dealt with these topics in Ukraine for years, but only by the 2010s, as a result of geopolitical factors, policy-makers – as well as rapidly growing resistance groups – started to pay attention. On the one hand, although Ukraine has always aspired to join the European Union, since the early 2010s the EU has increased its pressure on partner countries regarding the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and respect for the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups and, particularly, LGBTQ rights (Slootmaeckers et al. 2016). On the other hand, pro-Russian groups have drawn more attention to the issue by creating a discursive connection between the political approximation of Ukraine and the EU and the so-called 'homosexualisation' of Ukraine. According to these groups, the EU's attempt to impose the legalisation of same-sex marriage on Ukraine contradicted the country's traditional Christian family values and even threatened national security (Shevtsova 2020; 2021).

By 2022, Ukraine – largely due to the political pressure from the EU and its member states, as well as the coordinated efforts of civil society activists – had adopted several pieces of national legislation aimed at establishing sexual and gender equalities. These include an anti-discrimination law (2012), an amendment to the labour code that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and a law against domestic violence (2017). The years 2015 to 2021 also saw the growing visibility of LGBTQ activism. For example, in 2019 Marches of Equality took place in several major cities across the country, and by 2021 the number of officially registered LGBTQ-rights NGOs in the country had exceeded forty.

At the same time, the presence of strong resistance against gender and sexual equalities prevented further progress in Ukraine, so that the above-mentioned legislation could not be implemented. Conservative, right-wing nationalist and religious groups (sometimes the three categories can be applied to one and the same organisation) have proven to be strong opponents of sexual and gender equalities. For example, the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations (UCCRO), which constitutes the largest and one of the most prestigious non-governmental institutions in Ukraine, for years remained one

of the main forces blocking the country's ratification of the Istanbul Convention.[1] The main reason for the opposition was the convention's mention of the words 'gender', 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity', which, according to opponents such as the UCCRO, have to do with the normalisation of same-sex unions and the promotion of homosexuality. Ukraine also failed to include sexual orientation and gender identity in the list of grounds protected under its anti-discrimination law, due to similar claims from various groups which opposed the measure.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 led to Ukraine's growing dependence on alliances with the West and created momentum for LGBTQ and women's rights activists to advocate for new gender equality and LGBTQ rights policies. In July 2022, confirming previously expressed firm intentions to join both the EU and NATO, the parliament of Ukraine voted for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, despite all protests from conservative and religious groups. Furthermore, in the summer of 2022, as the petition to establish same-sex marriage on the website of the President of Ukraine collected the 25,000 signatures necessary for the president to react, Volodymyr Zelensky promised to address this question once the war would be over. In other words, it seems that the war has created certain political opportunities for LGBTQ and feminist activists.

Nevertheless, the years 2014–21 also marked an era of renewed nationalist sentiment in Ukraine; this led, for the first time since the country's independence in 1991, to shifts in the project of nation-building and the construction of national values, a process for which educational institutions are central (Nash and Browne 2021). In 2022, in response to the Russian aggression, these processes only strengthened and now take place against the background of society's growing militarisation. As this chapter analyses the debates around the CSE in the Ukrainian education that took place before 24 February 2022, it is too early to make any claims about which of the two factors discussed above – closer approximation to the EU and the growing influence of Western institutions that this entails, or the increased nationalist sentiment and militarisation and re-traditionalisation of some parts of society – will play a major role once the war is over.

Following the reasoning of Gacoin (2017) on the politicisation of sexual education as a nation-building project and of Nash and Browne (2021) on the

influence of resistances on national policies and in shaping 'national values' and 'standards of good citizenship', I explore here nationalist grassroots and institutional resistances to sexual education in Ukrainian schools as they were active between 2019 and 2021. My empirical data demonstrate that, within contexts that are far from being LGBTQ-friendly, sexual education shaped by oppositional ideologies can be particularly effective in establishing the notion of the 'superiority of monogamous, binary cis-gendered, coupled marriages as best for children and for society' (Nash and Browne 2021, p. 74).

A Note on Method

To examine emerging resistances to gender and sexual equalities in Ukrainian schools, I have chosen to explore the work of two major institutional actors, the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations (UCCRO) and the Association of Sexologists and Sexual Therapists of Ukraine (ASSU), and I will investigate how they frame their opposition to these equalities within the broader context of the country's cultural norms and values. I have chosen these cases as they illustrate high-profile heteroactivism in Eastern Europe generally and heteroactivism as it shapes a local, national discussion around sexual and gender equalities. While the analysis shows that there are similarities to such resistance in other countries, the core of these resistances in Ukraine is constructed according to local cultural and spatial/geopolitical specificities, as it is an opposition embedded in the national context.

In what follows, I will analyse the online presence of the UCCRO and ASSU, their press releases, their official statements both on- and offline, interviews with their spokespeople and articles published between the spring of 2019 and fall of 2021. I have chosen these organisations because they produce mostly public content, make official public statements and create printed and online materials aimed at preventing the introduction of CSE in Ukrainian schools. I have chosen key documents based on their relevance, depth of argumentation and presence of argumentative frames used throughout the organisations' documents.

The empirical section of the chapter discusses three main frames widely used by heteroactivists to resist the introduction of CSE: protection of minors, indoctrination of the so-called 'gender ideology' that can lead to the confusion of children, and freedom of religion. As this chapter demonstrates,

on the one hand, these frames and arguments are very similar to those used by heteroactivists in other countries (on the UK and Canada, see Nash and Browne 2021), while, on the other hand, they are embedded in a local cultural and historical context.

Two Readings of Sex Education in Ukraine: When the Name Matters

In Ukrainian, the English word 'sex' has at least two different translations. The first refers to biological sex, which translates into Ukrainian as '*stat*', while the second – '*seks*' – means sexual intercourse or sexual relations. The form of sex education that has traditionally been present in Ukraine was defined in the curriculum as '*statteve vykhovannia*' – the closest translation is 'education of sexes'. *Statteve vykhovannia* has usually been the responsibility of a biology teacher (or occasionally another teacher who volunteers) who would dedicate a separate class to the subject in the ninth grade (students are typically fourteen or fifteen years old when they are taught human anatomy in school). The students are divided by gender and are given a forty-minute introduction that usually covers the basics of contraception as well as some information on sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The teachers do not receive special training or instruction on how to prepare for such a class, and it is normally left up to each teacher to determine how to present the class and what information to offer the students. This task is usually, but not always, assigned to female teachers. According to research conducted in Ukraine in 2019 (Cedos 2019), the vast majority of teachers felt awkward and unprepared during these classes and commented that they would benefit from additional training on the topic. At the same time, this is the type of sex education accepted by the larger population, including conservative groups. Most parents, according to this same research, also expected *sttateve vykhovannia* to remain the school's responsibility. Overall, the need to have teenagers informed about contraception and STIs is not questioned or opposed by the conservative groups who contest comprehensive sexuality education.

Over the past decade, however, more and more activists and civil society organisations have been trying to introduce in Ukrainian schools an approach they define as '*seksualna prosvita*'. They base this approach on the UN Population Fund's concept of comprehensive sexuality education, which, as has been mentioned above, is a 'rights-based and gender-focused approach to sexuality education, whether in school or out of school' – an approach expected

to include 'scientifically accurate information about human development, anatomy, and reproductive health, as well as information about contraception, childbirth, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV' (UN Population Fund 2021). The initiatives to promote CSE are mostly sponsored by international and Western donor organisations and are coordinated regionally by various human rights civil society organisations usually working with women's reproductive health and/or children's rights. As I learned from the interviews and informal conversations I conducted with civil society activists and experts on sexuality education in Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science works closely with them, participating in discussing the new curriculum which could possibly include CSE; however, the ministry is extremely careful not to voice opinions on the matter officially or to give explicit preference to CSE over the sex education proposed by conservative groups.

The movement 'Stop Sexual Education for Children' and the Association of Sexologists and Sexual Therapists of Ukraine (ASSU) which has launched it define the sex education that they are opposing as a 'sexual education realised through the propaganda of homosexual relations, destruction of family values and moral and ethical foundations' (ASSU 2021). ASSU has clearly defined what 'properly organised sexual education (*statteve vykhovannia*)' entails:

1. The classes should be organised separately for educators, parents and children.
2. Children should be divided into groups according to their age. Children from different age groups cannot be mixed.
3. The curriculum must include at least twelve classes (ideally fifteen to twenty).
4. The first six to nine classes should not mention the topic of sexual intercourse.
5. The first six to nine classes must be dedicated to an 'orientation towards couple relations, family values, friendship skills, love skills, teach[ing] how to love, show feelings [and] conscious choice of friends'.
6. Whenever physiological issues are discussed, boys and girls are to be divided into different groups.
7. Emphasis must be given on the conscious beginning of one's sex life and the conscious and responsible choice of one's life partner. The instructor must help the group develop an understanding of the consequences of 'irresponsible sexual behaviour'.
8. The group should be oriented towards steady, monogamous relations.

At the same time, proper *statteve vykhovannia* cannot include:

1. Criticising parents or questioning their authority.
2. Discussions of polyamory, polygamy, or other forms of 'alternative sexual relations'.
3. The propagation of homosexual contact since it can 'affect the still-evolving gender identity of the child'.
4. Discussion of sexual activity in terms of purely physiological satisfaction without the centrality of couple and family relations.
5. Extensive information about the 'sexual practices of adults'.
6. Detailed descriptions of 'sexual deviations'.
7. Instructors who 'irresponsibly provide contraceptives as the one and main protection against STDs and HIV'.[2]

For heteroactivists in Ukraine, too, school is supposed to be a safe space for children (Nash and Browne 2021) where the 'natural' dominance of heterosexuality and cisgenderism is conveyed to the children, with no chance of their 'indoctrination' with foreign values or the 'propagation' of homosexuality or 'alternative forms of sexuality'. The danger of the normalisation of non-heterosexual relations and sexualities for minors is at the core of most heteroactivist claims, of both scholars and religious institutions such as the UCCRO. The 'neutral' and 'objective' knowledge that the school is expected to offer children is inherently heteronormative and prioritises abstinence as a method for contraception and protection against STIs. There is no assumption that heteronormativity can be or is imposed on children; it is presented as the only 'healthy' norm that they should be taught. No other forms of sexual orientation and gender identity are supposed to be mentioned in such classes, and while LGBTQ people can be mentioned during other courses (as a part of those courses' curricula), their 'lifestyle' should not be presented as normal or discussed in detail, so as not to 'confuse' minors.

Protecting Minors: For the Sake of the Kids

The heteroactivist ideology in Ukraine is predominantly built around the theme of protecting minors. School, in this picture, is a place where children are separated from their parents and become vulnerable to multiple possible

influences which must be controlled to ensure their safety as minors. The educational content that the children receive thus corresponds to the general idea of what it means to be a good citizen of their country. With regard to sexuality education, two central issues of heteroactivist resistance are sex as a source of pleasure – and its possibility outside the family (that is, outside the marriage of a heterosexual couple) – and non-heteronormative sexualities.

CSE is seen by heteroactivists, UCCRO and ASSU as 'experiments on children' that are beyond their families' control and are aimed at promoting 'gender ideology' in schools. This ideology, in their rhetoric, gives children the 'wrong' ideas about what sexuality is supposed to mean in their lives as well as which sexualities are societally-approved and state-sanctioned and which are deviant and unacceptable. In their publications, heteroactivists refer to alleged research results which prove that Western countries with more 'liberal' approaches to sexuality education have higher rates of 'gender deviations' as well as suicide and depression among teenagers (Rebro 2019). The children, therefore, must be protected against such harmful influences, and schools must become a 'safe space that makes impossible imposing on children the idea of "normalcy" of homosexuality and other sexual deviations' (Urazbayeva 2020).

Another argument commonly pops up in discussions about the need to protect the 'majority' of the children against those who 'think' they might be a part of the LGBTQ community. Since heteroactivists reject the very idea of LGBTQ children, they first claim that such children often wish for things that may not be best for them. If their parents do not want to stimulate 'psychological deviations in children', then they should understand that the 'harmonious development of a child is not equal to fulfilling all their wishes'. Second, they claim that one cannot 'take care of some children by ignoring or offending the others'. Giving trans children safe access to schools, in other words, endangers the safety of other children and, therefore, should not be allowed (Gorgota 2020).

These arguments are incorporated into the larger discourse on the importance of the traditional Christian family to Ukrainian society: gender ideology, hidden within comprehensive sexual education, is aimed at ruining 'family foundations' and imposing foreign liberal ideology on children – who are, after all, future citizens.

Teaching Third Gender? On 'Gender Ideologies' in Schools

Gender confusion – or, introducing a 'new' or 'third' gender – is among the most popular arguments against CSE in schools. In August 2021, Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science announced plans to conduct a gender audit of schools nationwide. This provoked a strong reaction from conservative groups; in particular, the UCCRO published an official appeal to the president of Ukraine, asking him to withdraw from the international Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality (UCCRO 2020). Being part of the Biarritz Partnership required the government to take multiple steps toward achieving comprehensive gender equality, including in the sphere of education. In its appeal to the president, the UCCRO alleged that the Western countries which founded the partnership interpreted gender equality not as the absence of discrimination against a person on the basis of gender but in such a way as to introduce a 'gender ideology' normalising the concept that people independently choose their gender according to their will (UCCRO 2020).

Similar to the case of the British and Canadian schools described by Nash and Browne (2021), Ukrainian heteroactivists opposing sexuality education and 'gender ideology' frame these as confusing for the majority of the children, challenging the societal 'norms' and threatening the 'healthy' order of things. The psyche of children is presented as fragile and prone to persuasion: a child can be 'convinced' that their sexual orientation is not heterosexual, or that their gender identity is different from the one assigned at birth.

Official resources by the UCCRO and ASSU contain quite a few articles discussing foreign examples of creating LGBTQ-inclusive school environments – or role models for fighting them. For example, the webpage of *Vseukrayinski Sobor* (the online portal of the Orthodox Christian Church in Ukraine) has a section titled 'Threats and Challenges' where foreign countries' cases are regularly discussed. One of those articles, 'In Scotland one can become transgender at the age of four', discusses the attempts to create a safe and healthy school environment for trans kids in Scotland. In particular, the article is concerned with the consequences that teachers might face if they question the gender 'chosen' by a child. Heteroactivists fear that 'the Church' will be driven out of schools, which will turn schools into spaces where a child's gender and sexuality can be 'shaped' in an undue manner. They refer to such an inclusive school environment as a 'mechanism that will

forbid parents of a child making decisions about recognising their child's gender' (Vseukrayinski Sobor 2021). According to another article on the portal, LGBTQ teenagers do not exist because sexuality is defined as beginning in one's early to mid-twenties. In other words, heteroactivist opponents of CSE and LGBTQ-inclusive schools, on the one hand, reject the fact that a child *can* have a non-heterosexual orientation or non-cisgender identity. On the other hand, they present children's sexuality and gender as something fluid and vulnerable enough to be easily confused by the wrong guidance and changed against the will of their parents. The new kind of school – that is, a school tolerant of and friendly towards LGBTQ children – is seen as an institution that opposes the 'normal' family and indoctrinates students with values and norms imposed by the West.

Heteroactivists claim that they do not oppose measures to prevent gender discrimination if it means fighting gender-based violence or ensuring equal rights for men and women. Instead, they argue that a broader reading of the concept of gender contains a set of confusing ideas which can adversely affect minors. A closer reading of their texts, however, shows that these groups do not fully support gender equality either; they often refer to the importance of following 'traditional gender role models', understanding the differences between men and women and paying attention to 'natural' and 'biological' characteristics of the two genders.

To summarise, in addition to the danger of presenting sex as a source of pleasure and something beyond simply a means to procreate in a heteronormative monogamous relationship, heteroactivists in Ukraine oppose CSE as a danger that plants seeds of gender confusion in children. Traditional gender norms and the duality of gender/biological sex, according to them, are to be carefully shaped and protected by the parents and the school – where the Church should be present. These heteroactivists do accept, in other words, that gender norms may differ from the norms that they promote, but since they privilege heterosexuality and heteronormativity as the only norms good for society, their work is aimed at protecting and reaffirming those values.

Protecting Families – Protecting the Nation

As they see education as the process of creating new docile citizens (Thapan 2006), heteroactivist organisations view what they consider to be the attempts

of foreign states or institutions to interfere with existing policies or to change practices (or introduce CSE) as a threat to the nation's survival. I have already mentioned the strong association in public discourse between Ukraine's approximation with the European Union and the import of certain values and norms, such as same-sex marriage and, in general, inclusion for LGBTQ people. Heteroactivists refer to attempts to promote these norms as a threat to the safety and even survival of the nation, while framing their own resistance as national defence. They rely not only on the notion that minors have vulnerable psyches – and are thus easy to confuse and push toward 'changing gender' – but also on the fear that the whole nation will stop reproducing itself due to 'gender ideology'.

In their materials, heteroactivists mention particular international institutions and organisations that threaten Ukrainian national security. One of these is the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), which develops the promotion of CSE in Ukraine. *Vseukrayinski Sobor* mentions several events organised by UNFPA that are in some way related to LGBTQ rights, normalised homosexual relations or the human rights of HIV-positive people. These events, according to the authors, reveal the true ideological position of UNFPA. UNFPA's promotion of women's rights serves, according to the ASSU, as a 'Trojan horse' which will 'bring inside the society [foreign] values and norms' (ASSU 2020). Furthermore, joining international initiatives such as the Istanbul Convention or Biarritz Partnership is seen as 'creating a powerful mechanism to introduce gender ideology and punish those who oppose it' (Ibid.).

The solution, according to heteroactivists, is in their resistances and, ultimately, in appealing to the government to withdraw from the international obligations that disrupt traditional educational practices and threaten Ukrainian families and the Ukrainian nation. Otherwise, according to the UCCRO, the consequence would be the following:

> We see examples of other countries where the people did not stand up for the education of their children. We see that the spiritual and pro-family curriculum has been replaced by sexuality education for first grade, where from the very beginning children are being offered what is called 'education' but, in fact, is propaganda of masturbation, sexual experiments, various sexual deviations, LGBT, transgenderism, gender change, etc. (Vseukrayinski Sobor 2020)

The heteroactivist discourse, therefore, encourages resistance in three realms: the private family realm, where parents and families should have control over their children's sexualities (as long as those are heterosexual families that accept heteronormativity); school, where the Church is crucial in opposing children's confusion and the potential normalisation of 'wrong' sexualities; and the state and public realm, where the government is expected to protect national security by ensuring that only certain sexualities and gender identities are recognised as 'proper'.

Conclusion

In the present article, I have argued that, between 2019 and 2021, Ukrainian classrooms and school curricula turned into a battleground for so-called heteroactivist groups who resist the promotion of gender and sexual equalities in the country. In their resistances against CSE, and, broadly speaking, against gender and sexual equality, they stress the superiority of heteronormative sexualities and gender identities over all others, and they use this argument to re-affirm social and political inequalities already existing in Ukrainian society. Applying both transnationally-inspired and locally-embedded frames and arguments, oppositions presented by religious groups and groups of scholars built an organised resistance to the 'threat' of 'alternative forms of sexuality and gender identity'. Through the framework of heteroactivism, I have explored here how monogamous, cisgender heterosexuality is presented as something in need of protection and promotion for the sake of the health and even survival of the nation, through the protection and correct education of children (minors). This protection is to be granted by the state and can only be institutionalised when the state and Church define both public and private spheres (foundations of the family).

The analysis of two cases – the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations (UCCRO) and the Association of Sexologists and Sexual Therapists of Ukraine (ASSU) – has confirmed the claim of Browne and Nash (2017; 2021) that heteroactivism is 'inherently geographical' but transnationally inspired. Indeed, one can see multiple similarities between the arguments, forms of mobilisation and strategies of resistance used by heteroactivists in Ukraine and elsewhere, including the cases of the UK and Canada analysed by the authors. The discussion around sexual and gender freedoms

in Ukrainian schools is rooted in geopolitical situations – that is, the ideological clash between the so-called traditional family values (promoted by pro-Russian groups and some religious groups funded by the US) and the vaguely defined 'European values', which are supposed to include sexual and gender equalities and, in particular, LGBTQ rights. Leaving behind notions of 'sin' or 'sexual deviation', the opponents now make central to their claim the idea of children's rights and parental control over what their children are taught in school. Securing the 'safety' of school/classroom spaces from 'foreign gender ideology' becomes the specific challenge for Ukrainian heteroactivists.

It is worth noting that, unlike in some other cases, the topics of race and ethnicity are largely absent from this discussion, even though implicitly the idea of a 'Ukrainian' family is heterosexual, Orthodox or Greek-Catholic Christian and white. Indeed, the right-wing groups in Ukraine, as in some other Central Eastern European countries, choose non-white Ukrainians for their attacks; nevertheless, this theme is largely overlooked, not only by the rest of the opponents of gender and sexual equalities in the country, but also by the activists promoting CSE. The common myth that there is no such thing as racism and xenophobia in Ukraine has penetrated this sphere as well.

While the topic of opposition to LGBTQ rights in Central and Eastern Europe has recently gained increased attention (Luciani 2021; Shevtsova 2022), this work stresses the further need to examine resistances to 'progressive' sexuality education that is supposed to be LGBTQ-friendly and supportive. Eastern European countries such as Ukraine differ in many aspects regarding their legislation and implementation of LGBTQ-rights norms and policies, as even at earlier stages of adoption actors can imitate or adjust to their local context both the best practices for the promotion of and for the resistance against sexual and gender equalities. Considering this peculiarity, one needs to employ both geographical (spatial) and geopolitical (political, historical and cultural) lenses to deal with the implications of these new (hetero-)activisms. Similar to the cases in other locations, as Kandiyoti has argued in her chapter in this volume, the fight over CSE in Ukrainian schools is shaped by an external, geopolitical clash of values and powers in Europe, as well as by an internal national political dynamic.

Russia's war in Ukraine, which escalated with the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, has made the situation of gender equality promotion and LGBTQ rights in Ukraine even more complex, by amplifying the controversial trends of closer approximation with the EU and the increasing nationalist sentiment and

militarisation of society. The year 2022 brought substantial changes to both the legislation and societal attitudes towards sexual and gender equality. In addition to the adoption of LGBTQ-friendly legislation, such as the Istanbul Convention and the law prohibiting homophobic and transphobic hate speech, sociologists have reported growing support for such issues as marriage equality for same-sex couples or the political participation of women (NDI 2023). The most recent polls also show a decrease of popular trust in the Church (from 55 to 44 percent) and growing trust in the government (from 14 to 52 percent) (UNIAN 2023); this change, too, can play a favourable role in the promotion of CSE in Ukrainian secondary education.

Nevertheless, the militarisation of society, the economic crisis, the rise of radical nationalism and increased social inequalities can lead to a growth of conservative attitudes and the cementing of traditional gender roles in some regions of the country. Both ASSU and UCCRO have continued their work with the population in 2022–23, staying firm in their opposition to gender and sexual equalities. While sexuality education at schools is not central to the current debates around schooling in Ukraine, it is inevitable that this clash of values will, in the future, influence the state of Ukrainian secondary education and shape the place of gender and sexuality in it.

Notes

1. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, or the Istanbul Convention, is a human rights treaty. The document was opened to signature on 11 May 2011, in Istanbul, Turkey. The goal of the Convention is to prevent gender-based violence, protect victims and end the impunity of perpetrators. Ukraine signed the Convention in November 2011 but as of September 2021 has failed to ratify it.
2. This list is taken from the Ukrainian version provided on the association's official website. I have translated it into English, closely adhering to the original text, and chosen to place in quotation marks some phrases to stress that they are word-to-word translations. Original in Ukrainian at https://sexology.org.ua/stop-seksualna-osvita-v-ukraini/, accessed 6 August 2021.

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5

ATTACKS ON THE ACADEMY FROM GENDER STUDIES TO POST-COLONIALISM: SCIENCE, SECULARITY AND THE FAR RIGHT IN FRANCE, GERMANY AND BEYOND

Elizabeth Berman

Introduction: Negotiating Post-Colonial Discourse in France and Germany

On 2 October 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron delivered a speech titled 'Fight against separatism – the Republic in action'. Macron outlined the aims of the speech: 'to define what problems we actually face, with no taboo subjects [. . .] What, today, in our society, endangers our Republic, our ability to live together?' The problem at hand, for Macron, is 'Islamist separatism', a 'conscious, theorised, political-religious project [that] is materialising through repeated deviations from the Republic's values' (Macron 2020). The rehearsal of such panics about the 'state of the Republic' is deeply entangled with anti-migration sentiment and anti-Muslim racism in the country with Europe's largest Muslim minority, and it is profoundly familiar to French Muslims, as well as to scholars of Islamophobia and secularism (Fernando 2014).

In his speech, Macron linked the charge of 'Islamist separatism' to post-colonial thought: 'We see children of the Republic, sometimes from elsewhere,

children or grandchildren of today's citizens of immigrant origin from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, revisiting their identity through a *post-colonial or anti-colonial discourse*' (Macron 2020; italics my own). Education emerged as a central concern in Macron's speech, as he described the steps available to the government to take control over and pull public funding from associations that do not comply with the French government's definition of *laïcité*. A term that both encompasses and exceeds 'secularism', *laïcité* is a constitutional principle in France; the letter of the law ensures the right to a free exercise of religion, but in the public sphere it can serve as a freedom *from* religion, including from displays of religious apparel or practices of faith in public. Macron emphasised secular education as a core tenet of the French Republic: 'Schools are our republican crucible. They completely protect our children in the face of all religious symbols, religion. They are central to the notion of *laïcité* and are where we form consciences so that children become free, rational citizens able to choose their own destinies' (Macron 2020). A reform of (or crackdown on) higher education and university study pervades this rhetoric about French subjects 'from elsewhere', as noted by media reports published in the wake of Macron's address. Scholars and journalists quickly denounced Macron's speech (Barlas 2020; *Al Jazeera* 2020), while others lauded it as 'far more balanced' (Rahman 2021) than far-right attacks on Muslims.

Concurrent with the French clashes over post- and anti-colonial discourse 'from elsewhere', Germany witnessed public panics over post-colonial theory in universities and the arts. The revocation of renowned philosopher Achille Mbembe's invitation to speak at the opening of the 2020 Ruhrtriennale, on the basis of accusations of antisemitism concerning his work, sparked much debate. Following what was termed the 'Causa Mbembe', and as a response to post- and decolonial activists criticising the opening of Berlin's Humboldt Forum (*NoHumboldt21!* 2013), an ethnological museum housing the city's non-European collections, art historian Horst Bredekamp on 8 March 2021 penned a guest editorial in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, titled 'Why the identitarian delusion is our greatest threat' (Bredekamp 2021). In it, he denounced post-colonial scholars as 'identitarian' menaces to Germany's social and intellectual fabric. These discourses take place in a landscape haunted by the Shoah[1] and embattled by increasing efforts to curb debate over Israel/Palestine.

Germany's culture of memory, or *Erinnerungskultur*, exists as a set of practices and discourses of post-Holocaust commemoration, one that disciplines Jewish, German and migrant subjectivities through a socio-political 'theatre of memory' (Bodemann 1996; Czollek 2018). The discourse on antisemitism in Germany has, over the past decades throughout the tumultuous present, incorporated not just what Judith Butler has termed the 'negative narcissism of guilt' (Butler 2016, p. 280) – an intergenerational self-flagellation for Nazi crimes – but also concerns over so-called 'imported antisemitism' (Arnold and König 2019; Özyürek 2016), by which the onus for alleged resurgences of antisemitism falls on the shoulders of those marked as 'Muslim' or 'Arab' and not those who themselves are descendants of the perpetrators of the Shoah. Such a reversal is remarkable: in this discourse, it is the very condition of white Germans' culpability, or generational connection to the Holocaust, that absolves them of reproducing antisemitism. The increasing visibility of postcolonial thought and its relationship to Israel/Palestine has become a proxy for these moral panics and public anxieties over anti-antisemitism as the German 'Staatsräson' (*Bundesminsterium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat* 2017) and its instrumentalisation in service of anti-migration agitation.

These public discussions also take place alongside the rise of right-wing nationalism in the country, particularly through the normalisation of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (Afd, Alternative for Germany) party. While the misogynistic, Islamophobic, anti-migration and antisemitic positions of the AfD are well-documented (Kemper 2014), the party won claims to academic legitimacy through the establishment of the Desiderius Erasmus Stiftung (*Der Spiegel* 2015). Recognised by the AfD as a party-affiliated foundation in 2018 (*Die Zeit* 2021), the establishment of the Desiderius Erasmus Stiftung (hereafter DES) was met with widespread backlash; opponents warned that the award of millions of taxpayers' Euros would allow the AfD to infiltrate academia (*Die Zeit* 2021). In 2019, the foundation held a public conference in Berlin to address what they termed 'growing threats to the freedom of speech' (Weißmann 2019a, p. 2). The talks given at this conference, documented in the first issue of the foundation's journal *Faktum*, offered a pointed insight not only into the political positions of the academics affiliated with the AfD, but also into how they situate themselves in the scholarly landscape.

How does an analysis of these assaults on Post-Colonial Studies in France and Germany intersect with debates on the scholarly value of Gender Studies? How might they together reveal how far-right and centrist discourse leak into one another and illuminate how 'proper science' is constructed in two national contexts that consider themselves, and are widely considered to be, hegemonically secular? At stake are battles over the position of science – understood here in its broad sense of *Wissenschaft*[2] – in projects of nationalism in France and Germany; in other words, these are debates over the proper function of the university, which has been theorised as 'a mausoleum of imperial ego' (Lim 2009, p. 36, cited in Snaza and Singh 2021, p. 6). The strategies and discourses deployed by those seeking to delegitimise post-colonial theory illuminate many of the concerns at stake in this volume.

The next section will establish the links between the anti-Gender Studies and anti-Post-Colonial Studies rhetoric in France and Germany. The section that follows will outline the transnational scope of this analysis, emphasising the rhetoric that links 'imported' theories, such as post-colonialism, to so-called 'Islamo-leftism' in France. The chapter will then take up this concern with 'Islamo-leftism' to consider how assaults on Post-Colonial Studies, as well as Gender Studies, frame these fields of study as both far-left *and* far-right, seizing on totalitarian histories to maintain an imperialist *status quo*. The final section will consider how these debates illuminate tensions over secularism, proper 'science' and morality, followed by concluding remarks that meditate on the institutionalisation of Gender and Post-Colonial Studies.

Focusing on the media coverage of French and German panics over post-colonial theory dating from 2020 and 2021, this chapter considers the 'journalistic gender enmity' noted in *Gender, Science, and Ideology*,[3] through which scholars, pundits and columnists (and their interactive audiences, such as internet commenters) join far-right parties, Christian fundamentalists and other diverse actors in denouncing what sociologist Roderick Ferguson has termed the 'interdisciplines of minority difference' (Ferguson 2012). The critical discourse analysis employed in this paper does not seek to mount individual attacks on Macron, Bredekamp, or other commentators examined here. On the contrary, I am interested in the wider, structural landscapes of discourse and critique in which their varying and overlapping assaults on post-colonial scholarship transpire.

From Gender Debates to Post-Colonial Panics

Towards a Queer-Feminist Analysis

In France and Germany, anti-gender rhetoric is folded into broader 'anti-identity' impulses that also come to bear on Post-Colonial Studies. This study's point of departure is twofold. The first is that critique constitutes a necessary mode of engagement to be taken with a spirit of generosity, as discussed in this volume's introduction. The second is that discourses and practices of sexuality, gender and intimacy are always already entangled with those of racialisation, migration and religion, as much work in Gender Studies and Post-Colonial Studies has made clear. Following philosopher Maria Lugones's landmark essay 'The coloniality of gender' (Lugones 2008), debates on racism and migration are also issues of anti-feminism and political homophobia, insofar as the maintenance of the Western nation is also a conservation of its heterosexual familial structures and 'proper' genealogies. The entanglement of concerns over gender, sexuality and racialisation are made readily apparent in the leveraging of (neo-liberal and white-coded) LGBTQ+ ascendancy and feminism to perpetrate anti-Muslim and anti-immigration campaigns across European and Anglo-American contexts, as social theorists Jasbir K. Puar and Sara R. Farris have analysed with their respective conceptions of 'homonationalism' (Puar 2007) and 'femonationalism' (Farris 2017). In his speech, Macron rehearsed this familiar gesture, leveraging 'gender equality' against a deficient 'Other', casting 'Islamist separatism' as 'indoctrination and, through this, the negation of our principles, gender equality and human dignity' (Macron 2020). The complex links between 'anti-genderism' and delegitimisations of post-colonial theory are shaped by the entanglements of the fields of study at stake, the concerns of which are exceedingly more complex than their detractors suggest – much is scholarship that seeks to complicate rather than to shore up identity.

Following theories that draw on the history of colonialism, the erasure of non-binary genders in pre-colonised societies and efforts to institute heterosexuality in the service of white supremacy (Ferguson 2004; Lugones 2008; Muñoz 1999), a queer-feminist perspective also acknowledges the plurality of feminisms and their various political aims. It dispenses with any feminism that is used in the service of protecting the white female (or queer) body from racialised and/or migrant bodies, imagined to be polluting both the individual body and the

body politic – which are discursively linked as one and the same (Yuval-Davis 1997). This argument suggests extending the imagination of the permeable body of the nation – constructed as violable and implicitly feminised – to the university. As a key element in the construction and maintenance of the nation, the university (and its etymological pretensions to universality) stands in for the state: 'the *Universitas* is always a state/State strategy' (Harney and Moten 2004, p. 105).

From Anti-Gender Debates to Assaults on Post-Colonialism

Oppositions to post-colonial theory follow logics already sedimented by assaults on Gender Studies, and considering how condemnations of post-colonial theory both intersect with and diverge from anti-gender discourse builds on extant studies of the latter. Previous and significant work on what can be called 'anti-genderism'[4] has outlined various strains of discourse attacking the academic study of gender across a globalised Europe, as noted in the introduction to this volume. Charges against Gender Studies are distinct from classic anti-feminist or anti-female positions, such as the restriction of reproductive rights or the right to wear a hijab, niqab, burqa, or other religious covering. As philosopher Eva von Redecker has written, '[n]ot women, or free and strong women per se, but a vague conspiracy of elitist academics and policymakers serves as the target in anti-genderism' (von Redecker 2016, p. 3). Full-length studies and edited volumes have addressed the manifold attacks on Gender Studies throughout the last decade, which proliferate across Europe and warp according to local or national contexts (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018; Ayoub 2016; Paternotte and Kuhar 2017).

Sabine Hark and Paula-Irene Villa's edited volume *Anti-Genderism: Sexuality and Gender as Sites of Contemporary Political Contestation* (Hark and Villa 2015) has compiled the various angles of assault on the study of gender: Christian-conservative attacks on Gender Studies emanating from the Vatican (Paternotte 2015) or Protestant evangelicals (Thiessen 2015); the fantasy of a teleological, 'completed' feminism folded into the delegitimisation of Gender Studies (Maihofer and Schutzbach 2015); debates over the scholarly value of the study of gender (Wimbauer, Motakef and Teschlade 2015); and the association of Gender Studies with the German Democratic Republic (DDR) or totalitarian impulses, broadly-defined (Heft 2015).

Considering the 'secular' contexts that Hark and Villa have elaborated affords a focus on actors that self-consciously distance themselves from the Christian right-wing. Although the anti-Muslim racism consistent across assaults on Post-Colonial Studies is often absent in delegitimisations of Gender Studies, detractors have termed both of these fields of study 'linke Identitätspolitik' (*Deutschlandfunk Kultur* 2021) or 'Diversity and Gender' (Bolz 2019, p. 17) – elsewhere, these fields have been satirically termed 'grievance studies', a moniker that purports to encompass 'gender studies, masculinities studies, queer studies, sexuality studies, psychoanalysis, critical race theory, critical whiteness theory, fat studies, sociology, and educational philosophy' (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* 2018). Many scholars and journalists attending to the anti-gender campaigns across Europe have not ignored the resonances of attacks on Gender Studies with those on related fields of study – such as post-colonial theory – and academic freedom more broadly (Garbagnoli 2018; Paternotte 2020).

Demographic and Academic 'Replacement' at the Nexus of Gender and Racialisation

Demographic anxieties within Europe illuminate the imbrication of attacks on Post-Colonial Studies with gender-related concerns. Just as political efforts to maintain the Western nation's familial structures take aim at racialised populations considered improperly or excessively reproductive (Franklin and Ginsburg 2019), so too do efforts to purge from the university-*qua*-state critical studies of racialisation and post- or de-colonial approaches reflect broader demographic anxieties within Europe. Those opposing Gender Studies and Post-Colonial Studies in Germany and France take up the rhetoric expressed in conspiracy theorist Renaud Camus' book *Le grande remplacement*, or the 'great replacement' (Camus 2011), an anti-immigration notion with antisemitic roots, which travelled to the United States and culminated in the 2017 'Unite the Right' Charlottesville rally that found white supremacists chanting: 'The Jews will not replace us' (Williams 2017). Detractors of scholarship concerning 'identity' consider these fields to be growing exponentially, conspiring to replace 'traditional' departments, a discourse that echoes the white supremacist panics over a 'great [demographic] replacement' that will see the national population's usurpation by racialised, migratory bodies.

Writing in *Die Zeit* in an article titled 'Schlecht, Schlechter, Geschlecht' – a German play on words that roughly translates to 'Bad, Worse, Gender' – journalist Harald Martenstein has claimed that Gender Studies

> is probably the fastest-growing branch of scholarship in Germany. In 2011, there were 173 gender professorships at German universities and universities of applied sciences, almost all of which are filled by women . . . Slavic Studies, for example, with about 100 professors, has already been easily overtaken by Gender Studies. Paleontology, which is quite useful for climate research and the oil industry, has lost twenty-one chairs in our country since 1997. At the same time, thirty new gender professorships have been created. (Martenstein 2013)

Scholars of gender and related fields note that, in reality, these disciplines remain resolutely under-funded, precarious and marginal within universities (Paternotte 2019; von Redecker 2016), even as Martenstein contends – applying a zero-sum logic to university resources – that Gender Studies conspires to 'overtake' or 'replace' other fields.

In his speech decrying 'Islamic separatism', Macron deployed this language of 'replacement' more directly: 'this radical Islamism – since this is at the heart of the matter let's talk about it and name it – [professes] a proclaimed, publicised desire [. . . to] develop another way of organising society which is initially separatist, *but whose ultimate goal is to take [the Republic] over completely*' (Macron 2020; italics my own). A queer-feminist perspective is concerned with the ways in which such panics echo anxieties about the racial make-up of the (Western) nation, and it also aims to interrogate more closely the relational, shifting and socio-historically contingent boundaries that determine the edges of the nation, the university and the politics of the right and the left.

Transnational Considerations: 'Islamo-Leftism' and 'Imported' Theory

Public panics over 'imported' social theories reflect a rejection of the international character of scholarly discourse under conditions of globalisation, migration and shared Anglo-European histories of dispossession, colonisation and racism. Alain Badiou and Eric Hazan link the nebulous neologism *Islamo-gauchisme* ('Islamo-leftism') to 'secularist zealots and misguided feminists' (Badiou and Hazan 2013, p. 17); over the past years, it has garnered renewed

attention in the French public sphere. Four months after Macron's speech in 2020, Frédérique Vidal, France's Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, announced before the National Assembly a probe into 'Islamo-leftism' at French universities (*Le Monde* 2021). Speaking on CNews, a right-leaning channel, Vidal said: 'I think that Islamo-leftism is eating away at our society as a whole, and universities are not immune and are part of our society [. . . left-wing academics are] always looking at everything through the prism of their will to divide, to fracture, to pinpoint the enemy' (Tharoor 2021). Claiming that 'Islamo-leftism gangrenes society' (Comité Justice et Libertés Pour Tous 2021), Vidal intended to carry out the probe in order to 'separate "what is academic research from what is activism and opinion"' (*Université Ouverte* 2021). The week prior to Vidal's announcement, the right-leaning publication *Le Figaro* had published a series of articles decrying 'Islamo-leftism' in French universities (Louati 2021). Vidal's characterisation of 'Islamo-leftism' as a 'gangrene' potently illustrates the imaginary of the university as a mutable body that can become ill, or disabled, and therefore must be healed (Beyer 2021).

The term 'Islamo-leftism' was first introduced by French philosopher and historian Pierre-André Taguieff in his 2002 book *La nouvelle Judéophobie* (*The New Judeophobia*; Taguieff 2002). Intended to describe what he saw as an alliance between 'far-left' actors criticising the United States and Israel (Onishi and Méheut 2021), Taguieff has described the concept as follows: 'I coined the term "Islamo-leftism" at the very beginning of the 2000s to designate a *de facto* militant alliance between Islamist circles and far-left circles (which I called "leftists" for short), in the name of the Palestinian cause' (Lemieux and Taguieff 2021). Nearly two decades after his introduction of the term, Taguieff suggested in an interview that 'the meaning of the term has been transformed with the evolution of the extreme left, which, from the mid-2000s onwards, has gradually shifted towards decolonialism and a racialist pseudo-antiracism' (Lemieux and Taguieff 2021). Taguieff's elucidation of this spectral threat as an alliance between Islam, decolonial scholarship and activism, and the 'left' reveals the motivations for Macron and Vidal's efforts to purge post- and decolonial scholars from the French state and its universities.

In the weeks and months following Vidal's inflammatory deployment of *Islamo-gauchisme*, a media storm erupted in the French and international news.

Vidal's announcement was met with fierce backlash – a petition against the investigation into scholars of racialisation and (post-)colonialism had gathered more than 10,000 signatures from academics across disciplines by the weekend following her announcement (*Université Ouverte* 2021) – and calls for her resignation proliferated under the hashtag #VidalDemission ('Vidal resign'). Despite this response, her announcement generated a crisis for scholars of postcolonialism, Islamophobia and theories of racism in French universities.

In the attacks on the ill-defined *Islamo-gauchisme* in the French university, detractors cited the 'imported' nature of critical theories of race and colonialism. French academics, among them Taguieff, wrote in a column in *Le Monde* in 2020 that '*Indigéniste*, race-obsessed and "decolonial" ideologies (imported from US campuses)' had infiltrated French universities, 'feeding hatred against "Whites" and France' (*Le Monde* 2020). Taguieff expressed that '"woke" activism and "cancel culture" are developing today in France and Great Britain on the model of the United States and Canada, feeding a hyper-moralism or pseudo-anti-racist puritanism working to destroy our history and high culture' (Lemieux and Taguieff 2021). Jean-Michel Blanquer, the French Minister of National Education, said: 'These are ideas that often come from elsewhere, from a model of society that is not ours' (Durand 2020). Macron was perhaps most clear in his denunciation of 'certain social science theories entirely imported from the United States', saying that 'we have left the intellectual debate to others, to those outside of the Republic . . . I am thinking of Anglo-Saxon traditions based on a different history, which is not ours' (Macron 2020). In the first issue of the DES' *Faktum*, AfD politician Marc Jongen has echoed these claims: 'The concept of hate speech was hatched at universities in the US and has now entered the phase of political implementation in Europe as well' (Jongen 2019).

The French and German desire to eliminate the influence of US theories of race and gender recall the purges of 'foreign' European Marxist academics from US-American philosophy departments in the McCarthyist era of the 1960s (McCumber 2001). Cited in an article in *The Washington Post*, French political scientist Audrey Célistine said of the attacks on 'Islamo-leftism': 'We're dealing with a form of McCarthyism' (Tharoor 2021). Detractors of the 'importation' of US-American trends in scholarship also fail to engage with the embattled nature of the debates within the United States, which have

burgeoned into right-wing panics over the instruction of critical race theories in secondary schools (Zurcher 2021). But it is the *local* implementation of these travelling theories of racialisation, intersectionality and post-colonialism – their application to the European phenomena of antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism, in contradistinction to analyses of the settler-colonial context of the United States – that so acutely threatens the imagined stability of the French and German university and state.

Blurred Boundaries of Political Extremism

French political scientist Samuel Hayat has noted of those who stoke the moral panic: 'They have to rely on a concept like "Islamo-leftism" — which means nothing but makes it possible to lump all critical thinking together with terrorism' (Delaporte 2021). Assaults on critical studies of identity often insist that they have a 'totalitarian' impulse; in what follows, I will consider how delegitimisations of Post-Colonial Studies as both far left *and* far right blur the boundaries of any strictly dichotomous political rhetoric.

'A Spectre is Haunting Europe . . .': The Framing of Gender and Post-Colonial Studies as Communist

As Kathleen Heft has noted in *Anti-Gender* (Heft 2015), anti-gender actors seize on widespread anti-Communist sentiment to cast the study of gender as a political project with roots in, or links to, the former German Democratic Republic (DDR) or the Soviet Union. Detractors of Post-Colonial Studies stoke decades-old moral panics around Islamist and Soviet connections, in efforts to situate post- and decolonial thought in a broader threat of totalitarian state structures. Despite their ongoing marginalisation, Gender Studies and post-colonialism have 'come to be seen as the reigning "ideology", as a force destructive of a national culture' (von Redecker 2016). The potency of anti-Muslim racism in Western Europe – its power to construct links between the Muslim- or Arab-coded body and the nebulous threat of 'terror', drawing on centuries-long boundaries drawn and re-drawn between the 'West' and its 'Others' (Puar 2007; Said 1978) – further emboldens detractors of Post-Colonial Studies and scholarship on Islamophobia.

The constructed links between studies of gender and colonialism to Soviet Communism are expressed freely in the French and German contexts. At the opening event of the AfD's Desiderius Erasmus Stiftung, Norbert Bolz cast

current trends in scholarship as the 'late victory of the DDR' in his speech of the same name (Bolz 2019). Throughout the issue of *Faktum*, representatives of the DES have linked critical theorists of identity to the 'Stasi', or the DDR state police (Weißmann 2019a, p. 4), and raised alarm about an impending 'Erziehungsdiktatur' or 'educational dictatorship' (Weißmann 2019b, p. 37). Taguieff, too, has refined his term '*Islamo-gauchisme*' to denote an alliance of Marxist and Islamist groups and written that, since 'the Trotskyists of yesterday having massively converted to decolonialism, we should speak of Islamo-decolonialism' (Lemieux and Taguieff 2021). In his article on 'Identitarian Delusion', Bredekamp has peppered the term 'totalitarianism' throughout, writing that within post-colonial theory and activism '[t]he phrases of self-determination were and are the coercive means of a totalitarian grip on language, history and the future' (Bredekamp 2021). Such characterisations of post-colonial theory, with parallels to depictions of Gender Studies as a menacing threat to social freedoms, have echoed the conspiratorial rhetoric of demographic and intellectual 'replacement' described above. Seizing on the generational memory of Communism in Europe – and particularly in the former East Germany – these attacks on scholarship on 'identity' construct an imaginary 'backslide' in state governance writ large.

From the Far Left to the Far Right: Linking Post-Colonial Studies to a Fascist Threat

Even more potent in efforts to delegitimise this scholarship (and to deflect attention from the fascistic and far-right resonances of such a delegitimising project) is the discursive link constructed between critical theories of identity and Nazism. Detractors of Gender Studies and post-colonialism implicitly associate post-colonial theory with National Socialist fascism; in the German context, such comparisons carry particular heft. The dangerous links drawn between Nazism and contemporary studies of racism emerge from the false equation of naming and studying 'race'[5] as a multi-dimensional social construct with the devising of a totalitarian system that commits genocide on its basis.

Bredekamp has described the opposition to the Humboldt Forum, emerging most often among scholars and activists who oppose the museum's colonial history and modes of exhibition, as a 'totalitarian gesture'. He has written that this activism 'pursues the same reactionary policy that was instigated by the master riders of the *Kaiserreich* [German Empire] and the

culture destroyers of the National Socialists and which consigned the writings of Boas[6] to the flames' (Bredekamp 2021). One commenter on this article has taken a cue from Bredekamp to cast studies of racialisation as the expression of racism: 'How does this so-called identitarian politics differ from the racial ideology of the nineteenth century, when it neatly sorts people according to their skin colour and recognises collective guilt and collective victims in skin colour?' Such delegitimising comparisons also traverse the French context. Philosopher Pascal Bruckner has been quoted in the conservative French publication *Le Figaro* in an article titled 'Indigenism, decolonialism . . . The crazy ideas of the new anti-racism': 'They [post- and decolonial scholars] are reinventing apartheid, going back to the 1930s while claiming to be fighting against it' (Devecchio 2020). For Bredekamp, Bruckner and their readers, analyses and critiques of racialisation and racism constitute a genocidal regime of racial classification. Such claims cast post- or decolonial theorists as racists who flout the norms of post-genocidal multi-culturalism, which posits a 'post-racial' fantasy of total equality.

Invoking Germany's real right-wing, Bredekamp has claimed, glibly, that the 'threat' of post-colonialism to the country's social fabric is 'more difficult' than that of the AfD:

> The AfD and worse are a constant challenge, but one that should be manageable. Overcoming the identitarian assault on reason is likely to be more difficult because it has become entrenched behind the ethos of leftist liberation rhetoric . . . political correctness means the end of social democracy. (Bredekamp 2021)

Bredekamp has not clarified why the AfD's challenge to social democracy is 'manageable'; his criticism of post-colonial theory hinges on the dubious but highly combative claim that it is 'anti-Jewish', and the AfD, after all, is widely understood to be antisemitic (*Die Zeit* 2021). The shifting boundaries of discourse around antisemitism that materialise within moral panics over Post-Colonial Studies will be considered in more detail in what follows.

'Horseshoe Theory' and Compulsory Centrism

Concerted efforts to situate Gender and Post-Colonial Studies on the far left *and* the far right take recourse to horseshoe theory, a widely-discredited concept

in political science that argues that the far left and far right are closer to one another than either is to the centre, distributed on a political spectrum shaped like a horseshoe.[7] The model is beloved among centrists: by assessing comparable proportions of evil in fascist and Communist politics – already a contestable claim – it constructs the only 'respectable' political position to be the maintenance of the *status quo*, a definitionally conservative impulse.

Eliding the trenchant critiques of liberalism to be found across feminist and post-colonial scholarship (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2020; Fraser 2013), attacks on the study of identity cast it, in the words of one commenter on Bredekamp's article, as 'anti-human and anti-liberal'. This criticism concerns itself with the defence of a 'diverse' society, following the fantastical logic of 'multiculturalism' – a happy co-existence of 'different' persons, whose genders, sexualities, ethnicities, religions and class backgrounds carry no value judgments or material effects. In this liberal humanist imaginary, oppression does not exist *a priori* to the critical discussion of identity; instead, identity is conjured into being, dragged into the social world, by those very academics and activists who seek to deconstruct it. As political and ethical injunctions, both liberalism and humanism remain entirely uninterrogated.

In considering studies of identity as a monolith, the actors that deride scholarship on gender, racialisation and migration elide the fundamental differences between what can be termed 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' in any contingent socio-historical context. They also cast aside the lively internal debates among critical theorists that aim to tease out the (dis)continuities between class struggle, queer theory and studies of gender, sexuality and racialisation (Spivak 2006; Grosz 1994; Bohrer 2020; Mouffe 2019).

While many far-right discourses have explicitly staked a claim on the restriction of civil freedoms – calling for bans on migration, medical access to gender transition or gay marriage – the critics of post-colonial discourse that I attend to here position themselves as guardians of civil liberties. Casting 'identity studies' as a singular and unified threat to open discourse, these actors' concern about threats to freedom of thought and expression emerge from a myopic view of 'freedom' itself. At stake here is not freedom as a site for ongoing scholarly and political negotiation, but rather the freedom for those with institutional power to continue to say and do what they desire without ramifications: the perceived loss of position that Al-Ali, Altay and Galor have noted in their introduction. The image included in Bredekamp's article is a potent

Figure 5.1 Horst Bredekamp, 'Warum der identitäre Wahn unser größte Bedrohung ist', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 March 2021. Source: https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/postkolonialismus-schaedigt-antikoloniale-vernunft-17232018.html.

illustration of the *status quo* that he, and other detractors of critical theories of identity, seek to protect (see Figure 5.1); in it, five men – and notably, one included woman – preside over a model of the Humboldt Forum, echoing the claim that '[e]tymologically, the university is driven by a desire to master everything' (Snaza and Singh 2021, p. 9).

Moral panics over 'cancel culture'[8] also elide the numerous critiques of this impulse across Gender and Post-Colonial Studies. While such debates remain embattled within studies of racism and identity, the characterisation of the academic study of gender, racialisation, migration and colonialism as, in Bredekamp's words, a 'pure' orientation 'that is as clean as it is inhuman' (Bredekamp 2021) constitutes a strategic misreading of the field(s) at hand. Queer-feminist and post- and decolonial theories are instead concerned with indeterminacy, ambivalence and impurity (Shotwell 2016), denouncing the existence of or aspiration to a space of 'ethical hygiene' (Ahuja 2015, p. 368),

even as they work with activist approaches to secure wider freedom(s) for historically marginalised persons. As the authors of *Gender, Science, and Ideology* have noted, it is precisely scholars of gender and racialisation, and the activist traditions from which they draw, who are concerned with formulating definitions of freedom and the various ideological impediments to their realisation (Frey et al. 2014). In the name of protecting a more abstract notion of 'freedom of expression', opponents of Gender and Post-Colonial Studies have argued for very concrete restrictions of academic freedoms.

Guardians of the Left: Strategic Adoptions of Left-Wing Discourse by Detractors of Post-Colonialism

While stoking fear around totalitarian leftism, detractors aiming to delegitimise post-colonialism in France and Germany nevertheless self-consciously strategically adopt the language of the left – similar to their adoption of 'freedom' as a core concern. Proclamations of their own commitment to left-wing traditions or even to anti-colonialism establish boundaries between these actors and Catholic conservative or neo-Nazi positions. As a lead-in to his article, Bredekamp positions himself as an expert on 'proper' left-wing discourse, writing: 'Post-colonialism is diametrically opposed to what can be considered left politics. It threatens the destruction of anti-colonialism' (Bredekamp 2021). The adoption of left-wing discourse in centrist and far-right attacks on 'identity studies' serves a myriad of purposes: to draw distinctions between 'respectable' centrist discourse and 'illiberal' far-right positions, even while parroting the latter; to cast contemporary studies of gender and racialisation as traitorous to a twentieth-century 'leftist' heritage; and even to use to their advantage key conceptual tools developed by feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist thought, such as Antonio Gramsci's 'hegemony' (Williams 2017).

Alongside his denunciation of Post-Colonial Studies, Bredekamp has claimed that '[t]here is no alternative to anti-racism and anti-colonialism, and the sensitivity of the young generation in particular gives hope for the future' (Bredekamp 2021). In his speech, Macron takes care not to mount a universalising attack on Muslims or on Islam – which is not to say, of course, that he considered the potential impact of his speech on French Muslims or scholars of Islam and Islamophobia – and even acknowledged France's historical colonial machinations: 'We're a country with a colonial past and traumas it still hasn't resolved, with facts that underpin our collective psyche, our project, the

way we see ourselves' (Macron 2020). And Vidal, when questioned about her announced investigation into Post-Colonial Studies scholars in French universities, attempted to adopt a vague anti-racist or anti-extremist position; she haltingly cited the 6 January 2021 attack on the US Capitol, saying: 'I, you should know, was extremely shocked to see a Confederate flag appear in the Capitol, and I think that it's essential that the social sciences delve into these questions, which are still relevant today' (Delaporte 2021).

Perhaps most confounding – and telling – is the citation of French placards from the May 1968 left-wing student movement in the DES' first issue of *Faktum*. Such visual rhetoric serves to legitimise the journal's far-right attacks on gender, diversity and Post-Colonial Studies as politically aligned with the French student movements for academic freedom and positions the DES as the legitimate heir to the 'proper' left-wing movements of the twentieth century. Under the first image, of a placard depicting a herd of sheep with the slogan 'Retour à la Normale . . .' ('Back to normal . . .'), the DES has editorialised 'the transformation of the public sphere into a flock of sheep' (see Figure 5.2);

Figure 5.2 *Faktum: Meinungsfreiheit: Anspruch des Grundgesetzes und politische Realität* [Online]. Source: https://erasmus-stiftung.de/mediathek-2/publikationen/.

the second placard, which reads 'Information Libre' ('Free Information'), has been captioned 'When the Left was still in favour of freedom of expression' (see Figure 5.3).

Such corrupted citations of twentieth-century left-wing discourse appear throughout the issue of *Faktum*. In his speech 'Von Free Speech zu Hate Speech – eine Dialektik der Aufklärung', Marc Jongen has taken up the title of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a seminal post-Shoah critique of Enlightenment reason and a core text of critical theory, and he cites Communist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg's dictum 'freedom is always only the freedom of those who think differently', writing furthermore: 'But this must not only apply within the socialist movement, as originally intended by Rosa Luxemburg, but universally' (Jongen 2019, p. 23). Positioning themselves as the heirs to *all* critiques of the *status quo*, critics of 'identity' scholarship rhetorically distance their claims from Christian conservatism, fascism or neo-Nazism. Following the queer-feminist approach outlined above, these unexpected alliances between liberal-centrist and far-right

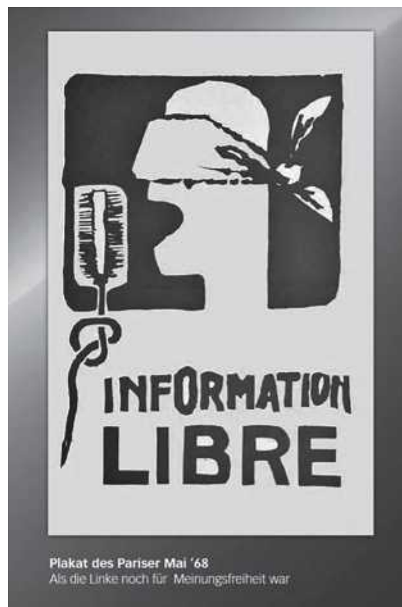

Figure 5.3 *Faktum: Meinungsfreiheit: Anspruch des Grundgesetzes und politische Realität* [Online]. Source: https://erasmus-stiftung.de/mediathek-2/publikationen/.

actors – and their concerns over the maintenance of 'freedom' – reveal the mutable boundaries of these political categories.

Debating Science, Affect and Secularism

Both the French and German assaults on Post-Colonial Studies and scholars are underpinned by concerns over antisemitism, as well as the maintenance of a properly 'secular' university.[9] The delegitimisation of leftism through the construction of a religious 'Other' that is always already too numerous, too unscientific and too 'ideological' is a strategic tool of any state that considers itself, and its scholars, as avowedly secular. The use of the term 'Islamo-gauchisme' in the French context, and the panics over links between post-colonialism and antisemitism in the German context, give rise to a moralising battle over the state/State of scholarship.

From Judeo-Bolshevism *to* Islamo-Gauchisme: *On Ethno-Religious Constructions of Critique*

'Islamo-leftism' hauntingly resonates with the concept of 'Judeo-Bolshevism', a pan-European antisemitic conspiracy theory dating to the 1920s. Noting the obvious links between Islamo-leftism and Judeo-Bolshevism – that is, the discursive fusion of leftist political creed with ethno-religious identity – Taguieff has swiftly dismissed any comparison of the two: 'The misleading historical analogy presupposes that Muslims are treated today as Jews were in the 1930s, especially in Germany. This is an untenable thesis, and it is the crudest form of victim propaganda' (Lemieux and Taguieff 2021). The argument might productively be called a 'straw-man' – for no one is claiming that historical antisemitism and contemporary anti-Muslim racism are one and the same – and rehearses the paternalistic commitment to 'protecting' Jewish victimhood that structures similar anxieties in the German context, as with the debates over Achille Mbembe's scholarship.

The dogged efforts to cast anti-Muslim racism and antisemitism as incomparable racisms is achieved largely through coding the 'Other' – here, the Arab, Muslim or scholar of post-colonialism – as the sole contemporary perpetrator of antisemitism. The threat of far-right antisemites and white supremacists to Jews and people of colour, and to those (erased) persons who identify as both, do not figure in these debates at all. Such is the larger project put forth by

Taguieff in *The New Judeophobia* and analysed in much contemporary scholarship on antisemitism in France and Germany (Galor and Atshan 2020). This rhetoric is a key instrument in the redemptive construction of the Western European state as 'beyond' its antisemitic past, as well as in the project of delegitimising post-colonial theory.

In his article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Bredekamp has made the claim that post-colonialism is 'strukturell antijüdisch' ('structurally anti-Jewish') (Bredekamp 2021). This charge levelled against post-colonial studies as 'structurally antisemitic' is a remarkable one that deserves pause. The accusation emerges from a now-hegemonic equation of 'Jewishness' with the 'State of Israel' and with critiques of the Israeli state with a will to destroy it and, in this, the premise that such criticism of Israel is a structural element of post-colonial thought itself. While an analysis of these thorny debates in the German context exceeds the purview of this chapter, the cognitive jumps that Bredekamp has made here are immense. Equally immense are the ramifications for post-colonial thought in Germany if it becomes associated with, in Bredekamp's words, 'structural anti-Jewish consequences' (Bredekamp 2021).

Here, Bredekamp rehearses an argument seen elsewhere in Germany: that post-colonialism is concerned primarily with an anti-imperialist attack on Israel, and that post-colonial frameworks remain unconcerned with considering Jewish identity or antisemitism. An article covering the revocation of Achille Mbembe's invitation to speak at the Ruhrtriennale makes a clumsy attempt to dismiss Mbembe, and contemporary post-colonial scholarship writ large, as betrayals of the field's own precepts – namely, Fanonian anti-essentialism (Mendel and Cheema 2020). In the article, titled 'Postcolonialism: The Blind Spot of Antisemitism', the authors have written:

> It is no coincidence that in the intersectionality concept of Post-Colonial Studies, antisemitism is often considered only a sub-form of racism. What is unique about antisemitism is not found in any account of Post-Colonial Studies, since it contradicts the binary division of the world into oppressors and oppressed.

The authors have recapitulated now-familiar denunciations of intersectionality as a hierarchical model of oppression, and of theories of racialisation as a tool to

cleave a given society into two. Furthermore, the 'uniqueness' of antisemitism, so the authors have claimed, lies in the perception of Jews as excessively powerful. 'In contrast to racism', they have written, 'antisemitism is not based on the inferiority of certain groups of people, but conversely on their superiority, their power and shrewdness. The antisemite sees himself precisely as a victim, namely of oppression by Jews; he believes himself to be in a position of weakness and considers his actions to be self-defence' (Mendel and Cheema 2020).

This argument – which arguably itself rehearses antisemitic canards – could just as easily describe the affective engine of contemporary efforts to purge scholarship on post-colonialism and Islamophobia from the university *qua* state. One may ask: are other forms of racism not also predicated on the perpetrator's victim mentality? Is it not precisely a perception of post-colonial theorists – here interpellated as Muslim – as *excessively powerful* and influential that could justify official probes into scholarship on racialisation and migration, or structure any broader panic in public discourse over Post-Colonial Studies?

Moral(ising) Panics

Those who decry the place of Gender Studies and post-colonial theory in the university cast racialised and non-normatively gendered persons as feeling, not thinking, subjects: 'Anti-feminist authors put forward [the assertion that . . .] people deviating from the heterosexual norm are not sufficiently neutral or objective to work on the subject scientifically' (Frey et al. 2014, pp. 12–13). It is notable, however, that the detractors themselves traffic in highly affective arguments: such is the structure of a moral panic. The French and German assaults on scholarship concerning 'identity' – whether related to gender, sexuality, migration background, religion or 'race' – reproduce, according to their own definitions, the very scientific transgressions of which they accuse Gender and Post-Colonial Studies scholars: they express a moralising and emotion-laden critique of their opponents.

Affect is the structuring feature of these polemics over 'Islamo-leftism' or post-colonial theories; it is the glue that binds together constructions of the nation, or other 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983) united under any conception of the collective. The contemporary assaults on Post-Colonial Studies are rooted in fear-mongering links to a totalitarian (or terrorist) threat;

in Vidal's own words, *Islamo-gauchisme* does not have a 'scientific definition, but it corresponds to a *feeling*' (Guillot 2021; italics my own).

Detractors of post-colonialism in the French and German context use moralising terms to construct their critiques as heroic projects. Macron noted that it has become 'taboo' to discuss 'Islamist separatism' (Macron 2020), acknowledging but ultimately dispensing with his critics and positioning his statements as transgressive. In a similar vein, Bredekamp has written that SPD politician Wolfgang Thierse 'has mustered the *courage* to speak out about [political correctness]' (Bredekamp 2021; italics my own). Taking recourse to the fantasy that studies of identity have constructed a totalitarian grip on the public sphere, attacks on Gender Studies and post-colonial theory are mired in a moral economy that is itself an enemy of structural critique: who is 'good' and who is 'bad', who is more brave and more concerned with freedom, who is more anti-racist?

To consider Post-Colonial and Gender Studies as moralistic projects – that is, projects seeking to restrict individual freedoms of expression in a sort of 'eye for an eye' act of vengeance for centuries of (ongoing) colonial violence – erases their aims for a thicker analysis of power. It is, after all, not white, cisgender, straight male *individuals* who are the subject of structural critiques of white, cisgender heteropatriarchy. Engaging with the latter, beyond individual actors, would, in fact, force detractors to engage with a much broader and more demanding project of rethinking the state, the university and the social world, in ways more threatening to the *status quo* than any perceived incursion into free speech.

Concluding Remarks: On Critical Studies of the University

The case-studies presented here aim to demonstrate that attacks on critical theories of gender and racialisation are not restricted to the far right, but that they belong also to the dominant political centre that allows it to flourish. All sides involved stake a claim not just on morality but on freedom, even while resolutely illiberal acts – such as the attempted purge of universities – take place. In so doing, detractors of Gender Studies and post-colonialism actualise the straw men against whom they argue. That is to say, scholars are compelled to fight for mere inclusion in the university and toe the line of liberal multiculturalism, rather than consider questions of education, nationalism and the

battle against far-right actors more capaciously. As the contributions to this volume testify, critiques informed by queer, feminist and post-colonial theories both enable and demand the latter approach.

Recalling the demands for transnational analysis outlined earlier in this chapter, the French and German assaults on Post-Colonial Studies can be read through critical studies of US-American institutional life and knowledge production. The pitfalls of such an examination, of course, lie in any impulse to map one context onto another: to see the global space of the university and of the post-colonial condition (and the decolonial efforts to attend to it) as a monolithic entity, as Al-Ali, Altay and Galor have argued in the introduction to this volume. The settler-colonial university – which occupies indigenous land and rests on the legacy of anti-Black racism, as US-American scholars have long argued – differs from the European one, but dominant assumptions underpinning what constitutes 'proper' scholarship can be traced across both (Levine 2021). Furthermore, as this chapter has explored, the debates in France and Germany are entangled with Anglo-American conversations that have congealed around critical studies of race and the usually right-wing attacks against them.

A rejoinder to Bredekamp's claim that post-colonial impulses are 'anti-human and anti-liberal' can be found in an essay in *Social Text*, titled 'Dehumanist Education and the Colonial University', which delights in drawing from queer-feminist and decolonial attempts to rethink the category of the 'human' (Wynter 2003) as it comes to bear on the US-American university. The authors, Nathan Snaza and Julietta Singh, have warned against efforts for (mere) inclusion in the university. Noting the university's position as 'one part of a larger ecology that endures in a global climate of coloniality, where extraction, expropriation, and accumulation shape our physical and affective landscapes', they have written: 'Dehumanist projects understand diversity and inclusion initiatives as apparatuses of institutional capture that neutralise the demands of social movements' (Snaza and Singh 2021, p. 3). These institutional aims of 'diversity and inclusion' – which individualise structural matters – are, alongside the more ambivalent and nuanced projects of Gender and Post-Colonial Studies, also the targets of 'anti-identity' criticisms.

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten have written in their seminal text 'The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses' that 'it cannot be denied

that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can' (Moten and Harney 2004, p. 101). How, then, to struggle for academic freedom amid resurgent and shifting far-right nationalisms – to be able to sneak into the university – as well as to resist institutionalising and de-politicising and making profitable fields that endeavour to rethink the borders of what constitutes 'study' itself? The assaults on post-colonial scholarship detailed and examined throughout this chapter underscore the imbrication of dominant conceptions of the university and scholarship with Western nationalisms. Gender Studies and Post-Colonial Studies are crucial precisely because, as both Deniz Kandiyoti and Evren Savcı have suggested in this volume, they investigate this politics of knowledge, maintaining deep ties to activists that cannot (or do not wish to) access the university.

Notes

1. 'Holocaust' is derived from the Koine Greek word *holokauston*, which means 'a completely (*holos*) burnt (*kaustos*) sacrificial offering'; some scholars have disputed the use of the term to refer to the Nazi genocide of European Jewry on the basis of this sacrificial connotation, favouring the biblical word Shoah (שואה), which means 'calamity' in Hebrew.
2. The German term *Wissenschaft* translates to 'science' or 'scholarship' and denotes the pursuit of knowledge in higher education in a broad sense that encompasses the arts and humanities, not merely the empirical or natural sciences evoked by the term 'science' in English.
3. The German title is *Gender, Wissenschaftlichkeit, und Ideologie*. The second term, 'Wissenschaftlichkeit', is difficult to express in English: it would translate most directly to 'scientificity' or 'scientificness', in the sense of a structured and scholarly pursuit.
4. It is important to note that the term 'genderism' risks positing a monolithic and dogmatic approach to theorising gender, which elides the multi-disciplinary and varying approaches represented by most Gender and Sexuality Studies scholars.
5. In post-World War II Germany, the term 'race' is often placed within quotation marks to denote its socially constructed nature.
6. Throughout his article, Bredekamp insists that the Humboldt Forum follows the cultural theories of twentieth-century Jewish scholars Aby Warburg and Franz Boas; by buttressing his argument with the Jewish identity of these thinkers, he makes the very identitarian gesture which he purports to denounce. In this quote,

he compares the decolonial activists who oppose the Humboldt Forum to book-burning National Socialists.

7. The roots of the concept date to the mid-twentieth century, but Jean-Pierre Faye has popularised the concept in his 2002 book *Le Siècle des idéologies* and Jeff Taylor in his 2006 book *Where Did the Party Go?* The concept has received considerable criticism, noting the vastly different aims of far-right and far-left actors opposing the centrist *status quo*.
8. 'Cancel culture' describes purported assaults on free speech emanating from scholars and students of gender and post-colonial theory, where 'cancellation' stands for the consequences faced by those engaging in racist, misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic, antisemitic or anti-Muslim discourse and/or behaviour. Two fallacies are apparent here. The first is that public recrimination for dehumanising behaviour does not amount to the violence inscribed in the term 'cancellation', although one may certainly argue that centuries-long regimes of organised marginalisation, forced displacement and genocide do. The second is that scholars of gender, racialisation and imperialism are often particularly attentive to the carceral implications of 'cancellation'; see adrienne maree brown's *We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice* (2020).
9. There is a certain irony that this panic over secularity has taken place in Germany under the governance of the CDU, the Christian Democratic Union, an inter-confessional party influenced by the Christian democratic tradition of the nineteenth century.

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PART III

COMPARATIVE STUDIES BETWEEN THE MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE

6

ANTI-FEMINIST STRATEGIES OF RIGHT-WING PARTIES IN TURKEY AND GERMANY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY POLITICS

Nur Sinem Kourou and Victoria Scheyer

Contestations of gender and sexual equality policies and anti-feminist attitudes have long been a part of national, regional and international political arenas. Not only do these political forces shape policy-making in the global political environment, but they also directly affect the everyday life of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex people (LGBTQ). Right-wing parties and especially right-wing-led governments – Georgia Meloni's Democratic Party in Italy, Ulf Kristersson's coalition with the Sweden Democrats in Sweden, Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition in Israel, right-wing president Andrzej Duda and the governing party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość in Poland, or Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his right-wing party Fidesz in Hungary – have grown into a formidable group of actors pushing against gender and sexual equality by attacking hard-won achievements and even reversing them. Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (the treaty to prevent and combat violence against women) and Sweden's recent abolishment of feminist foreign policy by the new right-wing government are only two of many possible examples of major episodes of backlash against gender and sexual equality policies. Dietze and Roth (2020, p. 7) have claimed that radical right parties

and movements have become 'obsessed' with gender and sexuality, making it their new flagship topic next to migration and religion. Issues such as framing gender as an 'ideology', restricting reproductive rights and sexual education, demonising queer identities and favouring 'traditional' families are some of the conventional strategies of right-wing parties in Europe and beyond (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017).

Right-wing parties,[1] such as those mentioned above, stand beyond the conservative end of the political spectrum. They advance an aversion to globalisation and multi-culturalism which frequently puts them at odds with democracy. As described by Rydgren (2018, p. 2), radical right parties 'share an emphasis on ethnonationalism rooted in myths about the past. Their programs are directed toward strengthening the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous and – for most radical right-wing parties and movements – by returning to traditional values'. To achieve their goal of strengthening a nationalist and less democratic state system based on alleged 'traditional' values, right-wing parties use hierarchical ideologies and 'establish clear lines of superiority and inferiority according to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, and sexuality' (Miller-Idriss 2020, p. 40). The notion of one ethnic group's supremacy over another appears, for instance, in many arguments for legitimising or advocating for racist immigration laws. Moghadam and Kaftan (2019), who have researched several right-wing and populist parties worldwide, have argued that, even as they vary and are used flexibly depending on the context, these parties all share nationalist identity beliefs and some patterns of right-wing gender dynamics. The commonality that they map applies to both the global North and South, or so-called Western and non-Western contexts, and is independent of religious and cultural influences (Moghadam and Kaftan 2019). Beyond the US, European or Christian contexts, little scholarship has focused on comparatively understanding right-wing ideology and policies, and even fewer studies have attempted to make sense of their similarities and differences with regards to gender and sexuality. Building on arguments in the current literature, this chapter argues that around the globe gender and sexuality, often referred to as anti-gender politics, play a critical role in how right-wing politics construct national identity and that the comparative nuances of right-wing politics matter (Blee 2020; Moghadam and Kaftan 2019). By comparing far-right parties in two very different socio-political contexts – Turkey and Germany – these nuances, similarities and differences are disclosed.

This chapter will explore the gender and sexuality policies and discourses of the right-wing parties AKP and AfD by examining what we term their *anti-feminist politics* – the strategic aversion to gender and sexual equality that seeks to return to or strengthen a patriarchal societal structure rooted in anti-democratic attitudes and racism. We encounter the tangible embodiment of what Kandiyoti has called the 'opportunistic alliance' earlier in this volume in these two examples, which transform both far-right thinking and anti-feminism from being phenomena exclusive to the West or the Middle East into a shared outcome of the contemporary backlash. In both Germany – a Central European country and member of the European Union – and Turkey – a country with a unique geographical location between Europe and the Middle East – right-wing political parties are part of the ruling system, but with very different political positions. In Turkey, the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party) has been the leading party for twenty years and holds significant governmental responsibility, while in Germany the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*), a relatively young party (founded only in 2013), functions as an opposition party in the parliament.[2] Comparing the AKP and AfD comes with several challenges, not only because of their different governing positions, but also because of the socio-political and religious differences of their respective contexts. The Turkish government's unitary, masculine and exclusionary interpretation of Islam has been one of the most important tools shaping Turkish society. The population is 99 percent Muslim, divided into various sects (Sunni, Alevi and Safi) (*EuroNews* 2022). In Germany, however, Christianity continues to strongly decrease in political and social power, and currently only 49.7 percent of the population follow either Catholic or Evangelical Christianity, while 41.9 percent describe themselves as faithless (fowid 2022).

At first glance, then, these two political parties do not appear to have much in common, besides being located on the far right of the political spectrum and sharing a 'populist' mode, claiming to be speaking for 'the people'. From a feminist perspective and as Al-Ali, Altay, and Galor have argued in the introduction, both parties not only oppress racialised communities but also show a strong aversion to international gender and sexual equality policies. Prominent examples can be found in their shared opposition to LGBTQ rights or the Istanbul Convention. The most significant difference, for our purposes, between the AKP and AfD are their religious and ethnic constructions of

identity. But across these differences, our critical question remains: how do both parties use anti-feminism in a similar way, and why? As an answer, we briefly compare both parties' attitudes towards LGBTQ politics, the Istanbul Convention and their applications of religion in their gender and sexuality politics. Emphasising shared characteristics between so-called white and Muslim right-wing contexts, we aim to bridge the antagonistic relationship to explore the shared role of anti-feminism.

Our drive to study and compare the AKP and the AfD is rooted in our shared research interests, as two junior scholars and friends who engage in intersectional feminist research into right-wing politics. As female and feminist scholars of Muslim Turkish and white German backgrounds, we each have been affected by anti-feminist right-wing politics in different contexts. We met online during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns via our PhD research endeavours. From there, we developed a small community of solidarity during our PhD journeys and as two female scholars aiming at fighting for gender and sexual equality, a feminist friendship based on *reciprocal solidarity* (Atshan and Moore 2014). Our frequent discussions about gender and sexual equality and right-wing parties in Turkey and Germany from our own unique standpoints also facilitated a critical analysis of the power hierarchies between us as individuals and in our knowledge production. Our collaboration both contributed to healing our isolation as PhD students in lockdown on a personal level and informed our research methods, tackling the very problem of bridging contextual divisions across critical right-wing research. To start the collaborative research, we utilised auto-ethnography, sharing our findings and interpretations of the data which we had gathered for our respective PhD projects (Ellis et al. 2011). Auto-ethnography is a process to understand 'what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles' (Ellis and Bochner 2006, p. 111), and this chapter, then, is a patchwork of our personal experiences and academic research. The comparison between these contexts and parties stems from separate research but analyses them together, using our original data from the field. This approach allows us to aggregate our research and collected data within this chapter and especially to select the three topics that stood out in our conversations about right-wing parties: LGBTQ politics, the Istanbul Convention and the role of religion. We discuss and compare these three topics to better understand anti-feminist right-wing political agendas. Our analysis

applies intersectional feminism as a tool to research systems of oppression in right-wing politics based on race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and religion in different contexts (Crenshaw 1989).

Exploring Anti-Feminism in Right-Wing Politics

Since the rise of right-wing political parties in many European governments, feminist scholars have become increasingly interested in analysing and comparing how gender and sexuality are used, constructed, or play a role in right-wing parties (Fangen and Skjelsbæk 2020; Blee 2020, 2017; Dietze and Roth 2020; Köttig et al. 2017; Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2015; Kuhar and Patternote 2017; Kováts 2018). This research has found not only that right-wing politics targets gender and sexual equality policy, but also that party structures, programmes, voter bases and politics are highly gendered in their reflection of masculinist and patriarchal ideas (Fangen and Skjelsbæk 2020). Moreover, right-wing parties in Europe instrumentalise gender equality and women's rights to legitimise nationalist and anti-immigration politics, framing migrants as 'uncivilised' or 'homophobic' and a threat to white women (Miller-Idriss 2020) or to consolidate illiberal practices (Arat 2021; Tripp 2013). However, the study of gender and sexuality in right-wing or authoritarian movements is not new and remains part of longer discussions about terminology. While some scholars prefer the term 'antifeminism', such as Stacey in the 1980s (1983, p. 559), who described the 'new Right, an organised antifeminist social movement', other scholars refer to the phenomenon of organised pushbacks against gender and sexual equality as 'anti-gender' politics or 'anti-genderism' (Graff and Korolczuk 2021). While recognising that both terms are often used interchangeably, in this chapter we use anti-feminism for describing not a general aversion to gender and sexual equality, but specifically a reactionary system that aims to return to or strengthen a patriarchal structure of society and acts in concert with anti-democratic attitudes and racism, through discourses, (violent) actions and other ideological tools.

The term anti-feminism has been described as the general and fundamental opposition of feminist – including but not necessarily intersectional – demands, its interventions and its achievements (Blum 2020; Henninger and Birsl 2020). Anti-feminism takes the form of essentialising gender to a binary and 'natural' idea which specifies roles for men and women and denies rights

of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Anti-feminism can take place on a discursive level, through political inaction towards gender and sexual equality, or in (violent) actions where misogynists and anti-LGBTQ rights activists attack feminists or women's rights activists. It also involves the construction of narratives such as the framing of gender as an ideology or demanding to restrict reproductive and sexual health rights through an abortion ban (Eslen-Ziya and Bjornholt 2022; Henninger and Birsl 2020; Blum 2020; Hülagü 2021; Sauer 2020 Berg 2019).

Sanders and Jenkins have argued that anti-feminism is 'a constitutive element of political movements that seek to naturalise inequality and legally enforce conformity with conservative social norms' (2022, p. 370). Their research builds on many studies that have shown a pattern of right-wing parties viewing feminist politics as 'gender theory', 'gender ideology' and 'women's anger', which all aim to destroy the traditional heterosexual family. The common concerns of these right-wing parties are based on arguments such as that a demographic crisis and the degeneration of the 'natural family' has been brought about by abortions, reproduction technologies, sex education, same-sex marriages and the enfranchisement of LGBTQ people (Provost 2019). According to the right-wing ideology, conserving society is the domain of the nuclear family, and women's natural abilities mean that they should take on the role of sustaining it (Kantola and Lombardo 2019). In this way, women have come to be seen as the most crucial component of society and as the means to control and regulate populations (Mudde 2007). However, LGBTQ people have come to be seen as a disruption of the heteronormative family and thus the nation-state. Right-wing heterosexual masculinity often delineates its supremacy by constructing all other forms of masculinity as 'deviant' or 'abnormal', giving heterosexual men a privileged 'natural' or 'normal' position in society as father and as breadwinner protecting women and children (Claus and Virchow 2017). Homo- and transphobic acts of violence – such as burning the rainbow flag, criminalising same-sex marriage, or forbidding LGBTQ marches – are common.

Thus, anti-feminism leads to structural and direct forms of violence, limiting women's and LGBTQ people's liberation from harmful and binary gender stereotypes and strengthening racist and anti-democratic ideas. While we want to emphasise that forms of violence against women and LGBTQ persons, their

everyday lived realities and political struggles differ, and while we do not mean to imply that all feminist movements are inclusive of the LGBTQ community, we argue that pushing women into the domestic sphere and denying the existence of LGBTQ identities belong to the same political strategy of what we identify as anti-feminism by right-wing parties. As a political strategy, anti-feminism aims to strengthen or return to patriarchal power relations, discredit and attack feminist demands, achievements and visions of gender and sexual equality – overall, it seeks to curtail women and LGBTQ people's access to justice, equality and human rights.

As an explicit fight taken up by right-wing parties against feminist movements and gender and sexual equality policy, anti-feminism is more than a patriarchal world view: it is a political strategy, resulting in regression and the dismantling of policies or legal protections. Kandiyoti has further elaborated on the concept of 'backlash' in the first part of this book; yet, she has described it as marking 'a period of masculinist restoration' (2019, p. 37), which goes hand in hand with the fear constructed in some far-right-wing narratives of the 'feminisation of Europe', leading to what Sauer (2020, p. 24) has called masculine identity politics. Reactionary politics does not, however, only take place on the right-wing political spectrum, but also in the centre, mainstream discourse of so-called liberal democracies. We find that their discussions of the theoretical and empirical understanding of anti-feminism are lacking, especially in regard to political strategic actions which aim to uphold or re-instate patriarchal and heteronormative social norms and practices. There seems to be an anti-feminist spirit sitting like a guardian on the fence of patriarchy, always ready to defend it.

A Closer Look at the AKP and AfD

Turkey and Germany share a history of crises as well as collaborations, but their national contexts do not present many political or socio-cultural alignments. Collaborations such as several highly criticised migration 'deals', their intense trading cooperation in the Joint Economic and Trade Commission and membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation do not change the fact that Germany is in a central position of the European Union geographically and politically, while Turkey in the same ways stands on its edge. The country's border with Europe and its unsteady relationship with the EU

(currently in a stalemate) highlights Turkey's 'non-European' identity. At the same time, neither does Turkey share strong ties with Middle Eastern, Central Asian, or Eurasian countries, which makes Turkey a particularly interesting case for comparisons (Savcı 2021). The analysis of the socio-cultural and political differences between the states would be crucial for understanding the development and rise of their respective far-right parties. Together with this, as Al-Ali, Altay and Galor have eloquently stated in the introduction of this volume, our central concern is to concentrate on two cases to understand how 'gender and sexuality shape right-wing politics across' and 'instrumentalise the family-oriented norms and conservative notions of gender and sexuality to increase support and actualise right-wing politics of oppression and control in the Middle East and Europe'.

The AKP came into power in 2002. The party was established after the separation of a group from the Islamist Welfare Party, called 'reformists' (Yılmaz and Bashirov 2018, p. 1816). The first period of the party's existence has been described as relatively democratic: the AKP introduced a series of policies for EU membership, questioned civil–military relations in Turkey and opened up for discussion the Kurdish issue (Müftüler-Baç and Keyman 2012, p. 86). Ever since the AKP has started to come out victorious in every election, it has been the main representative of Islamist, conservative, right-wing politics in Turkey. Tombuş (2013) has perhaps described the ideas and doubts about the AKP best: on the one hand, the party's democratic attempts conducted a 'civilianisation' in the system by limiting the power of the military over politics; on the other hand, many people waited in anxious anticipation for the consequences of the party's Islamist characteristics. These consequences manifested themselves with the anti-democratic and illiberal turn of the AKP gradually in 2008, 2011 and, more radically, after Gezi Park and the coup attempt on 15 July 2015. Since this turn, the party's conservative and pro-Islamist identity has become much more influential in every aspect of life, particularly regarding gender and sexuality politics. Gender and sexuality have played an important role for the AKP in allowing the party to further differentiate secular and conservative blocs in Turkey and to construct a new mode of sexuality from a religious and conservative perspective (Mutluer 2019). Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün (2017, p. 5) have suggested that from the beginning the AKP's gender politics has had their contradictions. Even though the party has attempted to join the EU

and even though pressure from women's civil society has increased, significant changes in gender and sexual equality in Turkey never took place.

The rise of illiberal and authoritarian values, especially in the post-2011 era, is characterised by AKP's harsh gender and sexuality policies and discourses (Ünal 2021). The party started to control and regulate women's bodies and reproductive rights (Cindoğlu and Ünal 2017) and banned the LGBTQ pride week and 8 March demonstration. As Tombuş has described, these policies derive from the AKP's 'authoritative impulses for its project of a more conservative Turkey' (2013, p. 325). This approach aligns with the AKP's current political stance along a number of ideologies: pro-Islamism, neo-liberalism, authoritarianism and conservatism (Cindoğlu and Ünal 2017, p. 41). Kandiyoti's research has underlined 'three nodes of ideology' (2016, p. 105) underpinning the changes in gender politics, which are populism, partnership between neo-liberalism and conservatism, and the normalisation of violence in everyday life. But even before the authoritarian turn, the centrality of conservative familialism in the AKP's party programme had influenced the party's gender and sexuality politics. However, these politics have grown more and more restrictive, combining patriarchal and moral notions with religious values (Acar and Altunok 2013, p. 14), instrumentalising women's rights to consolidate the party's power (Arat 2022) and enacting unwarranted legal amendments towards gender and sexual equality.

The AfD is a party much younger than the AKP. It was founded in 2013, shortly after the financial crisis (Lees 2018) by three economists (all men), out of scepticism towards the European project and its currency, the Euro. Ever since then, the party has steadily gained popularity, and in the 2022 elections reached 10.3 percent of the vote, making it a strong party in some of Germany's federal states. The party is the first right-wing party that has managed to enter the parliament since the 1950s, in part because other far-right parties, such as the NPD (National Democratic Party Germany), were still associated with nationalist and fascist Nazi Germany. While the AfD was formed for conservative and economic reasons, soon it turned to explicitly nationalist far-right stances, using the crisis in Syria in 2015 and increasing migration to Germany, the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris and the New Year's Eve incidents in Cologne to promote an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim narrative (Fangen and Lichtenberg 2021; Lees 2018). The party's gender and

family policies are not new, however, and have played an important role in all the party's programmes since the very beginning (Kemper 2014). The existing literature on the gender and family politics of the AfD (Kemper 2014; Berg 2019; Fangen und Lichtenberg 2021) has pointed out deeply entrenched anti-feminist sentiments. Gutsche (2019, p. 25) has concluded in her analysis that '[a]nti-feminist, sexist, racist and völkisch-nationalist ideologies found in right-wing populism take center stage in the AfD's policy objectives'. The same conclusion can be drawn from the party's 2021 election programme (AfD 2021). For the first time, it unequivocally and specifically explained the party's understanding of gender: 'The human species consists of two sexes, the male and the female. This dichotomy is not abolished by the fact that for a few individual persons an assignment to the male or female sex is difficult or even impossible' (AfD 2021, p. 114); '[s]ex is determined by the sex chromosomes' (115) and 'assertions of gender ideology contradict the findings of biology' (154). The idea of gender is not only demonised as an ideology but also framed as one opposed to the German constitution, which is supposed to protect the family (AfD-rbk 2017).

From this examination of each party's history, we see that both parties are undergoing a shift from their original, largely economically-inspired issues, towards an ideological and anti-democratic focus. In each case, the idea of a traditional and heteronormative family politics has been instrumentalised.

The Right United in Anti-LGBTQ+ Attitudes

Anti-LGBTQ positions and a strong urge to project heteronormativity are central to both AKP and AfD. LGBTQ people and rights often become targets or scapegoats in right-wing narratives about political or social developments which go against conservative ideas. This section presents some examples of how both parties use similar narratives and ideas to exclude and frame LGBTQ people as 'Other'.

The AKP's homophobic stance emphasises LGBTQ people as being incompatible with 'general morality'. This rhetoric has been followed by actions, including the banning and prevention of the annual 'pride march' (McCarthy 2022), which targets the LGBTQ community as an enemy of the AKP. The AKP attacks the community by constructing them as the enemy of traditional and moral heteronormative family values, referring to them as

those 'who exhibit all kinds of heresy' (Milton 2020). The same anti-LGBTQ stances have been used to justify Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention: according to the AKP, the LGBTQ community used the convention to threaten future generations. The party's public figures claim that concepts such as 'sexual orientation' and 'gender' are not acceptable and do not fit in Turkish society. The level of anger that these figures and the AKP in general express towards the LGBTQ community is striking, and their actions go beyond revealing their ignorance, showing hatred against the community's very existence.

The AKP's hostile stance towards LGBTQ individuals is supported by grassroots actors as well. On 14 September 2022, various anti-feminist actors in Turkey organised in Istanbul a public demonstration under the name 'Big Family Gathering against LGBT Imposition'. The demonstration was initiated by the Unity of Opinion and Struggle Platform (*Fikirde Birlik ve Mücadele Platformu*), which introduced itself as a conservative coalition against the LGBT imposition. They identified this imposition and propaganda as products of Western imperialism and the global powers seeking to desexualise Turkish society. Against these threats the platform invited families to protect their children and the future of their children. The group produced a video to call for people's participation, which was approved by the public Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) and shown on television channels. Even though the AKP did not show any explicit affinity with this movement and the actors who organised it, the government provided the legal framework without any restriction on the broadcast and the protest, authorisations never given to the LGBTQ movement in Turkey.

Much like the AKP's, so the AfD's position, programmes and discourses generally oppose LGBTQ people and non-nuclear families (Blum 2020; Gutsche 2018). The AfD frames gender identity and sexualities other than heterosexuality as 'deviant' and 'abnormal' in their narratives. Their entire 2021 election programme reads like an anti-LGBTQ manifesto in all aspects that touch on gender: its population policy, family policy, call for the prohibition of adoption by same-sex couples, research policy and even its education programme. The German Gay and Lesbian Association has stated that the AfD's goal is to eliminate the anti-discrimination law entirely, and that the party's attempts to ban same-sex marriage expresses and fosters hatred and

violence (LSVD 2017). Much like the AKP, the AfD uses the narrative of 'protecting children' from 'other' sexualities and seeks to forbid sexual education in schools. Through these different strategic narratives and acts of scapegoating, the AfD manages to frame the entire LGBTQ community as a threat to the German nation. This dire picture, however, stands in contradiction to their own politics and politicians at the highest levels, including Alice Weidel, a married lesbian woman, who is the co-chair of the parliamentary group and co-spokesperson of the entire party. Beyond this irony, Doerr (2021, p. 12) has found in her research that the AfD selectively attempts to 'appropriate elements of progressive feminist and LGBT rights symbolism for the sake of promoting anti-Islamic discourse'. This appropriation allows the AfD to portray themselves as liberal and 'saving' homosexuals from allegedly 'homophobic' Muslim culture – a strategy also known as homonationalism (Puar 2007). In distinction to these attempts to appropriate homosexuality, transgender or non-binary identities are increasingly the targets of AfD's anti-LGBTQ policies.

The attitudes towards the LGBTQ community which the AKP and AfD share are not merely about sexuality or gender identity – the contradictions within the AfD already suggest this – but instead are used as strategies to construct both parties' sense of what their respective national identity is supposed to look like – and, more importantly, what it is not. As outlined above, the AKP frames and constructs homosexuality as a practice imposed by the West and sexual and gender equality policy as Western imperialism. The AfD also uses anti-LGBTQ sentiments to foster racist and white supremacist ideas and to attack racialised immigrants, especially Muslim men (Farris 2017; Doerr 2021). Alice Weidel, for example, does not support same-sex marriage or 'marriage for all', arguing that same-sex marriage policies would lead to polygamous marriages of Muslims. Same-sex marriage cannot be recognised, in other words, because she sees the growing 'Islamisation of Germany' as a much more urgent and dangerous problem than equality for homosexuals. On the official AfD Facebook page, she has published in 2015: 'If the political elite does not finally understand the danger it is exposing our society to with its immigration policy, Germany will finally collapse. Debating "marriage for all" while millions of Muslims are illegally immigrating into the country is a joke. Erdogan's Islamic state illustrates the future we are facing'.

In summary, both the AKP's and AfD's right-wing politics incorporate not only a rhetorical attack but also concrete actions against LGBTQ people that lead to different forms of violence, whether discursive, structural or direct. Both parties justify their anti-LGBTQ discourses through similarly constructed arguments about the need to strengthen a 'national identity', reinstate so-called 'traditional' essentialist values and protect the heteronormative family and children. Yet, each party retains a distinct approach, as the AfD, unlike the AKP, is more flexible: if it suits their racist arguments, the party will even appropriate the fight for homosexual rights.

A Symbol for Constructing Nationalist Identity: The Istanbul Convention

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention, is a multi-lateral agreement, and its main goal is to prevent violence against women from a gender-mainstreaming perspective. The convention was signed by all EU member states, and thirty-seven states had ratified the convention by 2021. However, since Day One, different anti-feminist actors in social movements and political offices across Europe developed an opposition. Ironically, Turkey, under the AKP, was the first country to sign the convention in 2011 – which is why it is named after Istanbul – and the first country to withdraw from it on 21 March 2021. Turkey's withdrawal shows how a right-wing party can translate their anti-feminist discourses and sentiments into concrete policy action, as well as how these discourses themselves can bring about the change of a party's political direction, as the AKP then gradually drifted away from its original pro-EU/Western position (Hintz 2016). The period has been described as the 'Eurosceptic era' in Turkey's foreign policy (Yılmaz 2011).

The withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention is only one consequence of the AKP's anti-feminist strategy framed by the party's broader conservative and Islamist-rooted ideology. Supporters of the withdrawal claim that the convention interferes with traditional family values by normalising homosexuality, going so far as to cause divorces. An important anti-feminist strategy, in this case, comes not only from party activists directly. Far-reaching anti-feminist camps in Turkey and their actors – such as social media accounts with a high number of followers, columnists and journalists in conventional

media, conservative civil society organisations and religious groups – present themselves as anti-feminist campaigners and pave the way for the implementation of anti-feminist demands as a political decision. The obvious coalition, in other words, between the societal and political levels of anti-feminist actions achieved their desired result in the withdrawal. However, the withdrawal was not accepted without internal criticism; for instance, female members and the pro-AKP civil society organisation KADEM (Women and Democracy Association) expressed some concerns, but these were not enough to stop the decision. Özlem Zengin, a prominent female member of the AKP, openly criticised the withdrawal process and the subsequent discussion about abolishing Law no 6284 on Protecting the Family and Preventing Violence Against Women (*Bianet* 2023). Following this statement, Zengin has become a target for ultra-conservative groups both within and outside the AKP. As a response to such criticisms and discontent, Erdoğan promised to hold a new convention, one that would aim to represent 'native' and 'traditional' family values instead. The action against the convention further demonstrates the AKP's anti-EU/Western sentiment. The AKP used anti-feminist strategies to restore nativist and traditional values and to protect the institution of the family from any so-called degeneration that was framed as imported from the West. Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention nevertheless has left women legally unprotected against the risk of femicide, a clear consequence of practicing 'patriarchal-authoritarian' power (Moghadam and Kaftan 2019, p. 2).

The AfD, in contrast, has so far lacked political ruling power and is only left with the option to influence the public discourse about the Istanbul Convention through campaigns, speeches and social media. Generally, the AfD's narrative is that the Istanbul Convention is part of the 'green-leftist gender ideology' that harms traditional families and – ironically – supports Turkey's decision to withdraw. When Turkey withdrew from the convention, Christiane Anderson, the women's spokesperson of the AfD and a member of the European Parliament, remarked: 'That Erdoğan rejects the Istanbul Convention is understandable, despite all the justified criticism of him. The Istanbul Convention claims to be directed against violence against women. This is perfidious because, under the guise of protecting women, it tries to implement gender ideology' (AfDkompakt 2021). Anderson continued to elaborate on how a rise in violence against women could be traced back to

increased immigration by Muslims. She framed Muslim men as threats and perpetrators of violence against women. This connection is no *non sequitur*; the AfD argues that the Istanbul Convention implementation in Germany supports illegal immigration, as it puts specific protection mechanisms in place for refugee and migrant women. Furthermore, the party insists that the Istanbul Convention is redundant, as gender equality in Western European countries has already been achieved. What the convention does, in their rhetoric, is to discriminate against men, as they are also victims of violence and face exclusion through the gender equality policy implemented in many public institutions (AfD Fraktion NRW 2018; Peterson 2020).

In brief, both parties' shared position against the Istanbul Convention exemplifies two important features of how they use anti-feminism: first, as an active strategy to regain control over reproduction and households, especially through the regulation of women's bodies; second, to construct their own national and cultural identity through an othering process by defining an 'us' and a 'them'. While they both, then, come to oppose policy such as the Istanbul Convention, through the other's socio-cultural position, namely the 'West' or the 'Muslims', each party uses anti-feminism to strengthen its exclusively defined nationalist identity. Last but not least, the AKP's decision and power highlight the risks of the rising trends of the right-wing agenda in the world, as they were able to reverse the long-fought-for feminist achievement of the Istanbul Convention.

How Anti-Feminism Operates in Different Religious Contexts

Even though they do have similar attitudes towards LGBTQ people and adopt similar strategies in their opposition to the Istanbul Convention, the AKP and AfD do not collaborate on any anti-feminist political projects. Grzebalska, Kováts and Petö (2017) have introduced the concept of gender as a 'symbolic glue', which describes alliances of groups, themes and ideas with similar anti-gender politics which collaborate against feminism or gender and sexual equality policies. In the cases of the AKP and AfD, however, we argue that, even though they both deploy anti-feminist discourses, their respective processes of constructing national identity, coupled with the fear that the 'Other' could corrupt this nationalist sense of identity, keeps the parties apart. In this final section, we expand the analysis from the similarities of the parties' anti-feminist strategies to

what might seem to be the obvious difference between them: the role of religion in their anti-feminist sentiments.

The AKP has experienced three different phases in its history. Following attempts at secularisation in its early phase and, later, the Islamist mobilisation in the multi-party period by cultivating votes and mobilising electorates in the Islamist parties, in its current phase the AKP has resumed the Islamist and conservative right-wing political tradition. Since 2002, its discourses, strategies and policies have made it a well-known right-wing pro-Islamist party in Turkish politics. The AKP creates a rigid and steady environment for constructing gender roles, by making references to Islam; this is done especially with a rhetoric that defines the role of women by glorifying their nature-given duties, referring to their place in Islam. Motherhood became a crucial aspect, as being a mother 'is for the sake of society and for the sake of God'. Erdoğan has repeated this rhetoric in his familiar speeches during Mother's Day or Women's Day: 'Heaven is under the feet of mothers', adding that 'I kissed the soles of my mother's feet because they smell like heaven' (Erdoğan 2012). The over-emphasis on women's gendered roles from a pro-Islamist stance intensifies the AKP's anti-feminist gender and sexuality politics and its nativist anti-EU frame. The AKP has explicitly declared that gender norms in Turkey should not follow the gender and sexuality equality norms of Western cultures. Cultivating a more nativist understanding, the AKP has replaced the concept of gender equality with gender justice or gender equity (İlkkaracan 2015). Moreover, the AKP has collaborated with the above-mentioned civil society organisation, KADEM, to establish a new concept as the mainstream understanding of Turkey's gender norms. Every year since 2018, KADEM has organised a 'Gender Justice Congress'. The new concept of gender which KADEM and the AKP promote has been constructed through religious frameworks which assert that the natural differences between men and women determine their responsibilities and roles in society (Diner 2018).

The AKP uses the Islamist component as an important tool to formulate and operate its anti-feminism while isolating itself from its Western counterparts. Furthermore, the AKP's gender and sexuality politics play a role within domestic and foreign politics. At the domestic level, these politics serve to reinforce its conservative and pro-Islamist position; in order to increase the party's nativist identity, the AKP uses gender and sexuality politics in its articulation

of an anti-EU and anti-Western attitude at a foreign policy level. After the party's pro-EU beginnings, when Erdoğan worked towards EU candidacy and membership, the AKP's shift to an anti-EU stance also saw a shift in the party's gender and sexuality politics, revealing an anti-feminist attitude which blamed and referred to the West as an enemy of Turkish tradition. The anti-Western position provided Erdoğan with a number of tools to keep the party's supporters together – gender and sexuality politics being one of them.

In contrast, the AfD attempts to link Christianity with German nationalist values and culture in their basic political programme but maintains their stand in favour of a secular government (AfD Grundsatzprogramm 2016). For instance, the sub-group 'ChrAfD' is a group within the AfD with the vision to shape the party's Christian base and combines Catholic and Protestant followers (ChrAfD 2020). Beyond this group, however, German Christian churches do not collaborate with or support the AfD. The Protestant and Catholic churches both officially reject the misogynist and xenophobic values of the AfD and have publicly distanced themselves from the party. The Protestant Church and the AfD have even engaged in repeated public conflicts (Leitlein and Öhler 2019). In fact, if we search for religious arguments made by the AfD, we find that Islam plays a greater role in the party's programme than Christianity does. Christianity is mentioned only three times in the 2021 election programme; yet, an entire chapter is dedicated to Islam which is referenced thirty-one times (AfD 2021). Noting this disparity, we conclude that the AfD instrumentalises their so-called 'Christian values' to strengthen their nationalist ideology and white identity politics and uses Islam as one of its biggest enemies.

Drawing on the analysis of gender and sexuality politics, similar sentiments are at play in the ways in which the German far-right party constructs gender politics as in how they deploy Christian religious values to consolidate their anti-Islam racism. Hark and Villa (2017) have described the 'ambivalent interconnections' of feminism, racism and religion as a toxic relationship. In the name of protecting German and Muslim women, the AfD rejects any form of Muslim culture in Germany, calling to forbid teaching Islam in school education, university courses on Islam, the building of mosques, wearing niqabs or burkas, Muslim civil society organisations and especially migration from Muslim countries. The AfD has concluded that the solution to all sexual assaults

and violence against women is to ban Islam, and especially Muslim men, and hence to combine feminism and right-wing conservatism to provide security (Lang 2017, p. 70). The framing is clear: gender and feminism, as well as Islam's allegedly anti-feminist sentiments, are all a danger to 'traditional' nationalist values and thus threaten the continuance of the German Volk. Birgit Sauer has called this 'ethnomasochism', describing the patriarchal suffering of the 'Other' nation (Mayer and Sauer 2017). Sara Farris has also referred to 'femonationalism' to describe the alleged feminist argumentation used to justify racist and xenophobic policies and discourses against 'Others', but especially against Muslim men (Farris 2017). We argue that the AfD deploys both ethnomasochism and femonationalism to increase hatred and fear against Islam and to reinstate a 'pure' and white German nation.

Examining how they pair this with religious arguments, we found that both parties use anti-feminism to construct their nativist and nationalist identity according to their specific right-wing political agenda – for the AKP, this is a pro-Islam and anti-Western attitude; for the AfD, an anti-Islam and anti-Migration one. The AfD's anti-Islam narrative plays a part in the process of racialising immigrants and framing Muslims and immigrants as a threat to 'Western' values and, more importantly, perceived German values. They construct a hierarchy between the German and nativist 'Volk' and the racialised 'Other' through an enemy picture of Erdoğan, Turkey and what they consider to be Muslim immigrants. Anti-feminism functions as a tool to support their narratives and discourses, which leaves us questioning how much they care about actual gender and sexual politics at all beyond controlling reproduction. The hierarchical relationship that both parties continue to construct against each other is based not only on religion or gender and sexuality, but also on race, ethnic background and, in the case of the AfD, white supremacism. In comparison, the AKP constructs 'the West' or particularly 'the EU' as the enemies, trying to protect Turkey's 'authentic' and Islamist values from what they call cultural imperialism.

Anti-Feminism: The Same Tool Used against Each Other

In this chapter, we have shown that anti-feminism plays an increasingly influential role in right-wing politics in Germany and Turkey. Our chapter, together with other examples of this value and the arguments made in the introduction by Al-Ali, Altay and Galor, lead us to propose this development to be

a global phenomenon of the political right. In both parties we have examined, anti-feminism involves hostility towards the LGBTQ community and the (attempted) rollback of gender equality legislation and in the international sphere – for example, women's rights conventions such as the Istanbul Convention. Despite vast differences in their historical, religious and sociopolitical situations, the AKP and AfD stand as notable examples for demonstrating shared anti-feminist strategies. Following an analysis of the role of religion in these parties, we conclude that both parties use anti-feminism to construct native and nationalist identities according to their right-wing political agenda. The AKP takes a pro-Islam and anti-Western approach, whereas the AfD takes an anti-Islam and anti-Turkey approach. Anti-feminism appears to be adapted to function in Muslim and white European contexts – in a way at once similar and contradictory. Anti-feminism, along with mainly religious arguments either pro- or anti-Islam, is at the centre of discourses and actions that construct the identity of the 'self' and the 'Other'.

The AfD uses anti-feminism to support anti-Muslim racism, to racialise immigrants and as a tool to strengthen their nativist, nationalist and ultimately white-supremacist ideology. The AKP uses anti-feminism as a protective strategy against so-called 'attacks' from the West and the EU, who are seen as expanding their imperialist foreign policies. As discussed in the context of the AfD and the AKP, the 'Other' depends on a broader power hierarchy between the West and Islam, between a national white supremacism and broader colonial international politics. The main contribution of this chapter is to illustrate the ultimately arbitrary role of anti-feminism in right-wing politics, a role played regardless of the specific geographic or cultural context. More broadly, this chapter proposes that future research is needed on the power hierarchies that exist between various right-wing parties. This will facilitate a greater understanding of the so-called nativist and racialised politics utilising anti-feminism as a political strategy.

In conclusion of this chapter, we wish to reiterate that there remains an extraordinary lack of awareness regarding the relevance of anti-feminism in social movements and politics. This lack not only exists within the right-wing and authoritarian research contexts, but also in everyday life and public discourses in liberal democracies (Reinhardt 2022). We suggest that anti-feminism needs to be analysed within prevalent political and social systems, so-called mainstream politics and political parties, in order to prevent the false externalisation of

anti-feminism and racism as a problem only prevalent in far-right groups (Mondon and Winter 2020). Although they only passively block progressive politics towards gender and sexual equality, instead of actively pushing against them like the far right, liberal democracies and neo-liberal economies are closer to being anti-feminist than feminist.

Notes

1. In this chapter we use the term 'right-wing' to describe the wide spectrum of conservative, reactionary or fascist political ideologies. We intentionally use 'far right' to describe the German political party Alternative für Deutschland.
2. In neither of their respective countries is the AKP or AfD the only the conservative/right-wing political party worth studying; other important players include the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) in Turkey and the conservative CDU (Christian Democratic Party) in Germany.

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7

HOMOPHOBIA WITHOUT BORDERS: DISMANTLING HOMOPHOBIA'S ARCHITECTURE IN CAIRO'S BATHHOUSE RAID AND BERLIN'S RAVE CRACKDOWN

Ahmed Awadalla

I was having flashbacks as I stood in the Hasenheide,[1] a park in Berlin. The blue lights emanating from the surrounding police vans bathed the crowd. A cacophony of sounds populated my ears; the techno music coming out of speakers scattered around the space, intermingled with the sounds of helicopters hovering in the sky and the barking of police-trained dogs. I watched the crowd as some continued to dance, while others ran away from the menacingly approaching police. The police forces were here to disperse a rave in the Hasenheide, which had gathered out of the hope for intimacy and the desperation of isolation. It was a surreal dystopic scene – one of many that emerged during the 2020 pandemic. In all its strangeness, however, something felt eerily familiar. I have seen this before, albeit in another dystopia, in another time and place.

The events in Berlin triggered memories of police raids against queer spaces in Egypt following the military coup of 2013 – the vilification and prosecution of queer intimacies, the media's complicity in orchestrating police violence and the public health rhetoric that served as a pretext for the attacks. My embodied knowledge as a queer person from Egypt allowed me to experience and understand the COVID-19 pandemic in Berlin from a different perspective. The COVID

lockdown felt like the lockdown in post-revolutionary Cairo. Both lockdowns controlled gathering and movement in public spaces. The pandemic mitigation measures in Germany further controlled interactions in private spaces, such as limiting the number of people allowed to gather in one's home. This interference in social interactions meant that queer gatherings, in public spaces as well as in private homes, became illegal, echoing the prosecution of the queer community in Egypt. Moreover, police forces were deployed to enforce public health regulations, and their deployment coincided with increased racial profiling reports. This mimics the increased militarisation in Egypt following the 2011 revolution. Such securitisation practices in Egypt and Germany rendered racialised subjects such as migrants and refugees' targets of profiling. The vulnerability of marginalised groups, in the wake of colossal events such as the revolution and the pandemic, is intensified in ways to which the larger society is impervious.

This disturbing emotional resonance became the point of departure for the present transnational inquiry into 'the architecture of homophobia' in Egypt and Germany. In other words, I am interested in the foundations of homophobia and how they impact and structure queer lives, despite the evident differences in political and socio-economic contexts. I pose the following questions: what does the police raid on a bathhouse in post-revolutionary Cairo have in common with a raid on a rave in Berlin during COVID-19? What forms of queer knowledge and resistance emerge as a result? And what are the implications for security, media and health governance?

In this investigation, I have used a mixed methodology grounded in a queer feminist theoretical framework. I will juxtapose two case-studies of homophobic violence in Cairo and Berlin to explore the overlaps and the points of divergence. Homophobia is an analytical lens through which I analyse heterosexism defined as 'an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatises any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community' (Herek 2004). I deploy auto-ethnographic methods to generate knowledge that 'challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act' (Ellis et al. 2011). Auto-ethnography is an apt research method in queer feminist knowledge production, as it captures social and material realities while maintaining ambivalence in negotiating systems of power (Asante 2015). Moreover, I will conduct an analysis of media coverage of the events in Cairo and Berlin, including social

media platforms. Additional data were collected through informal interviews with members of the LGBTQ community. Thus, I also rely on emotional archives, which comprise the embodied knowledge and affective experiences generated and shared by the interlocutors. My analysis of the collected data is rooted in a queer and feminist theory and draws on a transnational understanding of gender and sexual justice.

By focusing on sub-cultural queer spaces and praxis, I render the subtle forms of political and cultural homophobia visible, while showing the complex ways in which homophobia functions. As Al-Ali, Altay and Galor have argued in the introduction, this transnational investigation simultaneously addresses homophobia in Europe and in 'the Middle East', thereby critiquing 'Middle Eastern exceptionalism' in relation to sexual and gender injustice, while making visible the persistence of these injustices despite geopolitical borders. It sheds light on how times of crisis, be they political upheaval or global pandemics, generate a praxis of authoritarianism, policing and prosecution which impacts and disrupts especially queer lives. This is a contribution to the importance of transnational queer-feminist critiques in interrogating power relations to make sense of our world and imagine a different future.

Police Raids on Queer Raves during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Berlin

On 20 June 2020, a video report on illegal parties in the Hasenheide was aired on a local state-funded channel in Berlin (RBB-Abendschau 2020). Having received an insider tip, the reporter searched for the rave between the bushes of the park, equipped with a hidden camera. The report showed images of people socialising and dancing, while emphasising that masks were not consistently used and that drugs were consumed. Some of the attendees spoke on condition of anonymity. 'Actually, Corona hasn't existed in the Hasenheide since March', a man said while pausing and laughing mid-sentence. Contrary to this sensational sarcasm, other interviewees showed a more reflective attitude: 'It is summer, we are young, and we probably aren't making the smartest of decisions'. The report pointed to the police's inaction despite their presence near the raves in the park.

The report on the Hasenheide's illegal raves stirred waves of indignation and condemnation (Hackenbruch 2020) which amounted to a state of moral

panic. Stanley Cohen has theorised that moral panic happens when 'a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests' (Cohen 1973). While the issues identified may be real, the response disproportionally exaggerates 'the seriousness, extent, typicality and/or inevitability of harm' (Hier 2011, p. 21). The discourse around the Hasenheide encompassed the elements of a moral panic about particular social groups, resulting in excessively punitive policies and practices.

Amidst the panic, several politicians demanded more control and policing of the park and its visitors. Falko Liecke, a member of the conservative Christian Democrats Union Party (CDU), renewed his demand that fences be erected to regulate access to the Hasenheide (Sudholt and Heller 2020). This demand was in tune with his party's history of conservative politics, often calling for anti-migrant, anti-drug and anti-gay policies which hindered the legalisation of gay marriage in Germany until 2017. In a similar vein, Karl Lauterbach, a politician of the Socialist Democratic Party (SPD), demanded to make the wearing of masks compulsory throughout the entire park (*Tagesspiegel* 2020).

The moral panic involved two main themes: (1) health concerns related to COVID-19, drug and alcohol use, and (2) concerns regarding environmental damage. First, regarding health concerns, the criticism largely pointed to the carelessness and recklessness of the raves, holding them responsible for an increased incidence of COVID-19 infections and worsening the outcome of the pandemic. At this point in 2020, COVID-19's modes of transmission were still under investigation. There was a sense of ambivalence regarding health and safety among the ravers. Some expressed more concern about COVID-19 than others; many showed health consciousness by using the Corona-Warn-App, a contact-tracing application (Götzke 2020), while others were more relaxed and felt safer as contact took place in an open-air setting. Most ravers questioned the presumed link between outdoor raves and COVID-19 incidence. Only later was it scientifically established that outdoor interactions carried a significantly reduced risk of transmission. The year 2020 witnessed a series of strict pandemic control measures, such as the ban on alcohol consumption after 11pm in public spaces as well as the ban on dancing (*Tanzverbot*)[2] in clubs, marking the re-emergence of outdated social control practices.

Second, environmental concerns involved the destruction of green spaces and the accumulation of trash in the park. Complaints about trash were

widely circulated in online and offline conversations. One Facebook user commented: 'This park should be renamed from Hasenheide to dumpster'. Other commentators blamed the raves for destroying greenery and disrupting park maintenance by local authorities, which had already been struggling to sustain green spaces. In response to these complaints, members of the LGBTQ community organised informal initiatives to clean the space. The proliferation of the talk about trash bears a particular significance in my later analysis of cultural homophobia.

These environmental concerns are reminiscent of the early-2000s debate around the Love Parade, where a marching rave destroyed green areas in the Tiergarten Park (Looss 2000). In 2020, local politicians were divided on the use of green areas for club culture events: whereas SPD and CDU were opposed, the Green and Left parties were in favour of such usage (Pohlers and Haarbach 2020). This division marks an ambivalent political stance towards club culture which can be traced to Berlin's post-reunification era. Certain politicians weaponised moral outrage, catalysing division and distrust for their own gain. Others co-opted Berlin's image as a hedonistic city to attract tourists and 'a creative class', who in turn served the interests of real estate investors and the club culture movement, a collusion which ultimately spurred the neo-liberal turn of the city (Perry 2019).

The events in the Hasenheide strongly impacted queer lives during the pandemic. The Hasenheide has historically been a space for queer sociality and sexual encounters. The corner for naked sunbathing,[3] often populated by queer people, is adjacent to a cruising area surrounded by bushes and trees. These cruising areas, spaces turned into dance floors, formed the location where the *Abendschau* report was filmed. This change created a strong division within the queer community: many vehemently criticised the raves, while others described them as a much-needed reprise from the isolation and loneliness imposed by the lockdown measures, as well as a chance for socialisation and pleasure, despite the involved risks. 'Everyone is talking about the COVID pandemic, but nobody is talking about the mental health epidemic, which is hitting queers hard', one interlocutor noted.

The media coverage created a similarly heated debate, leading many to question the role that the media played in creating the panic. In an email response, RBB editorial staff stated: 'Parties in public parks were a phenomenon of the

time on which we were the first Berlin media to report. On 20 June 2020, we ran the first article on the subject, which described the events in the Hasenheide in a very value-neutral way and allowed many party-goers to formulate their own motivation for attending as well as their concerns' (Hochleitner 2023).

While the media did not make explicit reference to the sexuality of the ravers, members of the LGBTQ community felt stigmatised by the coverage. In an interview, one of the ravers, Anthony (a pseudonym), confessed that he had been the protagonist of the *Abendschau* report who had made sarcastic, sensational comments about COVID-19. He expressed remorse for taking part in a demonising report, which contributed to 'a witch hunt', and described the experience as traumatic. Anthony was ambivalent about characterising the reporting as motivated by homophobia *per se*, stressing instead the hypocrisy of media outlets that 'flaunt openness and progressive values while making a successful show at the expense of marginalised communities'. In an ironic tone, Anthony relayed that the *Abendschau* reporter himself was gay: 'Of course, he is one of us. I've known him for years. How do you think he knew about the raves?' These claims will be part of a discussion below, regarding queer modes of resistance.

In the weeks following the media report, I witnessed several changes in the Hasenheide. First, the spontaneously organised raves had grown, attracting audiences from groups considered outsiders to the queer scene. A common complaint was the influx of 'straight crowds', making the space feel over-populated and unsafe, especially for women*. Incidents of sexual harassment, gay-bashing and petty crime were observed. Many ravers blamed this change on the media's publication of the rave's exact location. Second, there was a massive increase in policing: helicopters, trained dogs and large spotlights were used to chase the ravers away. The situation escalated around the Berlin Pride season in July 2020. According to the media, around 3,000 people convened in the park to celebrate (Pohlers and Haarbach 2020). Many raves were violently dispersed and chased out of the park with the help of police-trained dogs.

The crackdown on the Hasenheide was part of a larger crackdown on sites of queer sociality during the pandemic in Germany. It is noteworthy that gatherings and raves were not limited to the Hasenheide. 'Corona parties', the term used in the German media (Kittel 2022) to describe illegal in- and outdoor gatherings, were targets of recurrent police interventions. The police appeared

at cruising spaces in several parks in Berlin, allegedly to enforce pandemic measures. During the evacuation of an authorised queer party named Pornceptual, police used excessive force and called attendees 'disgusting and perverse' (*SIEGESSÄULE* 2020). After an outdoor rave in the Humboldthain, a park in northern Berlin, eight men were violently arrested and forced to undergo blood testing, presumably to check for drugs. Private indoor gatherings were raided, often following neighbours' complaints to the authorities. According to interlocutors with whom I spoke, such complaints were in part motivated by xenophobic and queerphobic sentiments.

The Hasenheide's location in Berlin bears significance for my argument on the architecture of homophobia. The park lies in Neukölln, a former West Berlin district that historically hosted migrant workers of Turkish and Arab backgrounds. In the past decades, the district has represented the front lines of discourses around migration, (failed) integration, criminality and gentrification. Neukölln has also been the site of racialised discourses on gender and sexuality in Germany, which reproduced the image of a backward racialised Other and simultaneously promoted Germany's image as a gay-friendly nation (El-Tayeb 2012; Haritaworn 2010; Petzen 2012). Incidents of homo- and transphobic violence in the district were highly publicised and instrumentalised to propagate anti-migrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Neukölln was often characterised as problematic, dangerous (Keller 2015), or a no-go zone (Hinze 2013). Despite this reputation, or perhaps because of it, Neukölln has been the site of a rapid gentrification process, catalysed by racialised discourses around criminality (Schulz and Tajeri 2022). The Hasenheide's location within a discursively and materially contested district contributed to the media's hyperfocus on the raves.

What is the architecture of homophobia in this case-study? How do regimes of security, health and media converge to impact and structure queer lives? How do notions of health risks maintain hierarchies and revive modes of social control? Some answers could be offered by recounting the case of a police raid on a bathhouse in Cairo.

A Police Raid on a Bathhouse in Cairo

In December 2014, a media report aired on Al-Qahira Wal Nas (Cairo and the People), a private Egyptian TV channel, investigating the events inside the Bab

el-Bahr bathhouse in Cairo (*El Mestakhabi* 2014). The episode revealed what was described as a den of orgies and sex-trafficking in the heart of Cairo. The show, titled *El Mestakhabi* (or 'The Hidden') and directed and presented by Mona Iraqi, had the ostensible goal to combat crime and create social change. In previous episodes, Iraqi had penetrated male-dominated spaces of drug trade and arms-trafficking, but she could not access the bathhouse since it was a male-only space. Instead, a member of her team pretended to be a client and used a hidden camera to collect audiovisual recordings inside the bathhouse. The undercover reporter requested from one of the staff members to organise external sexual encounters, an interaction that was later reframed to portray the space as a brothel. In another segment, Iraqi interviewed male sex workers unrelated to the bathhouse, yet argued that the bathhouse staff and clientele were collectively involved in prostitution and sex-trafficking.

As in the Berlin case-study, disease-related fears were substantial to the moral panic in Egypt. *El Mestakhabi* began with a segment on HIV/AIDS, in which health experts weighed in on the pandemic. Iraqi used sensational and stigmatising language – describing HIV as a 'disease that inevitably leads to death' and using the term 'people who spread the virus the most' to refer to key populations.[4] Sexual contact between the bathhouse clients was scandalised, emphasising the fact that condoms were not consistently used. Iraqi referred to the space as 'an animal farm' and pointed to the clients' 'carelessness and malice'. She cast the bathhouse as Egypt's most dangerous place for spreading HIV.

HIV/AIDS-related stigma is widespread at the institutional and societal level in Egypt (Awadalla 2021). Despite the government's National AIDS Programme which provides free testing, counselling and treatment for those affected, the legal context hinders prevention efforts. Homosexuality is not mentioned in Egyptian law. Same-sex relations, however, are *de facto* punishable by up to three years in prison. The vague term 'debauchery', codified in the 'anti-prostitution law', is taken advantage of to prosecute sexual and gender differences, mainly those perceived as gay men and trans* women. Furthermore, a positive HIV-status could be used by the authorities as evidence for homosexual conduct. In 2008, a person's admission to the police about his HIV-positive status spurred a series of arrests among men who engaged in same-sex relations (Human Rights Watch 2008).

In the following episode of *El Mestakhabi*, Iraqi contacted the authorities, prompting a police raid in her presence. Iraqi was seen standing at the bathhouse's entrance, filming the clients who, dressed in little to no clothing, were handcuffed and escorted outside by the police. Twenty-six men were arrested and charged with debauchery. During detention, the defendants were subjected to various forms of degrading treatment. In their testimonies, they reported insults to their families during visitations, physical abuse and torture, including non-consensual medical practices such as forced anal examinations[5] and blood tests for HIV, STIs and drug use (The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2017).

This case-study builds on auto-ethnographic accounts during my bathhouse visit in 2014, shortly before the raid. The bathhouse serves as a space for cruising and queer sociality. Its location in a working-class area near Cairo's central train station provides an influx of transient visitors. On my way to the bathhouse, the district residents whom I met were aware of its existence and guided me towards it. Contrary to Iraqi's claims, transactions among clients were voluntary and free. Although the other clients more or less perceived my middle-class background, I was not propositioned for any form of sex work. This is significant, as the perception of social status plays an important role in the social dynamics around sex work. The clients could, however, access moments of sexual intimacy at the bathhouse and arrange later external meetings. The staff turned a blind eye to the actions inside the hammam, as long as the participants remained discreet, which usually meant engaging in sexual activities in hidden, dark corners of the space. When staff members entered the hammam, they often made noise to give the clients a heads-up. In other words, both the staff and the surrounding neighbourhood exhibited a certain complacency about the space, reflecting tolerance of the activities inside. This account contradicts the version propagated in the TV episode and highlights its deceitful and sensational nature.

The media-induced police raid was met with outrage from different segments of society (Soliman 2019). Various international, regional and local human rights groups denounced the raid (Op Anti-Sexual Harassment/Assault 2014). Pundits emphasised the violations to the defendants' rights to privacy and bodily integrity. The criticism focused on the prying and cynical nature of the media reporting which operated under the assumption that

everyone in the bathhouse was involved in sex acts and/or trafficking. The incident sparked a national debate that built on an ongoing discussion on media ethics and the limits of investigative journalism. Social media campaigns used hashtags such as #مخبر_إعلامي, (#media_snitch) and #محاكمة_مني_عراقي, (#sue_mona_iraqi) to denounce the show. An anonymous artwork circulated on social media, showed Iraqi saying: 'I will report you to the police to get fame and money'.

The debate centred on the problematic relationship between the media and the state – a recurrent theme in the post-revolutionary period in Egypt. The 2011 revolution movement demanded an end to manipulation and fear tactics in media reporting, demands which stemmed from the practice's extensive use by state-run media during the Mubarak regime. Shortly thereafter, Iraqi was sentenced to six months in prison for defamation and spreading false information, a sentence which was later repealed. In her defence, Iraqi stated that she was not against personal freedoms, but rather acted according to media ethics and standards: she could not remain neutral and had to prevent a public health disaster (*El Mestakhabi* 2014). She also presented samples of BBC, EuroNews and France 24 coverage of raids on brothels to argue that such techniques were deployed worldwide, particularly in Western countries (*El Mestakhabi*, 2014). Her argument makes clear how Western media is ironically designated as a benchmark for media standards and ethics. I will return to these declarations in my discussion of the implications on media governance.

The bathhouse raid was part of a larger crackdown on the LGBTQ community in Egypt following the 2013 military coup. A series of moral panics involved incidents such as a viral video of a gay marriage celebration on a Nile boat (*BBC News* 2014) and the waving of the rainbow flag during the Mashrou' Leila music concert in 2017 (*Article 19* 2017), which invited a wave of arrests and detentions. The crackdown 'shows how authorities make performances out of the policing of queer communities as a way to show themselves as defenders of public morality' (Abdelmoez 2021), thereby scapegoating particular social groups as the cause of society's ills.

The raid's aftermath shows its impact on queer lives. In an unprecedented move for the Egyptian judiciary in cases of debauchery, all the defendants in the case were deemed to be innocent. However, the damage had already befallen

the arrestees. One of the victims survived a suicide attempt in which he set himself on fire after being taunted by those around him. In an interview with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, he stated:

> After the acquittal, I tried to return to my normal life, but I heard people commenting on the incident and marvelling at the verdict of innocence on [public] transportation and elsewhere. I constantly got into fights to defend myself [. . .] I completely gave up and decided to commit suicide, so I poured gasoline over my body and set myself on fire. My family took me to a hospital, where I was neglected and my condition worsened until I was able, with the help of some people, to move to another hospital. I am now part of a compensation lawsuit against Mona Iraqi. I cannot go back to my normal life again.

The acquittal of the defendants in the bathhouse trial was characterised as a mystery (Reeve 2015), but this characterisation failed to consider important factors. The media discourse, as well as human rights activism, campaigning and litigation positively contributed to the case outcome. Ahmed Hossam, the defendants' lawyer, stated that his defence strategy heavily relied on the unreasonableness of the police report: 'The police officer tried to assign every pair of defendants as a couple having sex with each other in the bathhouse, and since the number of defendants was an odd number, he assigned the last three as engaged in a three-way sexual relationship, meaning that none of the bathhouse clients was not having sex at the time of his arrest'; the judge found this explanation unreasonable (The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2017). I will return later to the notion of absurd sexual imaginaries to discuss the othering processes that underpin homophobia.

Iraqi remains a TV reporter to this day. Following the United States Supreme Court's ruling in favour of gay marriage in June 2015, Iraqi posted a photo of the rainbow flag on her Twitter account, writing that 'the right to life and love belongs to all without discrimination'. This tweet instigated a social media uproar denouncing her double standards regarding homosexuality. In a striking parallel to the reporter in the Berlin case-study, my interlocutors in Cairo believed that Mona Iraqi herself was a member of the LGBTQ community, which will be addressed in a discussion of queer modes of resistance below.

Architectures of Homophobia: Egypt and Germany in a Transnational Lens

The two case-studies I outline in this chapter are temporarily and spatially disparate and occur in distinct socio-economic, legal and political contexts. I aim to investigate what I call the 'architectures of homophobia', by showing where these cases diverge and intersect. The analysis builds on queer and feminist scholarship and activism to embody a transnational mode of knowledge production. The architectures of homophobia, so I will demonstrate, are the processes that underpin and construct homophobic discrimination and violence – namely, security, media and health regimes. By placing the events in the broader context, I demonstrate the interlocking mechanisms of homophobia with other systems of oppression such as race, class and migration status. I will finally discuss the queer modes of resistance that emerge in each case-study as a result.

The Foundations of Homophobia

An important point of divergence between the two case-studies lies in characterising their core events as 'homophobia'. The events in Egypt were largely described as a clear incident of homophobic state violence, but this description has been elusive in the German case. This divergence could be due to the perception that Germany is a queer-friendly country. Since the foundations of homophobia are built on the political and legal context, this perception merits further examination.

De facto criminalising non-normative sexual relations and gender expressions, Egypt's anti-prostitution law was passed in 1951. Its passage signalled post-colonial anxiety around sex work, which had become a widely regulated and licensed practice under British colonial rule. The first documented state attack against same-sex conduct, however, took place in 2001, when the police raided a discotheque on the Queen Boat, leading to the arrest of fifty-one persons (Human Rights Watch 2004). This campaign continued in the following years, albeit in a more sporadic pattern, eventually resurging after the 2011 revolution.

Although homosexuality is no longer considered a crime in Germany, homophobic state violence has a long genealogy. Paragraph 175, which criminalised 'unnatural fornication' among men, came into effect during the imperial

period (specifically in 1871). The heinous crimes of the Nazi regime, conducted under Paragraph 175, are considered the most systematic state prosecution of same-sex relations globally. The law was finally abolished in 1994 (LSVD [no date]). Certain homophobic state policies did persist, most notably the police surveillance of gay men. When such practices came to the forefront in several federal states in 2005, a scandal ensued (Blech 2005). The intervention of police in various cruising areas around Berlin during the COVID-19 pandemic particularly calls to mind the Hamburg Mirror Scandal in 1980, when the police peeped through public toilet mirrors to surveil gay men in cruising areas (Würdemann 2012). The revelation of neo-Nazi groups operating within the German security apparatus in recent years has cast further shadows on the performance of the police force (Engelhart 2017). As outlined in the Hasenheide case-study, various transgressions from the police interventions in a range of queer spaces during the pandemic were documented.

Despite complaints from the queer community, officials in Germany actively denied the accusation of homophobia regarding the Hasenheide raids. In a media interview, Berlin's police officials who function as intermediaries for the LGBTQ community were asked whether the city's law enforcement had a homophobia problem. The officials maintained that the park raids and sweeps were conducted solely for the implementation of pandemic control measures and that homophobic transgressions, if they occurred, must be reported to the police (*SIEGESSÄULE* 2020). The widespread denial of homophobia in Germany marks a cultural investment in homonationalism, which links a nationalist ideology to a favourable position for LGBTQ people and their rights and thus propagates the image of Germany as a queer-friendly nation.

The broader context to each case-study proves useful for analysing their events. The events in Egypt can be placed within the context of a post-revolutionary period marked by the military regime's attempt to restore order and eliminate potential political resistance. This was achieved by a crackdown on opposition groups, civil society organisations and queer spaces. While the LGBTQ community is often scapegoated to maintain the image of a moral state, in times of political instability the crackdown on sexual and gender differences further reaffirms the values of conformity and cultural authenticity and sends a warning to dissidents regarding the limits of what can be expressed.

The events in Germany, too, can be placed within a larger picture. It is important to mention other queer spaces that were targeted by security forces during the pandemic. Queer alternative housing projects (squats) such as Mollies and Leibig34[6] were forcefully evacuated to create space for profit-driven investment projects. The pandemic period witnessed considerable changes in Berlin's public spaces, marked by a shift towards urban remodelling and gentrification. Self-organised, non-profit park raves stray from the leisure economy comprised of clubs, bars and other venues which can be taxed, regulated and controlled. The raids on the raves in the Hasenheide can be read, then, as an act to restore a neo-liberal urban order – an order which dictates the co-optation of certain queer leisure and organising practices while obliterating sub-cultural praxes.

This transnational reading shows how political homophobia persists across Egypt and Germany. It further nuances the account of how homophobia operates, as it reveals connections to other political agendas. Homophobia is instrumentalised in different times and spaces, such as during political instability in Egypt, or under the mandate of pandemic control measures in Germany. Both cases offer a critique of securitisation practices, posing the following question: to what extent should the state interfere in people's private affairs, whether in the name of public morals or public health? The Hasenheide and the Bab el-Bahr bathhouse, in other words, not only elucidate the disruption to queer lives, but also shed light on larger societal affairs such as urban change and political dissidence.

Homophobia and the Media

The media serve as an additional pillar in the construction of homophobia. In the case-studies, the media reports strikingly resemble each other in their use of stealthy reporting techniques and sensationalist language and images, culminating in a moral panic. Revealing something hidden, each report made public what was meant to be private. For all these reasons, the media ultimately catalysed state intervention and police raids, quite directly in Cairo and indirectly in Berlin. The line, in other words, between the reporters' role in covering the story and creating it – or at the very least, setting the agenda for a state and public response – is blurred.

This media strategy follows a certain logic around 'sex in public' and has been commonly deployed in other parts of the world. In 2012, I covered a similar story

in Lebanon where a TV show used hidden cameras inside a pornographic movie theatre that served as a cruising space, prompting a police raid and the arrest of thirty-six men (Awadalla 2012). In the United States, a similar dynamic occurred when *KXAN News* used undercover cameras in their coverage of sex in parks in Austin, Texas. Reporters then threatened to air the mug shots of the men later arrested by Austin police (McGlotten 2013).

Activists in Egypt utilised the notion of privacy as a response to the case, claiming that 'the expanded use of Law 10/1961 to criminalise consensual sexual activity between adults, only because such practices go against societal norms, is a clear violation of the individual's right to privacy and the freedom to undertake whichever choices pertain to their sexuality' (The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2017). This strategy is noteworthy for how it stands in contrast to the deployment of visibility politics to advance queer rights. It also marks an expansion of the normative understanding of privacy from the 'couple in a bedroom' standard, which upholds property and propriety, into a wider purview which connotes non-normative sexual choices.

The public discussion in the case-studies raises important questions about media ethics and governance. In Egypt, the resulting discourse problematised the relationship between the state and the media, calling for media independence from state ideological influence. The hashtag 'Media Snitch', used to describe Mona Iraqi, hints at the dynamic where media anchors are recruited to serve the interests of state authorities. I build on this critique to problematise the media's role in the Berlin case. While the media are expected to work freely and democratically in a liberal state, the state-funded RBB-Abendschau report used sensational techniques and catalysed the intervention of security forces. Anthony's and others' accounts questioned the ethics of media freedom and highlighted the negative impact of the media's actions – especially on queer lives. Ironically, Mona Iraqi defended herself by citing Western media as a benchmark for media ethics. This investigation thus poses questions about the role and limits of investigative journalism, and the ways in which the media acts as a state apparatus serving specific political agendas.

Homophobia's Others

Built on the construction of a sexual Other, homophobia is rooted in normative understandings of intimacy and sex. The interventions in the park relied

on certain normative imaginaries of the publics that populate it. ‘That idea that everyone at the Hasenheide was involved in one mass orgy is something we have to contend with’, said one of my interlocutors in Berlin. ‘I like to go to the Hasenheide because there is a lot of space, and I can choose how close or far I am to others’, he added. A similar sexual imaginary – equally fantastical – was also present in the Cairo case: the police report constructed an extended orgy among the bathhouse clients and contained ‘detailed accounts of imagined sex scenes involving the 26 defendants [. . .] as if the presence of the police force would not interrupt the sex actions taking place, and as if every pair would continue to have sex until an officer reaches them and arrests them’ (The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2017).

Discursive analysis can render societal homophobia in Germany visible. At the surface level, the discourse lacked clear references to the ravers’ sexual identities, revolving instead around so-called ‘Corona parties’, irresponsible raving and the accumulation of trash in the Hasenheide. However, as Sara Ahmed’s work on the cultural politics of emotions through a Marxist and psychoanalytic lens has shown, hate functions unconsciously in an *affective economy* through iterations without a fixed referent: ‘The impossibility of reducing hate to a particular body allows hate to circulate in an economic sense, working to differentiate some others from other others’ (Ahmed 2014, p. 47). The objects of hate do not necessarily move with bodies but rather with the signs that stick to them. The proliferation of talk about trash in the park could be read as a signifier through which hate moves in a codified sense: it deflects the way in which the public feels about certain bodies and makes homophobia more subtle. For Ahmed, such a discourse ‘justifies the repetition of violence against the bodies of others in the name of protecting the nation’ (Ahmed 2014, p. 47).

Both case-studies involved further processes of othering, which illustrate the intersectional workings of power. The Hasenheide’s location in a historically contested district like Neukölln, shaped by a migrant population, an influx of expats and queer residents, contributed to how it found media limelight. The debate partially focused on the otherness of the ravers – namely, that many were foreigners – highlighting the othering processes at work. One commentator claimed that the raves were organised by ‘bored rich kids from the United States and Australia’ (Kurianowicz and Leister 2020). In the Cairo

case, the public discussion called attention to the class aspect of the raid, pointing out the location of the bathhouse in an impoverished area of Cairo and the working-class background of the clientele. One activist wrote on Twitter: 'Can Mona Iraqi break into luxury health clubs in five-star hotels, as she did with the Bab el-Bahr bathhouse?' In each case, homophobia did not act alone; rather, it operated through an intersectional system of oppression that involved sexual orientation as well as race, migration status and class.

Homophobia as Fear of Infection and Disease

In both case-studies, the moral panic capitalised on disease-related fears. This is anything but new. Disease-control measures have paved the path for attacks on spaces of queer sociality and intimacy across various global contexts at different times. In the wake of the HIV epidemic in the 1980s, a number of queer spaces around the world permanently closed. As an example, gay saunas and bars were shut down in the United States amidst anti-sex debates which revolved around questions of public health *vis-à-vis* gay civil liberties (Disman 2003; Hubley 2018).

The ascent of risk as a central feature of the modern world saw health become enmeshed in institutions of power: 'Health is now a disciplinary rubric, offering a rationale for the institutional control of whole populations, as well as a matrix for self-understanding and self-discipline. Modern epidemiology's description of health in terms of risk has transformed health into a precarious state that needs constant monitoring and assessment' (Dean 2009). This enmeshment means that health can be culturally weaponised, for 'risk is a social construct where individuals assess the same dangers but come to different opinions of risk based on underlying cultural biases associated with their way of life' (Douglas 1992). Risk, then, emerges as a tool in which privilege can be maintained through identification and disidentification.

Writing about AIDS, several authors have pointed out how homophobia and other forms of bias seep into a range of institutions of knowledge production (Patton 1990; Treichler 1987). These biases in turn manifest themselves in the translation of such knowledge into media messages and policy decisions, leading to problematic HIV epidemic control measures such as travel and movement bans, blood donation bans for men who have sex with men and HIV transmission criminalisation laws (Awadalla 2022a). Although

they have different articulations according to the changed political and cultural context, some of these policies remain in effect today (Awadalla 2022b). Against this backdrop, it is essential to question the neutrality of health and biomedical policies and shed light on the continuities of their problematic histories in the present.

Public health policies often fail to consider the needs and vulnerabilities of marginalised groups. COVID-19 infection control measures revived conservative and antiquated conceptualisations of kinship and family (Renner and Laubenburg 2020). During the Christmas season in Germany in 2020, the government stipulations to limit contact to biological family were criticised for failing to consider alternative kinships, such as chosen families and friends which are particularly important for queers and single people (LSVD 2020). Moreover, the bans on alcohol consumption and dancing mark the resurgence of strict moral codes in the wake of the pandemic.

Public health rhetoric is further instrumentalised to vilify certain social groups. In the case-studies, the ravers and the bathhouse clients were blamed for worsening the outcome of the epidemic and acting as 'super-spreaders'. Instead of casting them as vulnerable subjects – which they are, since they belong to social groups who face barriers in accessing healthcare information and services – they are portrayed as the problem. This role reversal and victim-blaming reflects a classic feature of power dynamics wherein those in positions of power feel and claim to be victimised by oppressed groups.

That homosexuality would bring about the collapse of society is a common conservative trope. This builds, in some cases, on a reproductive imperative, and in other cases on disease-related fears. Samuel Delany has recounted an encounter with his Republican Catholic uncle, who opined that 'prostitutes and perverts destroy, undermine and rot the foundations of society' (Delany 1999, p. 184). Delany has explained the underlying assumption: the untrammelled pursuit of pleasure is the opposite of social responsibility. Homophobia is associated with imaginaries about sex – or rather, the excesses of sex. This systematic tension between pleasure and responsibility is key to understanding homophobia.

In contrast, a queer, feminist and sex-positive conceptualisation of health challenges heteronormative attitudes which manifest within public health regimes. Douglas Crimp has condemned attitudes and positions that espouse

the incomprehension of intimacy-seeking behaviour. He pleads for ambivalence, empathy and uncertainty in responding to an epidemic and denounces shame-and-blame health campaigns. Crimp has further proposed promiscuity as a model for surviving an epidemic: 'We are able to invent safe sex because we have always known that sex is not, in an epidemic or not, limited to penetrative sex. Our promiscuity taught us many things, not only about the pleasures of sex, but also the great multiplicity of those pleasures', he has explained (Crimp 1987, p. 253). Contending with our pleasures, then, opens the door for generating safer sex and harm-reduction interventions that take into consideration the lived reality of marginalised communities.

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a few initiatives in Berlin strove to provide alternatives to the closed clubs and bars. Techno Drift and Transmission, for example, were queer rave initiatives that embraced health guidelines such as physical distancing, regular testing and mask-wearing, while providing a space for queer joy and intimacy. Such initiatives embody a harm reduction approach which reconciles personal rights with public health imperatives.

Architects and Dismantlers of Homophobia

The term 'moral panic' contains some problems 'because of its connotation with irrationality and being out of control. It also evokes the image of a frenzied crowd or mob: atavistic, driven by contagion and delirium, susceptible to control by demagogues' (Cohen 2011, p. xxxiii). In this sense, a moral panic may be understood as a depoliticised phenomenon, ascribed to essentialist cultural specificities, without coming to perceive its potential architects. It is worthwhile, then, to consider the *Cui bono* of political and cultural homophobia. In the case-studies, these architects were found in a number of agents who were implicated in the moral panic and the consequent disruption of queer lives – politicians, media figures, health officials and urban investors.

It is important to think of the queer forms of resistance that emerged as a response – social media campaigns, human rights litigation, queer environmental initiatives and harm-reduction pleasure initiatives, to name a few. By focusing on marginal spaces such as the Hasenheide and the Bab el-Bahr bathhouse, I have highlighted their potential to unsettle the heterosexual world. Sub-cultural spaces of queer sociality and cruising, labelled as queer 'counter-publics', are

central to queer world-making (Berlant and Warner 1998). They ‘unsettle the garbled but powerful norms supporting (heterosexual) privilege – including the project of normalisation that has made heterosexuality hegemonic – as well as those material practices that, although not explicitly sexual, are implicated in the hierarchies of property and propriety that we will describe as heteronormative’ (Berlant and Warner 1998). The scandalisation of public sex in the media acts not only as a cautionary tale of failed intimacies for the viewers but also instructs the audience on what togetherness should look like; public sex scandals rather act as ‘reminders both of the limits of normative sex and sexuality and that nonnormative intimacies are available, if at a cost’ (McGlotten 2013).

Can gossip be seen as a queer mode of resistance? In both Cairo and Berlin, gossip circulated that the media reporters who had contributed to the moral panic were members of the LGBTQ community. This claim is tangible insofar as it explains the insider knowledge of fringe and hidden queer spaces. I am not interested in the veracity of these allegations. Whether or not they are true, they provide a crucial insight for the discussion of the architecture of homophobia by complicating the binaries of who is invested in maintaining a heteronormative order and deepening the conceptualisation of homophobia itself.

While gossip is dismissed as insignificant or as a feminised form of knowledge, it has interesting implications for queer world-making practices. Gossip provides a rich archive which challenges traditional epistemologies and ‘provides unique evidence of affect, sex and sexuality, and the individual and group dynamics that make and unmake social movements’ (Cifor 2016). Feminist writing on gossip shows how it contributes to the forging of social ties that subvert and challenge male dominance, such as instances where women have used gossip as a direct action to destabilise male authority in leftist movements (Lagalisse 2013). The purpose of this discussion is not to reproduce the mechanics of homophobia. It is not useful to portray these reporters, in Cairo and Berlin, as traitors to the community, but rather as engaged in a straight world-making process in which normativity and conformity are upheld. Gossip can be understood as a queer strategy invested in undermining the reporters’ heteronormative world-making practices.

The role of gossip in the case-studies demonstrates that political homophobia involves a wide range of architects and is not limited to structures and actors

characterised as right-wing or authoritarian. Queer theorists have pointed out the tendency towards assimilationist respectability politics in queer movements. A homonormative politics 'does not contest dominant heteronormative institutions but upholds and sustains them' (Duggan 2020, p. 179). This approach espouses respectability politics, while reifying certain expressions of queerness as acceptable, at the expense of queer sub-cultural practices more generally.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined two case-studies of political homophobia in contexts with a high degree of political and socio-cultural difference. The juxtaposition of these investigations does not aim at a simple comparison but rather aspires to highlight the continuities in hetero- and homonormative logics across geographical and temporal borders. Choosing the case-studies builds on embodied knowledge, personal experiences and belongings to queer (under)worlds. This study not only provides a valuable account of these sub-cultures, but it also shows the valence of sub-cultural and transnational queer feminist epistemologies in critiquing of a broad range of political affairs as security, health and media governance.

There are several differences as well as similarities between the case-studies, which remind us that, while homophobia has context-specific expressions and manifestations, it remains a tenuous, deeply-rooted phenomenon. It does not exist in a vacuum but is entangled with other systems of oppression. It can be invoked during times of crisis to serve many socio-political agendas, such as suppressing political opposition, free assembly and speech, fuelling anti-migrant sentiments and advancing neo-liberal urban policies. Such policies have implications for everyone, but they disproportionately affect LGBTQ lives. Although it may be tempting to view the events in the case-studies as exceptional, it is crucial to recognise them as extreme instances of a continuous pattern.

Despite their potential for unsettling heterosexual world-making, sub-cultural queer spaces are the most impacted by the infringements of securitisation, media and public health policies and practices. This investigation is possible through reclaiming knowledge generated from these marginal spaces, but more importantly through a transnational approach that undermines the rigidity of spatio-temporal borders in matters of gender and sexual injustice.

Notes

1. The Hasenheide is a park in Neukölln that entered the media limelight during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the raves that took place there.
2. Dancing bans have been deployed across various times and cultures. In Germany, bans have usually overlapped with Christian holy days. The dancing ban in relation to COVID-19 invoked an antiquated connection between dancing and the loss of proper judgment.
3. Naked sunbathing is a common practice in Germany, known as *Freie Körper-Kultur* – that is, 'Free Body Culture'.
4. 'Key populations' is the term that describes groups who experience both increased impact from HIV and decreased access to services. This includes men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers, people who inject drugs and people in prison and detention.
5. This medical test derives from the work of the nineteenth-century French forensic doctor Auguste Ambroise Tardieu. It remains in practice today in several countries, including Egypt, Uganda and Tunisia.
6. Mollies and Liebig34 were squatter spaces and housing collectives in Berlin, which provided space for queer-feminist and left-wing politics. In the wave of recent large-scale investment projects – and despite resistance from various actors – both spaces were forcefully evicted and no longer exist.

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8

‘FROM BELFAST TO DİYARBAKIR’: TRANSNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS ON CONFLICT AND LGBTI+ POLITICS IN THE ARCHIVE

Hakan Sandal-Wilson

In October 1983, Belfast was host to a lesbian and gay conference organised by the National Union of Students (NUS) at Queen’s University. The Democratic Union Party (DUP), ‘a devoutly unionist and right-wing’ (Whiting 2017) political party founded in 1971 by the Reverend Ian Paisley, protested the conference. Around 150 persons gathered at the entrance of the university to picket the event, bearing placards (*Irish Queer Archive*), with messages such as ‘This is Belfast, not Sodom’ and ‘God demands righteousness not gay rights’ (McDonagh 2019a, p. 129). The DUP is infamous for campaigning against gay rights, as part of a wider platform of conservative politics which has included opposition to abortion rights. Just a few years before the lesbian and gay conference took place in Belfast, the DUP had launched a campaign (‘Save Ulster from Sodomy’) opposing the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Northern Ireland, a campaign which attracted some 70,000 signatures in support (Goldhaber 2007, p. 37; see also Thane 2018, pp. 281–83).

The DUP’s campaign unfolded against the backdrop of a violent sectarian conflict known as ‘the Troubles’, which engulfed Northern Ireland between the 1960s and 1990s. To simplify, at the heart of this conflict was the clash

between predominantly Protestant Unionists – such as the DUP – who wanted Northern Ireland to remain a part of the United Kingdom, and predominantly Catholic Nationalists or Republicans who rejected this union as illegitimate and sought unification with the Republic of Ireland in the south (see McKittrick and McVea 2000; Tonge 1998). While this conflict impacted the lives of all of Northern Ireland's inhabitants, gays and lesbians were subject to additional prejudice and hostility throughout this period. But they were also active in resisting homophobia and asserting their rights (McDonagh 2019a; see also McDonagh 2019b). Their defiance was brave and humorous. It was brave, because gay and lesbian activists had been politically active in organising as early as in the 1970s (Livingston 2003, pp. 1207–10). They organised, for example, against laws criminalising 'sodomy' in 1975; consequently, with *Dudgeon v United Kingdom* at the European Court of Human Rights, they challenged and achieved an important legal victory over the criminalisation of male homosexual activity (Ibid. pp. 1215–17). And it was humorous because, in the midst of violent sectarian conflict, activists found creative ways to subvert and mobilise against the harmful rhetoric targeting LGBTI+ people. In 1983, for example, Tarlach Mac Niallais, a well-known community activist, was also present at the conference at Queen's University Belfast and took aim at the DUP picketers by wearing a T-shirt which mocked their 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' campaign with its own slogan: 'Save Sodomy from Ulster' (O'Doherty 2020; see Goldhaber 2007, p. 37). Albeit understudied in the scholarship, the history of Northern Ireland's LGBTI+ community's legal, political and social organising and struggle is important and offers lessons to conflicts around the world. As this chapter will elaborate, the past experiences of queer/LGBTI+[1] struggles that took place during conflicts do not simply remain in the past but continue to offer lessons to current and future LGBTI+ struggles in times of conflict, as well as in times of rising authoritarian right-wing politics around the world.

In 2010, nearly three decades after the gay and lesbian conference had been held at Queen's University Belfast, anyone flicking through the pages of 'the world's first Kurdish LGBTT magazine' (*Hevjîn* [1] 2010, p. 3) in Turkey's Kurdistan would have been given an insight into the Troubles and its meanings. In a piece titled 'From Belfast to Diyarbakır', Kürşad Kahramanoğlu – a well-known LGBTI+ activist from Turkey who served as Secretary General

of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) between 1999 and 2006 and who passed away in 2018 (*Ilga* 2018) – offered readers a personal insight into the centrality of LGBTI+ rights in contexts of conflict. This piece, published in Turkish, Kurdish and English, gives us an entry point for thinking about the kinds of transnational conversations happening in LGBTI+ political organising across recent decades. As in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, LGBTI+ activists in Turkey's Kurdistan operate in a context of an intense and long-standing ethnic conflict, this time between the Turkish state and an increasingly organised Kurdish movement centred on key cities in Turkey's Kurdistan, such as Diyarbakır, which seeks the attainment of political and cultural rights and, in some instances, autonomy. That these conversations have been taking place within a community engaged more broadly with politics and the politics of race and ethnicity makes visible the more comprehensive emancipatory frameworks pursued and indeed pioneered by movements organised around gender and sexuality – in stark contrast to the limited frameworks focused on individual rights adopted in mainstream gay rights discourse. The translation of the piece into Kurdish itself has political significance, since language has been central to nation-building and the process of racialisation in Turkey since the founding of the modern Turkish Republic. Kurds' demands for education in their mother tongue, even just the mere act of speaking their language in social, cultural and political settings, have been criminalised and often met with accusations of secessionism (see Coşkun, Derince and Uçarlar 2011). In my own research on LGBTI+ activism and ethnic conflict in Turkey, I have found these transnational conversations in the archive – and, indeed, how LGBTI+ activists reflect on different conflictual contexts – rich and insightful. In particular, they chart a course between reductionist analyses of LGBTI+ rights as an imperial imposition from the West (for example, Massad 2008) and liberal rights discourse which focuses solely and uncritically on the state. Focusing on these kinds of transnational conversations brings to the fore the emancipatory potential of LGBTI+ movements globally, rather than equating these movements with imperialism. There is an important parallel here to the uncritical representation of feminism with imperialism, which is discussed in Kandiyoti's and Savcı's contributions in this volume.

This chapter explores how LGBTI+ activists seek to understand and contextualise different conflicts across the world, grounding this discussion in the

example of LGBTI+ organising in Turkey's Kurdistan. Rather than drawing sharp conclusions, my aim here is to initiate a discussion around how Turkey's LGBTI+ movement, in general, and Kurdish LGBTI+ activism, in particular, can help us understand the transnational communicative work of LGBTI+ activists during times of conflict. In doing so, I hope to highlight how attending to transnational conversations can strengthen holistic emancipatory analytical possibilities and to reflect on the value of these possibilities in the contemporary moment, in the face of growing authoritarian right-wing constellations targeting feminists, LGBTI+ people and gender and sexual rights.

Engaging with Different Conflicts

In a previously published article, which explored the relationship between the Kurdish conflict in Turkey and LGBTI+ activism, I have highlighted how Turkey's broader LGBTI+ movement has articulated rich analyses of conflict (Sandal-Wilson 2021b). The strength of their analyses, in my view, comes from not shying away from difficult conversations about nationalism, militarism and racism, as well as from their critiques of the nation-state. I have also argued that exploring the relationship between the Kurdish and LGBTI+ struggles, reveals the limits of a certain strand of post-colonial theory that reduces LGBTI+ rights activism to an imperial import (Ibid. p. 565). Rather than an instance of Western imitation, Kurdish LGBTI+ organising emerged out of longer and complex histories. Yet, the orientation of Turkey's broader LGBTI+ movement or Kurdish LGBTI+ activism was never solely towards the local or national. In line with how Roderick Ferguson has emphasised that LGBTI+ activists in the Global North make connections 'between how militarism in local settings is tied to its iterations across the globe' (Ferguson and Sandal-Wilson 2021; see also Ferguson 2019), so too do LGBTI+ activists in Turkey and Kurdistan make connections between the violence inflicted upon them and global politics, showcasing the global relevance and reverberations of a queer of colour critique. One can find in Turkey's LGBTI+ movement's archive reflections on conflict in different contexts, such as Serbia/Bosnia (Mladjenovic 1996, pp 16–17; see also Sandal-Wilson 2021b, pp. 570–73), and Mexico and the Zapatistas (*Kaos GL* [24] 1996, p. 17; B. 1996, pp. 7–8). These engagements make clear that there are ongoing conversations among organised LGBTI+ groups, not only about LGBTI+ rights, but also about

justice and radical movements in a broader sense, complicating attempts to brand LGBTI+ rights as 'imperial imports'. Paying close attention to how LGBTI+ actors in conflicts analyse other conflicts in relation to LGBTI+ rights is valuable, because their analyses recognise the significance of specific historical, political and social contexts, and because they offer nuanced interpretations of existing power relations. These analyses, then, allow us to have a deeper understanding of the power dynamics within specific contexts such as Turkey/Kurdistan, as well as more broadly across the Global South, and they help us perceive anti-oppression struggles not as monoliths but as layered and complex (see Sandal 2017).

Organising in Turkey's 'East'

LGBTI+ rights organising in Turkey's Kurdistan has had its challenges. In a conflictual environment, organising is difficult at best and dangerous at worst. As Yıldız Tar, a prominent LGBTI+ activist from Turkey, eloquently suggested after the destruction of Kurdish cities, including Diyarbakır's historic centre (Sur), following the end of peace negotiations between the Kurdish armed movement (PKK) and the Turkish state in July 2015: 'The ground on which the LGBTI organisations can breathe or work is being taken away from them. I mean, a large part of Kurdistan is doomed to a regime in which it is a success merely to survive, to live . . .' (Sandal 2016). Despite these challenges, visible LGBTI+ organising in Turkey's Kurdistan goes back to 2008, and more informal initiatives go back even earlier. These organising efforts include trying to keep a record of human rights violations against LGBTI+ people living in Turkey's Kurdistan, as well as being active in politics more broadly. One of the latest and most comprehensive examples of this record-keeping is the detailed report 'Reviving peace from recent past to possible future: LGBTI+ people living in Diyarbakır between 2013 and 2018' (Fidan and Göçer 2022).[2] The period between 2013 and 2018 represents a particularly pivotal period in the modern history of the conflict: although it began with hope, as a peace process between Turkey and the PKK started, with the collapse of that process debilitating violence followed. Diyarbakır – the symbolic capital of Kurdistan – found itself at the heart of both. The importance of this report lies in its foregrounding of the lived experiences of LGBTI+ people during an armed conflict, with a focus on themes such as access to justice, access to healthcare and political participation.

The first LGBTI+ initiative in Kurdish Diyarbakır was Piramid LGBTT, which was founded in 2008.[3] Nearly a year later, *Kaos GL*[4] (Güner and Çakır 2009, pp. 38–39) covered the founding of the initiative in a half-page clipping titled 'Despite the war and forced migration, there is hope in Diyarbakır'. Murat, a member of Piramid LGBTT and a *Kaos GL* reporter, has asserted that getting organised was a necessity, 'despite the ongoing war in the region and forced migration' (Ibid. p. 39). He has added that growing 'civil-societism' (*sivil toplumculuk*) in Diyarbakır and the lack of involvement of organisations in Istanbul and Ankara with local organisations paved the way for the founding of such an initiative:

> . . . the presence of organisations in cities such as Antalya, Eskişehir, İzmir made us hopeful, and we started to ask why we were not getting organised. While discussing such questions, the question of 'How is our organising perceived in Diyarbakır?' was worrying us. All of these discussions actually gave birth to Piramid LGBTT. (Ibid. p. 39)

Direct ties and a longer history with Turkey's broader LGBTI+ movement, in particular with *Kaos GL*, opened up the possibility of being involved in a wider network, primarily within Turkey. Murat, from Piramid LGBTT, said that the founding of Piramid LGBTT provided unprecedented visibility for the LGBTI+ struggle in Diyarbakır, and that it enabled them to make connections with NGOs. Piramid LGBTT was also involved in various aspects of the broader LGBTI+ movement in Turkey, such as a meeting on the union and workers' rights of LGBTI+ people in Ankara (*Kaos GL* [109] 2009, pp. 6–7).

In a 2010 issue of *Kaos GL* appeared another news piece about an LGBTI+ group in Diyarbakır, Hevjîn LGBT, which began publishing a bilingual periodical in Turkish and Kurdish (*Kaos GL* [113] 2010, p. 8). The first issue of *Hevjîn* was dedicated to the Kurdish journalist and writer Baki Koşar, who had been murdered in a hate crime in Istanbul in 2006, with the following text on the back cover: 'Baki Koşar, born in 1970 in Batman, had two oppressed identities under the pressure of the dominant ideology; he was [both] Kurdish and homosexual' (*Hevjîn* [1] 2010). In this first issue, the introduction asserted that the group's primary aim was to communicate and discuss its problems, which stemmed from the 'trauma' of being both Kurdish and homosexual

in Turkey (Ibid. p. 3). The fact that the pro-Kurdish party BDP (Peace and Democracy Party, 2008–14) included sexual orientation under discrimination in its party code increased the group's hopes (Ibid.).[5]

The first issue of the periodical published by Hevjîn included a piece by Kürşad Kahramanoğlu. His piece in the first issue, titled 'From Belfast to Diyarbakır', was highly relevant to the political condition in Turkey's Kurdistan. In this piece, Kahramanoğlu recalled helping to organise a gay and lesbian conference at Queen's University Belfast with the National Union of Students (NUS), which had initially been reluctant to organise such an event in the city. He remembered asking with excitement and fear at the NUS general meeting: 'If Belfast is a city of this country and Queen's University a part of this organisation, then what is the problem?' (*Hevjîn* [1] 2010, p. 8). Having convinced the NUS to go ahead with the conference, Kahramanoğlu and his friends went to see the duelling demonstrations outside Queen's University Belfast. On the one side, Northern Ireland's conservative and British nationalist Democratic Unionist Party members protested the meeting, chanting 'Save Ulster from sodomy!' (Ibid. p. 9). On the other side, Irish nationalist Sinn Féin supporters, leftists, students and trade unionists were counter-chanting 'Gay rights are human rights, long live human rights!' (Ibid. p. 9). The picture here clearly shows the alignment of conservative right-wing politics with homophobia, and the leftist Sinn Féin supporters as adopting and visibly supporting progressive politics at this moment, bringing together a constellation of students, trade unions and leftists more broadly.

After a successful conference, Kahramanoğlu and his two friends were invited to the secret Sinn Féin headquarters. There they were given an overview of the history of Sinn Féin and what they wanted to achieve, but Kahramanoğlu noted that they had not mentioned anything about sexual rights. He asked: 'What is Sinn Féin's policy regarding sexual liberty?' (Ibid. p. 9); this was followed by an uncomfortable silence. Kahramanoğlu and his friends were told that there had been no specific discussion of gay rights, but as the party was against all forms of discrimination, there would be 'complete non-discrimination against gay people' (Ibid. p. 9). In his piece in the periodical *Hevjîn*, Kahramanoğlu wrote that this was a positive and mature approach, which may have been because the party members perceived the LGBTI+ struggle as a 'struggle for liberation' similar to theirs, or because they

somehow understood the demand for LGBT rights as part of a 'struggle for all human rights' (Ibid. p. 9). This memory is significant in the Kurdish context, as the Kurdish movement was and is also criminalised but still reluctant to wholly support the LGBTI+ movement.[6] The same issue of *Hevjîn*, for instance, also included an interview with the then (pro-Kurdish) BDP MP Sebahat Tuncel, who said that she had received no negative responses from other party members following her submission of a parliamentary inquiry regarding LGBTI+ rights, because the Kurdish political party BDP had a stance against discrimination.[7] By giving examples from a conflict in the history of the UK and Ireland, Kahramanoğlu's piece not only suggested an approach to draw on – using human rights discourse within contexts of political conflicts as a means to call for the protection of LGBTI+ people – but also called for a broader anti-oppression politics. That this piece was published in Turkish, Kurdish and English strengthens its emphasis on the importance of communication with wider publics, including a Kurdish-speaking audience.

Conclusion

This chapter has opened up the question of how LGBTI+ movements engage in transnational conversations about conflicts and their actors. It does so by focusing on the first Kurdish LGBTI+ periodical *Hevjîn*, as well as the longer history of Turkey's LGBTI+ movement's engagement with and analyses of global conflicts and the Turkish nation-state. Exploring analyses by LGBTI+ groups during conflict is important because their analyses give us insights into wider and broader power structures in their specific contexts, histories and memories of violence, as well as into the possibilities of emancipatory political projects that can tackle right-wing authoritarian politics – in and beyond the specific contexts in which these movements find themselves. These analyses also make clear how LGBTI+ activists struggling for equality in different contexts recognise that their destinies are not separate from equality struggles taking place in other conflictual settings. This awareness – and more than this, active engagement through communication and story-telling – points, in my view, to a form of cosmopolitanism that is at once historical and valuable to contemporary activism: this queer cosmopolitan anti-authoritarianism shows quite sharply the limitations of mainstream gay rights activism, which fails to address histories of colonialism, broader and intersecting oppressive structures,

exacerbated either during conflicts or at times of a global rise in right-wing authoritarian constellations.

The Kurdish and LGBTI+ struggles have a lot to offer to global conversations about justice and rights, and engaging with the questions and analyses emerging from this particular context has the potential to broaden the horizons of comparative sociological analyses. An investment in a comparative critical perspective, as argued by Al-Ali, Altay and Galor in the introduction to this volume, is needed; such perspectives sharpen our understanding of the emancipatory potential of movements organised around gender and sexuality. Focusing on global analyses coming from conversations within situated knowledge production offers a more inclusive vision of justice and de-exceptionalises already stigmatised geographies. As the case-study of this chapter has shown, exploring grassroots conversations on global conflicts expands the queer of colour critique in novel directions and signposts promising research agendas for the future.

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Notes

1. In this chapter, I use 'LGBTI+' and 'queer' interchangeably since the predominant usage in these struggles in Turkey is 'LGBTI+'. The usage of 'LGBTI+' by local activists in the context of the Global South shows the continuing emancipatory political potential of the acronym 'LGBTI+'. In this chapter I use the acronym LGBTI+, which has been the predominant usage in Turkey's organised queer/LGBTI+ movements.
2. See also 'From converging roads to narrowing grounds: The struggle for peace by LGBTI+ and women's organizations in Turkey' (Bor, Daşlı and Alıcı 2021).
3. I am aware of the complicated history and relationship between the activists of these organisations and the active engagement of the recent Kurdish LGBTI+ organisation, Keskesor LGBTI+, with politics at present; however, due to the scope of this chapter, I am not able to discuss these issues.

4. *Kaos GL*, published since September 1994, is a magazine produced by one of Turkey's oldest LGBTI+ groups. The organisation and its magazine, both known by the same name, have had an explicitly political tone since their beginning (see Sandal-Wilson 2021b; Engindeniz 2019).
5. This inclusion was possible thanks to the longer connection between BDP (and its predecessors) and Turkey's broader LGBTI+ movement (see Çetin 2016; Sandal-Wilson 2021a) before a visible organised LGBTI+ movement emerged in Turkey's Kurdistan.
6. However, the close relationship between the pro-Kurdish HDP (and its predecessors) and Turkey's LGBTI+ movement should be noted (see Sandal-Wilson 2021a; Sandal 2016).
7. Sebahat Tuncel is an important figure in Turkey's political history in terms of both her politics regarding the Kurdish movement and her support for the LGBTI+ movement. Sebahat Tuncel was the first MP in Turkey's history to request a parliamentary inquiry into the status of LGBT citizens (Sandal 2016). In 2008, she was the only MP to greet the LGBT Rights Platform in the Turkish parliament, in which the platform reiterated its demand for the inclusion of equality in the constitution, having received 5,000 signatures (*Kaos GL* [103] 2008, p. 3). At the time of writing she was in prison for her political activities.

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PART IV

BOTTOM-UP INTERVENTIONS AND RESISTANCE

9

FEMINIST AND QUEER ACTION AND ART IN POLAND'S ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Tomasz Kitlinski and Pawel Leszkowicz

In 2015, following the electoral success of the far-right Law and Justice Party, Poland became an authoritarian country. This turn was additionally impacted by an especially oppressive religious fundamentalism: with almost 88 percent of Poles declaring themselves Roman Catholic, this dominant denomination becomes essential to national identity. Under the new ultra-nationalism and ultra-conservatism, hate speech and discriminatory politics have intensified, as evidenced by the almost total ban on abortion, introduced in 2020, and by the assaults on LGBTQ activists. The Law and Justice government is anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ rights, as indicated by the attempt to introduce 'LGBT-free zones' in 2020, among other measures.

Yet, a return to democracy remains possible. The fundamentalist politics of gender and sexuality that have overtaken Poland can be challenged. In this chapter, we argue for the potential and power of activism to impact change, exemplified by the queer feminist marches of the All-Polish Women's Strike, the campaigns defending refugee rights, as well as the support for contemporary public art that advocates for feminist and LGBTQ dissidence. Only nominally protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Polish LGBTQ citizens live in a volatile climate of culture war and openly homophobic discourses. In our analysis, we focus on some recent artworks and exhibitions that engage and counter homophobic and anti-feminist attitudes. We highlight

the interventions staged by activists and artists ('artivists') in public space and show how both artists and curators can increase the visibility of queer, feminist and refugee issues in the national and international context. Examining the artivist interventions in Poland between 2015 and 2023, we would like to support the key argument of this book on the centrality of gender and sexuality in authoritarian far-right politics. We understand queer feminist politics of resistance as an expression of solidarity among people, including especially women and minorities, who are discriminated against by heteronormative patriarchy. Similarly, we emphasise the role of artivism as a new effective mode of resistance to reclaim and democratise the public sphere from the bottom up.

Currently, democracy in Poland is majoritarian, incomplete or unfulfilled, neglecting, as it does, women's, LGBTQ and refugee rights. The images and actions under discussion here touch upon the deepest ailments, counter discrimination and create hope for a better and more just future, one where all groups are free from discrimination and governmental abuse. As a global phenomenon, 'artivism' can be considered the first new art form of the twentieth-first century (Weibel 2015, pp. 5–10). This form of protest art, which was already prominent in the Polish context of the 2020s, has been mobilised in support of performative democracy. In the Europe of the EU, a diversity of loves and a respect for and protection of queer rights co-exist with the old and persistent hatreds and prejudices against sexual and ethnic minorities. In Poland, as in Hungary, the politics of nativist heteronormative ultra-nationalism remains dominant, and the persistent old prejudices and forms of discrimination are still very much alive. In this chapter, we will explore whether feminist and queer cultural and activist initiatives, beyond being highly visible and effective, can truly change the agenda and the balance of power of a government defined and backed by military force, one increasingly influential since the Russian invasion in neighbouring Ukraine.

Polish Illiberal Democracy

A variety of terms have been used to describe the authoritarianism of the Law and Justice government, among them 'fascism', a term which, given its highly charged nature, we must discuss here in more detail. Many political and scholarly commentators use it to describe the recent increase in hate speech and the ultra-nationalism of such countries as Poland, Hungary and Russia.

Social anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, for instance, has written about the fascist tendency of the nationalist far right in Poland (Wodecka 2016), and the well-known poet Adam Zagajewski has warned (in the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza)*: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, Fascism is near' (Zagajewski 2016). In her book *Fascism: A Warning* (2018), Madeleine Albright has included contemporary Poland in her analysis of the rise of fascist politics globally during the era of President Trump. Similarly, the Polish feminist philosopher Ewa Majewska has seen the gendered biopolitical rule of the Polish government, based on the triad of church, state and family, in which government authority is above the law, as clearly fascist (Majewska 2021, pp. 15–17). Tokarska-Bakir, Zagajewski, Albright and Majewska all deploy the term 'fascist' to describe the authoritarian politics of the Law and Justice government and its leader Jarosław Kaczyński.

This authoritarianism evokes both dream and reality of the nineteenth-century worship of the nation, expressed in such terms as Greater Hungary, Sacred Russia, Make America Great Again, or Proud Poland. Authoritarian structures and mindsets run very deep in Poland, a consequence of its history, first as a dominant power, when Poland invaded Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and, subsequently, as a subject nation, when Poland was invaded by Prussia, Austria and Russia in the nineteenth century, and by Germany and the USSR in the twentieth. In these contexts, religion is turned into a useful ideology. After all, fascism constitutes a false religion, or, according to Emilio Gentile, a political religion in which a new model of the human being is born (Gentile 2006, p. 20). George L. Mosse has linked this kind of fascism to hyper-masculinisation and to an emphasis on homosocial relations, coupled with discrimination against homosexuality (Mosse 1998, p. 155).

Thus, despite our occasional use of the word 'fascism' to describe the political situation in Poland, in most instances of our analysis we prefer the terms 'authoritarianism' or the 'failure' or 'erosion' of liberal democracy for their precision. Particularly pertinent to our discussion is the notion of 'illiberal democracy', as popularised by Fareed Zakaria (1997), since the Polish government, although democratically elected, ignores or changes constitutional rules, limits civil liberties and deploys police violence to attack the rights of minorities and refugees.

According to Timothy Garton Ash (2001, p. 25), Poland was widely viewed as a success story of the post-Communist transition to capitalism, joining NATO in 1999 and then the EU in 2004. Now, more than three decades after the collapse of communism, Poland's recent history is seen differently, as this transition has led to the current authoritarian government.

The hegemony of neo-liberalism, with the privatisation of public services and the attendant spike in social inequality between 2007 and 2015, has led to a widespread disappointment among Poland's population in the former centre-right-leaning liberal government. What followed were the far-right results of the 2015 election, which brought the Law and Justice Party to power. The new regime quickly monopolised the three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial. Since then, the party has jeopardised the Constitutional Tribunal, purged the state media, clamped down on progressive NGOs with false accusations of financial irregularities and rejected Syrian refugees as non-Christian, EU quotas notwithstanding. The Law and Justice Party has also taken over all cultural and educational institutions, which they have used to broadcast propaganda, institute censorship and promote 'patriotic education' controlled by the Science and Education Minister Przemysław Czarnek, a religious fundamentalist.

Primary and secondary schools alike impart patriotic education. Paramilitary organisations are vigorously promoted. Progressive university lecturers who teach Gender Studies may find themselves at odds with the government (Kim and Lis 2017). Academic freedom has been curtailed, and access to free higher education is under threat. Within the context of the new political structure, extreme nationalism and Catholic fundamentalism, antisemitism, misogyny, homophobia and xenophobia have increased. The seductive appeal of belonging and community identity holds sway in contemporary Poland, where populist ethno-nationalism is becoming *de rigueur*, together with attempts to clamp down on civil liberties and cultural pluralism.

Especially as the concordat between the state and the Vatican guarantees the teaching of Catholic doctrine in Poland's public schools, fundamentalism – religion turned ideology – has grown into a kind of cult. Politicians use and abuse religion, which is manipulated as ideology. The religion professed by the ruling party and supported by influential legal organisations such as Ordo Iuris and Life and Family has little to do with 'turn the other cheek' or 'love thy neighbour' Christianity. In the words of Henri Bergson, it is not an open

and dynamic faith, but a closed, static, tribal pseudo-religion (Bergson 2003, p. 25). Thus, one of the pressing public policy issues in Poland is the liberalisation of religion. In this regard, non-integralist, faith-based activism, rather than the fundamentalism of today's Poland, a country that has transitioned from a false Communism to a false Christianity, has great potential to make a positive contribution.

This raises a parallel question as to whether the current government has improved the lives of its constituents: the poor, the working class and people from the provincial cities. Basic income has increased, and the government has also introduced a substantial and much-welcomed child subsidy of 500 zlotys (120 Euro) per month per child. As Remi Adekoya has remarked in *The Guardian*, no previous Polish government ever offered such a generous social welfare program, one that responded to the economic marginalisation of many Poles (Adekoya 2016). This focus on poverty and social exclusion is, however, nothing more than a political calculation designed to overcome the growing hostility to authoritarian rule.

This decline in democracy has led a significant part of Polish society to join in a form of 'performative democracy', participating in demonstrations, social media, contemporary public art and theatre and social movements, in particular the Committee for the Defence of Democracy, the All-Poland Women's Strike, as well as other women's and LGBTQ rights organisations. This civil opposition is taking place within the context of a stagnating economy exacerbated by the Ukraine war, political scandals and corruption, with an election pending in the autumn of 2023. There are hopes that the Law and Justice government, increasingly compromised, will be defeated. Although this prospect is certainly encouraging, it would be overly optimistic to speak now of the rebirth of liberal democracy. For the time being, Poland's reality remains bleak.

Queers, women and minorities find themselves, with regard to the state, 'beyond the pale'. There is no same-sex marriage or partnership, no protection from hate speech, nor any form of recognition for non-heteronormative families or parenthood. Polish LGBTQ couples who have married abroad in other EU countries and applied for the recognition of their marriages by Polish courts are now blacklisted as law-breakers. Anti-abortion-ban protesters who are teachers have been called before disciplinary committees. Censorship has returned, and repression of feminists and queer activists by the police is on the rise.

The 2022 report *Cultural Control, Censorship and Suppression of the Arts in Poland* from the Artistic Freedom Initiative states: 'Artists exhibiting in Poland today must contend with the possibility that the majority of media outlets could construe even a mild critique of Catholicism, nationalism, racism, sexism or discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community as an affront to the Church or the Polish nation' (Sethi et al. 2022, p. 9). This report lists four major tools that the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage have used successfully to limit the freedom of artistic expression and to force artists and cultural producers into self-censorship. First is the investigation and prosecution of artists making anti-nationalist or anti-Catholic works. Second comes the bureaucratic take-over of state and local arts institutions through the installation of right-wing party loyalists as directors. Third, state media is ordered to foster conservative cultural narratives and denigrate non-conforming art. Fourth, the ministries strengthen non-state actors, such as right-wing organisations and ultra-orthodox religious groups, which actively intimidate dissident artists. To enforce these oppressive regulations the government takes recourse to a blasphemy law, a defamation law and a Holocaust law. The country's archaic blasphemy law punishes creative expression directed against the Catholic Church. The defamation law criminalises the defamation of the Polish nation, the president of Poland, national symbols and public officials. The Holocaust law forbids assigning responsibility to the Polish state or people for any crimes committed during the Holocaust, and it targets both academic historians and cultural producers who expose or engage with the Polish participation in the genocide.

In fact, the government and associated groups conduct a form of warfare against dissident artists and activists, deploying legal measures to curb their impact. This has blighted artistic production and inaugurated an era of government-curated arts and culture. The government has sought to re-orient culture to foreground the glorification of the Polish nation, the heroism of ethnic Poles, the primacy of Catholic values and the centrality of the patriarchal family unit. Artists and culture workers who reject these values struggle to find work opportunities, are subjected to legal and financial repercussions, face the abuse of government-controlled media outlets and are often threatened with physical violence (Sethi et al. 2022, pp. 9–12). Despite government censorship, repression and threats, protest art still thrives in public spaces,

with performative interventions taking place in a few independent cultural institutions that are not controlled by the Ministry of Culture, but rather by local municipal administrative bodies.

The Art of Mass Protests as a Queer Feminist DEMO-GRAPHIC

The Women's Strike protests in Poland (2020–21), organised by the All-Poland Women's Strike, were mass anti-government demonstrations begun in October 2020, in reaction to a ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal that tightened the law on abortion. The ruling made almost all abortions illegal, including cases in which the foetus indicates a severe disability or an incurable life-threatening disease. Previously, under a compromise in force since 1993, abortion was banned except in cases of rape or incest, if the woman's life was in danger, or if the foetus was damaged. Under the new proposal, abortion on medical grounds is also illegal.

In the past, as result of mass protests organised in Poland and many other EU countries in support of Polish women, Poland's parliament rejected plans for a total abortion ban. With the 'black protests' of 2018–19 – so called because of the black mourning clothes worn by the protestors – tens of thousands of women delivered an embarrassing setback to the conservative government and the Catholic church, achieving a major success for civil society. In 2020, however, during the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in authoritarianism that it permitted, the government criminalised abortion, including abortions on medical grounds.

Despite the COVID-lockdown, the black protests were the largest that the country had seen since the anti-Communist Solidarity movement of the 1980s. They have been well-documented in photography and film by the artivists of the Archive of Public Protests (APP), a semi-open platform for distributing images connected with social and political tensions in Poland from 2015 until today (APP [2023]). Yet, the marches in which millions of citizens participated, both in the streets and through social media, have not managed to change the position of the ultra-conservative government, supported by powerful religious fundamentalist organisations. The abortion ban has been retained, and many of the protesters were prosecuted or threatened by the police. For the most part, Polish society does not support the restrictive abortion law, which clearly establishes the anti-democratic tenor of the government's politics.

The significant change in popular opinion was brought about by the social movement that emerged in the wake of the women's mass protest. This movement – a queer and feminist alliance – is a social phenomenon that expresses itself on the barricades with rainbow flags and cardboard art. Over the past thirty years, the partnership of the feminist and LGBTQ movements for the liberalisation of Poland has become more political. Throughout the 1990s, during the country's transition to democracy, the feminist and LGBTQ movements grew together as a liberal force in opposition to a re-emerging heteronormative patriarchy underpinned by the re-emerging conservative Catholic church, which had been suppressed under Communism. Feminist and queer projects thus have tended to run parallel to, and co-existent with, the human rights agenda. The collaboration of the feminist and queer movements, united in a common struggle for equal rights and participation, has remained an essential force for change into the 2020s. Although together they have had a greater impact in the social and political realms, as well as in media and academia, their combined force has not proven strong enough to overcome anti-abortion legislation or to legalise same-sex partnerships. Both movements remain on the dissident side of mainstream politics and united in the face of the common enemy found in right-wing and far-right governments (Kitlinski 2014, p. 125).

For this reason, the splits and conflicts in the feminist and queer movements have not been as contentious in Poland as in some Western democracies. Neo-liberal competition does not dominate, allowing for strong solidarity between feminists and queers. It would be wrong to see this as a merely reactive phenomenon: these are people seizing power in a positive fashion, citizens reinventing themselves and reinventing society. The Law and Justice government's gender politics culture war, then, decidedly targets a queer feminism – hence the oppositional ideas and slogans of the 2020–21 mass protests. Significantly, the founder and leader of the All-Poland Women's Strike Marta Lempart is openly lesbian.

The women's strikes brought large numbers of people into the streets, along with banners of various kinds and a sea of slogans mostly written on pieces of cardboard; thus, we give these productions the name 'cardboard art'. In recent decades, cardboard art has accompanied protests in many countries, but it has gained particular visibility in 2020s Poland. An authentic example of grassroots expression, the anti-aesthetic social art practice of cardboard art has abandoned the gallery to appear on every street, on its own terms, wherever

it chooses. Cardboard art displays new sentiments in a new language of anger and resistance, expressing a multiplicity of opinions, a multiplicity of lives, identities, inspirations and emotions. It is the constitution of a new democracy that is being written everywhere by everybody. Democracy under threat has found a way to express itself, a way that involves many individuals speaking out in different manners – directly, openly and without fear – in an un-curated mountain that signals dissent, humanity, humour and hope.

Cardboard art was initially born out of the LGBTQ demonstrations against the Polish state's campaign of harassment, hate speech and scapegoating against queer people. This anti-aesthetic art is anonymous, and rather than being ascribed to a single author, it is the product of a social group. Beyond being linked to a group, however, cardboard art has also evolved along individual lines, through the work of gay artist Paweł Żukowski, who is known for creating inscriptions on cardboard and banners for Pride parades in support of LGBTQ rights. In the spring of 2020, during the first COVID-lockdown in Warsaw, he gained fame with a series of cardboard boxes, displayed in his windows, inscribed with slogans such as 'We can handle it' or 'We demand tests' – not only as a form of encouragement, but also to criticise inept government policies in the face of the first wave of the pandemic. At least in Poland, the revival of cardboard protest art is thus queer and also necessarily politically engaged, as it emerged as a response to the oppressive lockdown rules of the Law and Justice government.

Cardboard art created in the streets has been collected and documented for the first time by the Labirynt (the Labyrinth), a public contemporary art gallery in Lublin. (Another cultural organisation from the city, Brama Grodzka, Teatr NN, is also collating these materials for the historical record.) In the winter of 2020–21, the Labirynt mounted an exhibition titled *You Will Never Walk Alone*, dedicated to the visual material accompanying the Women's Strike demonstrations. This was the first exhibition documenting the public artwork of the civic uprising against religious fundamentalism. It is significant that the exhibition took place in Lublin, in eastern Poland, a conservative province at the epicentre of the conflict and a declared 'LGBT-free zone'. The Labirynt's main exhibition space (of 400 square metres) displayed a selection of the material that accompanied the strikes: banners, slogans, cardboard boxes, stickers, graphics, posters and also photographic and video documentation of the demonstrations. A large multi-media installation surrounded the viewer.

Figure 9.1 Exhibition *You Will Never Walk Alone* at Gallery Labirynt, Lublin, 2020. Source: Photography Wojciech Pacewicz, courtesy Galleria Labirynt.

Figure 9.2 Exhibition *You Will Never Walk Alone* at Gallery Labirynt, Lublin, 2020. Source: Photography Wojciech Pacewicz, courtesy Galleria Labirynt.

On the central wall, a mass of posters and cartoons with spectacular political slogans formed a colourful mosaic of signs and words –visually impressive and resonant with meaning.

You Will Never Walk Alone was introduced by an enormous banner reading 'Free Poland'. Visitors were also welcomed by the sculpture of a huge fist with the iconic symbol of the Women's Strike – a red lightning bolt – created by the graphic designer Aleksandra Jesionowska. These acts of political rebellion, protest and rage organised by the Women's Strike incorporate a significant element of humour, at times intentionally vulgar humour; after all, the issue concerns sexual politics. In an attitude of mockery, another banner carried the inscription 'Laughter at the enemies of the homeland'. The colourful wall of cardboard boxes, displaying slogans at once comic and tragic, surprised the viewers with messages such as: 'My uterus is not a chapel', 'We fear to fuck', 'Only anal is left', 'Piss off', 'Faggots with women', 'I don't want to be a coffin' and 'Enough punches below the belt'. Most of the slogans were in Polish, with a few in English, to include the international audience. What all these materials have in common is their raw graffiti style and their use of slogans worthy of the most talented copy-writers.

The slogans, banners, posters and cardboard boxes produced for the demonstrations together form an authentic grassroots folk art, a new kind of public art blossoming in 2020s Poland. Douglas Crimp theorised this art with the term DEMO-GRAPHIC,[1] from the Greek words 'demos', meaning people – a community of free citizens – and 'graphikos', meaning drawing and writing (Crimp 1990). The material of which this art is made – used or recycled paper – is raw and poor, almost abject, a quality symbolic of marginalisation. Yet, as an art form, the cardboard is transformed by its creators into imaginative, diverse and visually effective works. The DEMO-GRAPHIC art of the Women's Strike uses signs and words creatively, combining image and text: there is no single author, but at the same time the art is very personal. This collective, anonymous work conveys the poignant, private voice of women declaring 'You will never walk alone', or 'We want to live, not just survive'. Each message is created by one person, while forming part of a wave of signs joined in a single utterance of queer feminist protest.

However powerful and highly visible on an international level, through conventional news outlets and on social media, the demonstrations have failed to influence the government or stop the assault on reproductive and

LGBTQ rights. In other words, despite the performative power of the protests, it is important to acknowledge this failure in order to learn and to effect real change in the future. Cardboard protest art – recorded on abject paper – reflects the marginalisation and rejection faced by queer feminist opposition that confronts the power of the state, its mass media and police. Yet, we continue to affirm the role of civil society and the function of the protests while in despair over its weakness against the governmental forces. Even if, so far at least, women's and queer rights have not been won, the mere act of revolt sustains performative democracy.

Queer Artivism

The queer exhibition *We Are People* (2020), like the feminist *You Will Never Walk Alone* (2020–21) a few months later, presented a new model for exhibitions propounded by Waldemar Tatarczuk, director of the Labirynt Gallery. No longer just the art is socially and politically engaged, but also the style of curation is understood as an intervention: curatorial activism becomes a form of direct action utilising a public art institution. *We Are People* and *You'll Never Walk Alone* were organised in the space of a month, as immediate reactions to the events provoked by the government during the period of COVID restrictions. Due to the pandemic, the exhibitions were attended by only around 900 people each, although many more engaged with the exhibitions on social media.

We Are People included works by over a hundred artists who addressed the issues of the LGBTQ community in Poland. An 'interventionist' group show, *We Are People* was mounted in response to the words of Andrzej Duda, the Law and Justice president of Poland, who, during his successful re-election campaign in 2020, said of the non-heteronormative community: 'These are not people, this is an ideology'. Thus, he declared queer people and queer rights – as is common on the far right – to be the creation of a foreign ideology, one worse than Communism (BBC 2020). In contrast, the title *We Are People* emphasised the humanity of those despised and vilified by the politicians in power.

A key work in the *We Are People* exhibition was a series of photographs by Bart Staszewski, the most prominent contemporary LGBTQ artivist in Poland, acclaimed for his use of visual media to counter hate speech and the lawsuits that ensue from his interventions. The series, titled *Zones* (2020; Figure 9.3),

Figure 9.3 Bart Staszewski, *Zones* (2019–20), photograph series, exhibition *We Are People* at Gallery Labirynt, Lublin, 2020. Source: Photography Wojciech Pacewicz, courtesy Galleria Labirynt.

features some of the eighty municipalities in southeastern Poland designated as 'LGBT-free zones' – free of so-called LGBT ideology. Staszewski, who is from this conservative region, took photographs of queer people living in the cities and villages purported to be LGBT-free. His portraits show these individuals standing alone by empty roads, outside their small towns, posed next to the road sign of their locality, to which he attached his own yellow 'LGBT-free zone' sign, written in various languages.

Zones captures not only the atmosphere of the small towns whose local governments have adopted an LGBT-free designation, but also the experience of life there for non-heteronormative people. The artivist noted that it was not easy to find individuals willing to participate in his project, so paralysing was their fear. However, he and those portrayed overcame their fears, deciding to trust in the power of the images.

In the photographs, the subjects are portrayed like hitchhikers on the outskirts of towns. They stand in the foreground, their faces a particular point of focus, with their gaze directed at the viewer. One can look into their eyes! Their

pose is a performance of their presence; they demand their rights, here and now. They are alone in a transitional zone, within the city and at the same time outside the city limits. Their status is borderline. The photographs can be read as psychological portraits that reflect the experience of living and growing up in localities where the authorities pursue a homophobic agenda, where the so-called elites are motivated by hatred and superstition. Staszewski has employed a simple strategy: he replaces the Law and Justice party's homophobic construct of 'LGBT ideology' with the real people who are targeted by this propaganda.

Staszewski's activist project – while courageous and, most importantly, effective – is not optimistic. His subjects are not smiling, and the world around them is cold, devoid of empathy. This coldness emanates from the photographs, from their grey tones and their settings on empty roads. There is no attempt to use aesthetics to lessen the horror of their existence. The people simply persist – their rebellion silent, the photographs their only voice. This is the power of artivism: the power of the image! The ideological wars have exhausted language. Arguments lead nowhere. What remains is the power of images and the magic of the human face. For there is no surface more interesting, more expressive, or more intensely affective than the face of a human being. The photographs of *Zones* rely on this power; their profound humanism, the source of their popularity, stems from the consent of the portrayed, from their desire to expose their face. The human face becomes a shield against dehumanisation.

Another poignant kind of representation in the *Zones* series consists of the landscapes devoid of people, where we see only signs with the names of the cities and the artist's interventionist yellow placard. The majority of the photographs in *Zones* is in this vein; they represent the localities where no one dares to reveal themselves, where homophobia has prevailed, where LGBTQ people have been erased and where fear reigns. The photographs devoid of people are the most vivid depiction of these LGBT-free zones and as such serve to witness their history. In the future, they will be an objective testimony to this discriminatory era, a record of the Polish localities that excluded their citizens on the basis of gender and sexual orientation. They show the geography of discrimination and document the intolerance of twenty-first-century Poland.

The *Zones* series was an instantaneous hit on social media and politically effective as well, reaching all the way to the European Parliament, which condemned the municipalities, fined them and passed a resolution against the

discrimination of LGBTQ people in Poland. Staszewski has declared: 'I want to show the monster that the politicians are fighting with and that we are not an abstract being, an ideology, but real flesh and blood people who must live in these places' (Tidey 2020). In response, a number of MPs from the Law and Justice councils in these towns submitted a request to local prosecutors to investigate Staszewski under a law against tampering with street signs or defaming Poland. Since then, Staszewski has won all the cases brought against him by the various municipalities, and a few of the city councils have even retracted their LGBT-free zone declarations.

All the incidents described above – the legal battles, the homophobic perseverance of the far right and the international infamy of 'LGBT-free' zones – illustrate the degree of political conflict over LGBTQ rights in Poland. At the same time, Polish society itself has become more positive towards LGBTQ rights. The LGBT-free zones were initially designated in reaction to a 2019 decision by the mayor of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski, a liberal politician from the opposition party Civic Platform, to sign a declaration of tolerance that promised to introduce measures to support LGBTQ individuals throughout the capital's institutions and that, in particular, would promote anti-discrimination curricula in schools. This initiative has drawn wide public support, and polls indicate a growing acceptance of and backing for same-sex partnership legislation. A record number of Equality Parades took place in 2019 and attracted large crowds, although some of them were violently attacked, particularly in the eastern city of Białystok, evocative of the kind of violence prevalent before 2020.

Polish society, for the most part, is against the government's authoritarian measures, yet the government is not backing down. During the period of COVID restrictions, the state had a legal basis to use its power to intimidate and arrest feminist and queer activists for continuing with pro-choice and anti-discriminatory actions. The most prominent case is that of Margot Szustowicz, a non-binary activist, who was repeatedly arrested and charged for the destruction of a van with homophobic slogans and for draping rainbow flags over national and religious monuments. The Polish state considers the display of a rainbow flag in proximity to religious or national monuments an offence (Santora 2020). Margot's imprisonment – as it became widely known – in 2020 led to large protests in Warsaw, which in turn resulted in a police crackdown

with arbitrary police violence and numerous arrests. Detainees complained of police violence during detention, being beaten in police cars and deprived of food and water (Kułakowski 2020). After the intervention of MPs and the ombudsperson, those arrested were given access to lawyers, who helped to secure their release. Margot, on hunger strike in prison, was released after three months due to a successful legal appeal.[2]

In the 2020s, Margot has become an icon for Polish society, her image featured in Polish art and pop music (Fortuna 2020), and a popular figure in the national and international media (Savage 2020). The anarchist queer collective 'Stop Bullshit' was founded, with the aim of undertaking performative actions in public spaces to counter homophobia and transphobia. Margot, a self-declared Christian, has vowed to save Christianity in Poland from the Catholic church, the government and associated fundamentalist organisations. The most disturbing aspect of Margot's case is the violence of the police, something that democratic Poland had never experienced before, a brutality which has more fully shown its face during the refugee crises on the Belarusian border.

Activism and Art against the Government Abuse of Refugees

So far, we have argued for a dissident turn in Polish contemporary art, the dissidents in this case being the queer feminist artivists under threat from the ultraconservative Law and Justice government (which was re-elected in 2020) and especially from this government's Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Ministry of Science and Education. There are two trends at play in the dissident turn: the first, queer feminist art, which had already been flourishing in Poland for a few years; the second includes works and practices inspired by the protest movement that developed in the autumn of 2021, during the refugee pushbacks at the Polish-Belarusian border forming the eastern edge of the EU.

Since coming to power in 2015, the Law and Justice party has exploited ordinary people's fears of queers and refugees to institute its nationalistic politics. The rejection of any form of sexual or ethnic/racial otherness proved a successful political strategy during the 2020 re-election campaign. The inhospitable migrant politics was manifested by Poland's refusal, along with Hungary, to take in Syrian refugees under a 2015 EU agreement to distribute asylum-seekers throughout member countries (Cienski 2017). It intensified in

2021, when an influx of tens of thousands of people – mainly refugees from war-devastated countries such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Iraq – arrived from Belarus at Poland's border. Their arrival had been orchestrated by the Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko, who trafficked migrants to disrupt the EU. The Polish government considered his actions a form of hybrid warfare and closed the border, building a wall and establishing a military no-go zone, refusing to allow humanitarian organisations to help the migrants stranded in the freezing forests. Polish border guards, supported by the military, denied the migrants the right to lodge a lawful asylum claim and used violent measures to push the people, often sick and dying, back into Belarus. Polish officials did not permit journalists, doctors and NGOs access to the border to bring food, water and medicine, or to provide basic shelter to the migrants. We, the authors of this paper, personally witnessed the border crisis. We drove a medical doctor to Usnarz Gorny to help Afghan refugees who were stranded and seriously ill. However, we were denied access by Polish border guards, who held the migrants at gunpoint.

As the crisis unfolded, the government criminalised administering humanitarian aid, despite the thousands of people protesting the inhumane treatment of migrants. Despite the fact that their government prohibited them to bring relief, ordinary Polish citizens formed special partisan groups to do so. The most important group was *Grupa Granica,* an informal coalition of activists established to provide aid. The situation at the border became more critical during the winter months, when hundreds of people for weeks were stranded in freezing conditions (Tondo and Mamo 2022). The crisis continued in 2023: it is estimated that so far forty people died, and 50,000, among them families with small children, were subjected to brutal pushbacks by the Polish border forces. Disturbingly, the EU has supported the Polish government's actions on the Poland-Belarus border, so pervasive is the fear of refugees throughout the EU.

In the autumn of 2021, in reaction to the inhumane and often lethal treatment of the migrants by the Polish government and military, activists organised a number of marches and protests. Once again, the activists joined forces with artists, the most important of whom was the feminist artist Joanna Rajkowska, creator of the project *Refugee DIY Flag* (2021; Figure 9.4) which became a symbol of the demonstrations. Integrating an individual art practice with a

Figure 9.4 Joanna Rajkowska, *Refugee DIY Flag*, 2021. Source: Courtesy Joanna Rajkowska.

collective work initiative, *Refugee DIY Flag* was a collaboration with participants in the STOP TORTURE AT THE BORDER! march in Warsaw on 17 October 2021. Rajkowska created flags from a thermal blanket consisting of a lightweight layer of insulation material – gold on one side, silver on the other – which recalls the blankets of the same material supplied to refugees. Visible on one side was the printed outline of a refugee child traced from a photograph. Both visually striking and practical, the thermal blanket can be taped easily along one edge to a pole or stick. According to the artist, the flags demonstrate empathy and solidarity with struggling refugees everywhere, but particularly with those on the Polish-Belarusian border at that moment (Rajkowska 2021). The flags were present at many protests demanding an immediate end to the illegal pushbacks of refugees; they were also emblematic of the anger, resistance and dissent of civil society against the Law and Justice government and its use of vulnerable people as a weapon – a behaviour no different from that of the Belarusian dictator.

For her next protest work, Rajkowska went further and created a public sculpture dedicated to the refugees barred from crossing the border. Titled

Figure 9.5 Joanna Rajkowska, *Sorry*, 2022. Source: Courtesy Joanna Rajkowska, the Wielkopolska Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts and the VOX-Artis Foundation.

Sorry,[3] the dissident yet empathic monument was erected in a public square in Poznan in the summer of 2022 (Figure 9.5). The 25-tonne sculpture consists of a high concrete wall topped with shards of glass, recalling the walls found in guarded border areas. The sharp glass conveys aggression, as well as the willingness to use violence. Viewed from ground level, the labyrinth-like sculpture forms a brutal physical barrier, impossible to cross and designed to cause harm. When seen from above, the wall spells out the word 'sorry', an apology from the artist and many Poles to the desperate refugees on whom the Law and Justice government has inflicted a terrible fate.

As Rajkowska has explained, 'the *Sorry* project was born of the feeling that since the Holocaust, we, as a community, have not experienced a more difficult moment testing our maturity, responsibility and solidarity'. The artist compares the mistreatment of refugees, particularly refugees from Africa and Asia, at the EU borders to genocide. This comparison indicates that Rajkowska intended her work to be a kind of anti-monument, commemorating not heroism, but the shameful acts of human history (Rajkowska 2022).

Body art has also been used to call attention to the Polish government's illegal immigration policies. Some artists have used their body to perform an act of sacrifice in an identification with human suffering, a masochistic tendency of body art that emerged in the 1960s at the time of the Vietnam War (O'Dell 1998, pp. 1–10); unfortunately, these practices seem to be all too topical today, in light of the injustices of the global discrimination against refugees.

One searingly memorable action took place at a performance art festival, the Festival of Naked Forms at the Gdansk Academy of Fine Arts, in October 2021. One of Poland's most radical artists, Anna Kalwajtys, gave her performance on 6 October (Figure 9.6), a day when the Academy of Fine Arts was surrounded by students and faculty members protesting the pushbacks at the border. We, the authors of this article, participated in the protest and witnessed the event. The description below is our own testimony of the experience.

The performance began peacefully, with Anna Kalwajtys stripping naked and painting her body red. In a gesture of hospitality, she served bread with

Figure 9.6 Anna Kalwajtys, performance at the Festival of Naked Forms, the Gdansk Academy of Fine Arts, 6 October 2021. Source: Photography Pawel Leszkowicz.

oil to the audience, seated in a circle. Kalwajtys, still naked, poured oil on her hair, then took hold of some red-and-white caution tape, and with that tape embarked on a long walk, followed by the spectators. First, she wrapped the tape around the interiors of the academy, then proceeded out into the streets heading towards the heart of Gdansk, a well-known tourist area. Naked and barefoot, despite the penetratingly cold October day, she continued her walk all the way down the main thoroughfare, Piwna Street, to arrive at the monumental gothic church of St. Mary's Basilica. Rather than going inside, she went around the building, wrapping it with caution tape. As she walked, she shouted in a voice of desperation: 'We don't have any money, we don't have any food'! After circling the basilica, Kalwajtys returned to the academy building, completing the performance on the patio. She made meditative cleansing gestures to close her action, exuding trauma and pain.

The simplicity of Anna Kalwajtys's performance is an expression of pure emotional power. The most important elements of the performance are the confrontation of a naked woman with the cold public sphere and the interaction of the artist with the audience, including many random passers-by. The passers-by stood still to film the artist and seemed to contemplate her walk; no one laughed or disturbed her; their reactions were serious, neither aggressive nor accusatory. Fortunately, the police were not there to arrest her for public nudity. The artist covered her breasts with red paint, and her body from the waist down, leading people to read the performance as an abortion ban protest. However, the performance clearly referred to the refugee crisis and the student protest taking place at that moment: media reports about the events at the border and the ongoing student protest, as well as the artist's poignant monotone cries of 'no money, no food' clearly referred to the tragic fate of the refugees. Kalwajtys's performance is the essence of body art: an action, here and now, that transports spectators to another dimension – an authentic art of transformation. There can be no better demonstration of an artist identifying her body with the suffering of others – a forceful rebuke to those in power who have caused so much harm and violence.

The Polish government's treatment of refugees on the Belarus border returns us to our discussion of fascism above, and to Madeleine Albright's *Fascism: A Warning* (2018). According to Albright, '[a] fascist is someone who claims to speak for a whole nation or group, is utterly unconcerned with the rights of others and is willing to use violence and whatever other means are

necessary to achieve the goals he or she might have' (Albright 2018, pp. 7–8). The Polish Law and Justice government's attitude to refugees, then, seems to confirm their fascist tendency. The denial of refugees' rights is closely linked to other discriminatory laws based on deep-seated prejudice and xenophobia. Especially disturbing is the racist character of their policy. Racism seemed to play a definitive role in the government's closing of the border, as the African, Asian and Middle Eastern migrants are not white and mostly not Christian.

This leaves us to question the attitude of Polish society as a whole towards migrants and refugees. While the outlook remains generally ambiguous, the societal attitude towards Ukrainian refugees, in contrast to that of the government, appears to be more positive. While the Polish government denied the right to asylum to non-white refugees and migrants, it did grant temporary protection to 1.5 million Ukrainians escaping the war. With the sudden, overwhelming influx of these refugees in the past year, numerous Poles spontaneously welcomed and housed hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, mainly women and children (Kostrzyński 2023), often in their own family homes. The government, in fact, has been highly ineffective in helping the Ukrainian refugees once they cross the border. The massive humanitarian support for stranded foreigners indicates that Polish society does not share the government's xenophobia. It is unclear, however, if these same individuals who assisted white Christian Ukrainians would be equally generous with migrants from Africa and the Arab world. Yet, the willingness of individual Polish citizens to extend hospitality to the refugees trapped on the Belarus border, in spite of the government's official order to the border guards to refuse asylum and push them back (October 2021), reveals that the Law and Justice government does not truly reflect societal attitudes. These individual initiatives, combined with the numerous NGOs working with refugees, would seem to indicate that millions of people feel truly *sorry* and that they are ashamed of their illiberal government.

The Hopeful Action of Civil Society

Refugee, feminist and LGBTQ artivism in Poland reclaims, reinvents and queers the public sphere. Thus, migrants' rights and the queer feminist mobilisation of the culture of protest can be explored in light of Hannah Arendt's philosophy of action and of the public realm. Her ideas of action are especially enlightening and crucial for the activist perspective.

In her book *The Human Condition* (1958), Arendt has developed a theory of action, in which she investigates the three categories of the *vita activa* (active life): labour, work and action. Action, which interests us here, is 'revelatory' for Arendt, in that those engaged in action disclose their essential being to others. Two important conditions of action are 'natality', the capacity that all humans have to begin anew, and 'plurality', meaning that we are all equal, yet unique, individuals living together in the world. In order to be truly human, in the sense of *vita activa*, it is essential for us to be with others. For Arendt, denying the ability to act reduces us to something less than human. Thus, humans are precarious beings with a powerful ability to act in new ways (Arendt 1998, pp. 8–9). These ideas are crucial to an understanding of Arendtian action in relation to the concepts of art and civil society that we are engaging here.

The philosopher Richard J. Bernstein has compared Arendt's notion of action to the artistic phenomenon of action painting (Bernstein 1996, p. 34). By the same token, we would apply Arendt's notion of action to artivist campaigns and demonstrations. In the Arendtian sense, queer and feminist initiatives strive for action as a new beginning (as can be seen in Hannah Arendt's writings on St Augustine) and as *constitutio libertatis* (the attempt to establish a public realm where political freedom would be guaranteed for all); herein, in our view, lies hope for democracies in crisis. Arendt has prioritised promise as action dependent 'on plurality, on the presence and acting of others' (Arendt 1998, p. 237). Arendtian action brings a new existential beginning and entails political agency. As Margaret Canovan (1998, p. xvi) has commented, for Arendt 'human beings are creatures who act in the sense of starting things and setting off trains of events'. Julia Kristeva (2001, p. 13) has gone even further and understood 'Arendt's concept of human life as a political action'. Seyla Benhabib (1996, p. 197) has called attention to 'the radical discovery of the link between action, narration, and interpretation'[4] in Arendt's philosophy. Arendt's concept of action is then a narrative, interpretative and existential; life itself is action, or, to paraphrase Socrates, a life worth living is an activist life. Action constitutes a communicative, transforming interaction which produces social change.

Hannah Arendt (1998, p. 246) has called action the one miracle-working faculty of man that can evoke hope. According to her philosophical scheme, action can be reconciled with the notion of natality and plurality. As to the latter, she has specified (Arendt 1998, p. 7) that 'action, the only activity that goes

on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality'. In Kristeva's (2001, p. 89) view, natality implies that everyone is a unique newcomer to the earth and hence 'a political action that would be the equivalent of a birth and would offer shelter for our strangeness'. Arendt's concept of action includes speech, theatre and politics. We view refugee rights, queer and feminist images and artivism in Poland as a form of Arendtian action. The mass mobilisation of civil society around issues of gender and sexuality constitutes an action that holds promise for the reconstruction of democracy. Civil society is the action that starts life anew, in a community with others.

Poland, under the Law and Justice government, has been gripped by the ideology of the 'pure' nation that excludes otherness and, with it, the vision of democracy, as theorised by Claude Lefort, as a 'heterogeneous way of life' (Lefort 1986, pp. 13–20). The country is badly in need of re-democratisation, a project requiring civil disobedience and rebellion. Poland's only hope seems to lie in the ideas and actions of civil society to change the anti-democratic government that came to power on a tide of populist hate-mongering against migrants and queers and an ultimately false promise of economic security.

The issue for the future of civil society is how to encourage not xenophobia, but hospitality. The principal aim is a re-engagement of the people with civil society, and of civil society with the people. The new civil society must be responsible for the disenfranchised; it must be pluralistic and open to both citizens and immigrants alike. Ultimately, it must create the context for citizens and immigrants to be hospitable to each other. All citizens and immigrants are part of civil society and should be equally involved, engaged and committed. To build on the call for friendship between feminist and queer praxis, as articulated by Evren Savcı in this volume, we would like to propose the even more radical idea of a friendly approach between citizens and non-citizens in any national context. The welcome that Polish civil society extended to Ukrainian refugees with many small and large acts of kindness, as well as the outrage at the inhumanity of the government towards refugees at the Poland-Belarus border, show how this utopia can be transformed into reality.

For democracy to survive we need a strong, ethical, committed and inclusive civil society to initiate citizens into self-associations of generosity. At stake is the fate of citizens and non-citizens alike, as citizens in Central Eastern

Europe have a moral duty to welcome refugees from countries less fortunate than their own. Civil society's mission is to speak with, for and of the deprived, right now, when they are confronted with issues of migration and exclusion. Civil society must inspire the constituencies that recognise and celebrate the common humanity that we all share with refugees, and with the members of our own societies who are discriminated against and marginalised.

The political freedom that Eastern Europe has achieved since the false promise of Communism has come about through civil society. 'Solidarity' was such a movement. There is hope that a formidable civil society will once again make the region more hospitable – for ourselves and for the Other. According to the Polish political philosopher Leszek Koczanowicz, the recovery of the idea of civil society has been connected to the significance of this concept during the years of struggle against the totalitarian Communist regime (Koczanowicz 2008, p. 42).

What to do about indifference, atomisation and marginalisation? That is a crucial point for action by the civil society of the future. Civil society transcends the idea of nationhood. It has the capacity to instil the ideals of transnationalism; to offer help and take responsibility for all humankind, as with women's solidarity marches in support of Polish women, as well as more generally the European and global movements for the rights of refugees. It is the task of civil society to mobilise civic engagement in a dynamic, non-hierarchical, open-ended way. It should amplify social, artistic, political and religious initiatives to challenge discrimination, engage the othered in society and act against the marginalisation and authoritarianism so prevalent in today's mainstream politics. In the activism and artivism of Polish civil society of the 2020s, there is both weakness and power, failure and victory, but without these efforts democracy would have been extinguished already. After only two terms of authoritarian government, democracy remains fragile in Central Eastern Europe.

We cannot decisively solve the crucial dilemma posed by our text of whether feminist, queer and xenophilic cultural and activist initiatives can truly change the agenda and the balance of power in the authoritarian government – one defined and backed by military and police force. Neither can we predict the future, which is generally endangered by the war in Ukraine and the new Russian imperialism in this part of Europe. Our purpose as scholars and curators is to document and analyse dissident artivism as an expression

of direct democracy and to assess the impact of civil society, all of which give hope and agency to people who act for and believe in the possibility of creating an equal and just society in this not-quite-yet-post-totalitarian region.

A Coda of Hope

The result of the recent political election allows us to respond positively to the question posed in the last paragraph of our text, which was written in the Arendtian 'dark times'. Again, in the history of Poland, the societal and cultural forces of resistance and protest, including artivism, have won, at least for the next four years. To reference the final thoughts of Deniz Kandiyoti in the first part of this book, imagination and wisdom have proven vital in forging a new politics of solidarity and harnessing the aspirations of the younger generations.

After the completion of this text, parliamentary elections were held in Poland on 15 October 2023, in which the opposition coalition won, while the Law and Justice party lost power after eight years of rule. The outcome of the election was decided by mostly women and the younger generations, who voted against the regime *en masse*. Independent media and culture also played a significant role, especially Agnieszka Holland's feature film *Green Border*, which was screened in cinemas only months before the elections and was seen by millions of viewers. The film depicts the cruelty and genocidal pushbacks against refugees at the Poland-Belarus border, perpetuated by the Polish security forces controlled by the regime.

The new pro-democratic government is now promising extensive reforms in the areas of equality, the fight against corruption, the restoration of the rule of law, and freedom and diversity in culture. This text can therefore stand as testament to the successful cultural and social strategies of resistance to illiberal democracy introduced by far-right politics.

Notes

1. We appropriated the term from Douglas Crimp's analysis of the visual activism of Act Up during the AIDS crisis.
2. For a detailed account of Poland's anti-LGBTQ politics in recent years, see the report *Poland Anti-LGBTI Hate Timeline* by ILGA Europe (2020).
3. The project was commissioned by the Wielkopolska Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, in cooperation with the VOX-Artis Foundation and Estrada Poznańska, combining sponsorship from local government and private foundations.

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10

WHY DO WE 'CARE'? NEO-LIBERAL GOVERNANCE AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE FEMINIST SUBJECT IN IRAN

Firoozeh Farvardin

Introduction

On 13 September 2022, Jina (Mahsa) Amini, a young Kurdish woman, was arrested in Tehran by the Moral Guidance Patrol of the Islamic Republic, also known as the 'hijab police', for allegedly violating its mandatory hijab law by wearing the hijab improperly in public. A few hours after her arrest, she was taken to a hospital in critical condition. Eyewitnesses said that the police officers had insulted and severely beaten her while she was in the police van. She died in the hospital a few days later, after falling into a coma. The epitaph on Jina's provisional gravestone read: 'Dear Jina! You will not die; your name will turn into a symbol'. Albeit not obvious at the time, her name did indeed become the symbol of the revolutionary movement that unfolded in Iran after her tragic death.

Despite pressure from the state's security forces, following her burial a large protest took place in Saqiz, her hometown in the province of Kurdistan, where many women*[1] unveiled themselves in public and chanted 'Jin, Jian, Azadî', a well-known transnational Kurdish slogan, which translates to 'Woman, Life, Freedom' in English and '*Zan, Zindigī, Āzādī*' in Farsi. The day after the funeral and the *en masse* public unveiling of Kurdish women* protests erupted across the country and have continued, despite severe oppression[2] by

the Islamic Republic. Since its inception, anti-gender politics and the disciplining of feminised bodies through measures such as the obligatory hijab have been core features of the Islamic Republic. Imposing the compulsory hijab are a series of institutional mechanisms to control feminised bodies and spaces through either coercive power (for instance, the hijab police) or soft power (for instance, ideological/religious education). Yet, the policing of the compulsory hijab is insufficient to explain why and how the revolutionary movement is taking place now, and not at any other point in the Islamic Republic's history of anti-gender politics. My argument is that the shift toward neo-liberal governance and, therefore, neo-liberal gender/sexual subjugation in Iran has contributed to the emergence of the revolutionary movement and its feminist subject in the current conjuncture. In Part I of this edited volume, Kandiyoti and Savcı have provided a comprehensive analysis of the influence of neo-liberalism on social justice goals, the individualisation and commodification of activism and the depoliticisation of some feminist issues in both the West and the South. My contribution, however, concentrates on counter-strategies against neo-liberalism, the feminist repolitisation of the issues of everyday life and the emergence of new forms of subjectivity, despite the prevalence of neo-liberal subjugation. I contend in this chapter that the Islamic Republic's latest version of anti-gender (and consequently anti-feminist) politics is related to the advancement of neo-liberalism in recent years.

In this chapter, I do not refer to neo-liberalism as the latest stage of capitalism with a unified ideology – but rather as a series of local and global political projects comprising a set of (non)discursive practices that 'cover heterogeneous guidelines, processes, and practices' (Farvardin 2020, p. 39) that eventually 'impose new political rationality, which remakes human subjects as a speck of capital' around the world (Brown 2016, p. 3). In this characterisation of neo-liberalism, the main question is not one of defining neo-liberalism *per se*, but rather asking 'what historical forms has neoliberalism [in different spatio-temporalities] taken, and what therefore are their various lineages in the present?' (Callison and Manfredi 2020, p. 5).

To this end, I will first discuss the entanglement of neo-liberalism and gender/sexual politics. By gender/sexual politics, I mean different (non)discursive mechanisms of policing sexuality, gendered bodies and populations and the counter-strategies and actions taken up by those subjected to policing. I expand

on this idea by examining the transformation of gender/sexual policing in the Islamic Republic over more than four decades. By contextualising the rise of neo-liberal governance and its related gender/sexual policies in the last decade of the Islamic Republic, I will then account for how feminised bodies have become the primary subject and object of neo-liberalisation, while also generating new forms of agency and resistance. As a recent example of resistance against neo-liberal gender/sexual politics, I will return to the present moment to explore the ongoing revolutionary movement and its feminist effects and implications. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by addressing and summarising the conditions of possibility of the feminist subject's emergence in the current revolutionary movement in Iran.

Neo-Liberal Governance and Gender/Sexual Politics

Defining and characterising neo-liberalism and its entanglement with gendered/sexual oppression stands as an ongoing theoretical debate in a broad range of (queer) feminist scholarship. In addition to offering critiques of neo-liberal feminism (Prügl 2015; Rottenberg 2014; Fraser 2013), the queer feminist scholarship on neo-liberalism has explored the impact of neo-liberal policies on emancipatory politics and transnational feminist movements (Al-Ali 2019, 2022; Gago and Cavallero 2021; Savcı 2021; Federici 2018, 2020; Cooper 2017, 2020; Brown 2015, 2019; Mohanty 2013; Duggan 2011, 2012). These feminist works, on the one hand, have addressed the effects of neo-liberalism on care work, social reproduction and family and, on the other hand, have critically assessed the formation and function of various subjectivities and resistive strategies arising from the neo-liberal subjugation itself.

Despite divergences and differences between various geographies, in terms of discourse and practice, authoritarian neo-liberalism engenders new forms of convergences, commonalities and alliances, not only on a structural level and between the states (neo-liberalism from above), but also between (trans) national subjects and grassroots movements. These affinities can unfold as (trans)national alliances of far-right or fascist movements as extreme examples of neo-liberal populism (Brandes 2020; Brown 2019), or in the form of transnational and translocal counter-movements, such as the International Women's Strike in 2016, 2017 and 2018, as well as a variety of counter-strategies (Majewska 2021; Gago 2020; Bhattacharya et al. 2019) against neo-liberal governance.

One of the central focuses of the queer feminist theorisation of authoritarian neo-liberalism is its moral and affect-driven politics that provides the basis for mass mobilisation and populism (Brown 2019; Whyte 2019; Cooper 2017). Wendy Brown (2019) has gone even further and called neo-liberalism a 'market-and-morals' rather than just a market-driven project. She has argued that the former account of neo-liberalism does not pay enough attention to 'the forces shaping the profoundly antidemocratic form of the rebellion' (Brown 2020, p. 42). To see only the market also fails to consider how the valorisation of traditional morality turns into 'weapons of political battle' (Ibid. p. 42). In other words, the reductionist, market-focused theorisation of neo-liberalism fails to understand the strategic importance of the affective dimensions of authoritarian neo-liberalism as a growing dominant form of neo-liberalism.

The recent return to the family as the strategic site of reproduction and affective care work, and to heteronormative values – such as provoking anti-abortion sentiments and praising hyper-masculinity – can be explained by analysing the affective aspects of neo-liberalism. Anti-neo-liberal and emancipatory movements also express strong affective impulses, turning the pain and anger of exploitation, injustice, inequality and exclusion into collective actions and movements. Affect-driven politics, therefore, is crucial for mobilising against authoritarian neo-liberalism. Indeed, a queer feminist account of neo-liberalism, which stresses the necessity of intersubjective and affective analysis, can effectively contribute to an explanation as to how the neo-liberal projects have become hegemonic, found popular support, mobilised the masses and, most importantly, given birth to neo-liberal (counter-)strategies and (counter-)subjects. It is here that we can organically connect the Woman, Life, Freedom revolution in Iran with transnational feminist struggles.

The Rise of Neo-Liberal Authoritarianism in Iran

In July 2020, a few months after the bloody suppression of the Aban uprising in November 2019, the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, held an important meeting with the newly elected MPs of the Islamic Parliament. In a surprise to everyone expecting him to address growing political discontent, economic difficulties, international sanctions and the COVID-19 outbreak, he focused his comments on the threat of depopulation and aging and their impact on the future of the country. The July 2020 meeting marked

the forty-second time since 2012 that Khamenei talked explicitly about population policies and the importance of the family (*Tasnim News* 2020), which mirrors the various ways in which the contributors to this volume stress shifting demographic strategies, particularly in relation to Turkey, Israel/Palestine and Ukraine. The following day, a 'Special Population and Family Committee' was formed in the parliament to support policy-makers in advancing the Islamic Republic's new pro-natalist program. Along the same lines, while the government was suffering from a massive budget deficit, the Islamic Parliament allocated 218 trillion Rials (then equivalent to eleven million US dollars) to implement population and family policies in 2020 alone (Ranjipour 2020). A year later, in October 2021, a new comprehensive law, known as 'Youthful Population and Protection of the Family', was passed, which further restricted access to pre-natal testing and diagnosis, abortion, contraceptives, voluntary sterilisation services and related information. More importantly, according to the new law, the regulation of abortion is no longer a matter of medical decision but exclusively of religious dictate. How can we then make sense of this obsessive focus of the Islamic Republic on pro-natalism and familialist gender/sexual policies in recent years? The domination of neo-liberal governance in the last decade of the Islamic Republic, I argue, also accounts for the radical shift in its gender/sexual politics toward familialism and harsh pro-natalism.

Adopting a queer feminist perspective, the case of neo-liberalisation and its related gender/sexual politics in Iran can be seen as another example of the recent historical trajectory entangling a refashioned neo-liberalism with gender/sexual oppression and violence; this entanglement, so I argue, has paved the way for the emergence and domination of authoritarian neo-liberalism as a global form of neo-liberal governance with specific gendered (and racialised) agendas implemented all over the world – from Turkey, Poland and Iran to the US, India and Brazil.

The entanglement of neo-liberalism and the gender/sexual politics of the Islamic Republic significantly contributes to the current revolutionary movement. To better understand this entanglement, we need to trace the transformation of policing feminised bodies and the various forms of resistance which in turn have affected the emergence of feminist subjects across the Islamic Republic's history. One can distinguish between three main periods in the Islamic Republic's gender/sexual politics:

The Islamic Republic's first decade (1979–89) was marked by protectionist principles that advocated a form of pro-natalist and protectionist familialism, which led to a baby boom in the mid-1980s. In addition to the state's Islamist ideology, the wartime economic policies during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88) indirectly enhanced protectionist familialism. For instance, during the war, the state prioritised large low-income families in the provision of essential food items and subsidised products (Ghobadi 2010). In the same vein, the Islamic Republic called for more procreation to add to its military force and build up more human resources for future wars (Farvardin 2020). In fact, in the early years of the war, the regime explicitly propagated 'Twenty Million Men Army' as a national slogan. Moreover, on the level of reproductive practices, the growing number of war casualties urged many couples to have more children to replace those family members who might lose their life during the war (Abbasi et al. 2002). In this period, one can argue, patriarchal nationalism, which was built on the urgency of war conditions for further procreation as noted above, promoted the Islamic Republic's pro-natalist gender/sexual policies (Farvardin 2020).

By imposing pro-natalist and familialist policies, the Islamic Republic aimed to push feminised bodies into the home. Introducing the compulsory hijab and partial gender segregation in public spaces and the health and education sectors are just a few notable examples (Moghadam 2004; Keddie 2000). As a result, the gender gap drastically widened in this period, and many women* were deprived of public positions or job opportunities – although these policies never led to the total elimination of feminised bodies from the public. Women* were, indeed, visible and active in various cultural, social and economic areas, particularly in gender-segregated sectors and those fields affected by the absence of men due to the war (Farvardin 2021). Their presence had a major impact on the shift in the gender/sexual politics of the second period.

In the second period (1989–2006), the Islamic Republic implemented policies based on developmentalist principles, including following the unified path of economic growth for all the so-called under-developed nations/societies/communities, fostering a competitive free market and facilitating foreign investments in development projects. In this context, the Islamic Republic departed from the previous pro-natalist and protectionist gender/sexual policies and went so far as to revive the previous regime's Family Planning Programme, which had been banned immediately after the revolution. As expected, the

result was a baby bust, and a significant demographic change which has affected the sexual/gender relations in the most recent decades of the Islamic Republic. In other words, the increase of women enrolling in higher education and thus being eligible for better employment opportunities can be partly attributed to the decline in birth-rates and reduced demand for women to do unpaid domestic and care work.

Several factors led to the shift from protectionism to developmentalism, including the necessity of the post-war reconstruction, economic recession due to capital flight, the drastic increase in oil revenues and the implementation of international sanctions after the revolution, which led to the country's further isolation (Ehsani 1994, 2017; Takeyh 2010). The concurrent surge of economic instabilities made the post-war government turn toward global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The government asked the IMF for credit approval and collaboration to reconstruct its post-war economy, and the IMF's guidelines in the 1990s, widely referred to as 'economic adjustment policies', suggested neo-liberal reform for the future economic plans of the Islamic Republic (Ehsani 1994). Such neo-liberal economic reform, however, required institutional preparations. Although beginning as expected with the neo-liberal structural adjustment policies, the institutional preparations went beyond the economic sector by introducing certain social policies and political participation programmes which mark the so-called reformist era of the late 1990s. In fact, the shift in gender/sexual policies, particularly the return to the family planning programme, was an important part of the institutional preparations of the structural transformation towards neo-liberalism. In this so-called reformist era, women* were also given more space and started to appear more often in public spaces and workplaces. Yet, this visibility certainly did not mean that the reformist government actually advocated for women*'s rights during this period. The change instead was tied to the government's developmentalist and anti-natalist policies. For instance, policy-makers hoped that the departure from the pro-natalist policies of the first decade could lead to an increase in the degree of women's literacy, education and involvement in economic activities, which in turn could facilitate neo-liberal economic reform (Farvardin 2020). In the same period (the 1990s and the early 2000s), besides individual and collective achievements, feminist activists gradually revived the feminist movement

that had been completely crushed in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution (Sedghi 2007, pp. 244–60). The feminist movement of this era had a decisive influence on the political landscape of these decades and on the future direction of contentious politics in the most recent period of the Islamic Republic.

The third period (2006–present), especially the last decade, has been marked by harsh neo-liberalisation and contentious politics. At the same time, gender/sexual politics have turned toward what I call 'neo-liberal familialism',[3] so called to distinguish it from the protectionist familialism of the first decade of the Islamic Republic. The early years of the period (2006–14) were distinguished mostly by discursive preparations for later changes in gender/sexual policies. Since 2014, the will to revise and impose certain policies over feminised bodies has turned into action, more so than ever before.

During the past decade, the Islamic Republic faced growing political discontent from different political forces in various forms, including several waves of country-wide protests and strikes. Under these conditions, different sections of society have raised their voices to become agents of political change. Of particular significance in this context have been 'the (middle class) poor' (Bayat 2021; 2018), women* and those marginalised by the ethnic and economic centralism of the state. The decade also saw the Islamic Republic suffer its worst economic crisis since its establishment in 1979. The re-imposition of US sanctions after the Trump Administration's repudiation of the 2015 nuclear deal has also contributed to pushing Iran's national economy to the verge of collapse.

Eventually, the harsh economic situation and rise of political discontent forced the government to introduce a new plan called 'Resistance Economy'. The plan, in fact, simply rebranded and reframed the same neo-liberal reforms and economic resilience policies in order to benefit from unstable political and economic conditions (Farvardin 2020). The plan's aim was to adapt the population to the changes and challenges that come with the intensification of neo-liberalisation and its consequent political discontent. In other words, neo-liberal reform that, in the previous period, had been imposed as a pragmatic and reversible adjustment policy gradually came not only to restructure the economy but also to introduce a new form of state governance. In such a situation, the family offered a very advantageous sphere for the economic and political agenda of neo-liberalism. From its feminist critiques, we know that

neo-liberalisation promotes reliance on privatised and unpaid family labour (Bedford 2008) as a strategy to make deprived and impoverished people more resilient in a time of crisis and uncertainty (Farvardin 2020). Indeed, as a political logic neo-liberalism works through gendered constructions that effectively re-assign care work to the private sphere to 'unburden' the state from tasks of collective care (Cooper 2017). The unburdening neo-liberal governance of the late Islamic Republic has been firmly grounded on family units, particularly feminised bodies and their reproductive and economic practices, either in the form of unpaid care work or informal paid work. One can conclude that these new policies, besides their effects on reproductive rights and the health of women*, push feminised bodies further into their family spaces and into informal and (un)paid care work (Farvardin 2021; 2020).

Evidently, during the period of the imposition of new familialist gender/sexual policies from 2011 to 2022, the gender gap once again widened in Iran. According to the Global Gender Gap index, while it ranked 125th in 2011, Iran ranked 143rd among 146 countries in 2022 (Global Gender Gap 2022). The rate of female participation in the labour market also decreased drastically from its peak in 2005 (18.6 percent) to a mere 12.9 percent in 2014 (InfoDev 2022). Despite slightly increasing to 16 percent in 2016, the rate of female participation was around 14 percent in 2021 (InfoDev 2022) and dropped even lower (to 12.8 percent) in 2022 (Radiozamaneh 2022). Furthermore, in 2021, a year before the first spark of the revolution, the rate of formal female employment was around 12 percent; on average, women earned less than men for the same work (Labour Market Report 2021). At the same time, more than half of the workers employed in the informal sector, which comprises 31 percent of Iran's economy (Pilehvar 2022), are female workers. To complete the picture, it is important to mention that two out of every three workers who lost their jobs in 2021 were women* as well (Labour Market Report 2021).

The statistics mentioned above outline a local example of the global trend of the formal labour market's defeminisation and the informal market's feminisation by pushing feminised bodies toward family-based work units. Thus, not only have the neo-liberal principles prevailing around the world framed gender/sexual politics of the last decade; they have made possible and advanced a specific form of neo-liberalisation in Iran which imposes its rule, specifically on feminised bodies, through pro-natalist familialism.

A Feminist Revolution in the Making

The emergence of the 'Jin Jian Azadî' movement signifies a recent form of collective resistance against gender/sexual oppression, as well as neo-liberal subjugation. While sharing similarities with previous waves of protests, this movement also stands out in important ways. The ongoing protests are by far the largest-ever mass protest in the history of Iran, spanning every corner of the country and bridging the diaspora and the local through transnational solidarity demonstrations. As of now, around 164 cities, along with many villages, have been the scene of demonstrations of one kind or another (HRANA 2023). The current protests are also the longest period of contentious politics in the history of the Islamic Republic (Bayat 2023; Sammy 2023), and they have created the most severe crisis in the history of the regime.

Although this is still an unfolding revolution with outcomes yet to be fully understood, there are already strong indicators for (re)claiming the present moment to be a feminist revolutionary one. First, this revolution in the making is clearly about the feminist issue of disciplining feminised bodies. The incident that sparked the revolution was the death of a young woman at the hands of the forces specifically tasked with enforcing the Islamic Republic's compulsory hijab law. Since the formation of the Islamic Republic, the compulsory hijab has been the hallmark of its theocratic and authoritarian rule that has disciplined bodies and regulated social spaces, and it came to symbolise, for some, the gender apartheid characteristic of the social regulation (Afary and Anderson 2023; Kohan 2022). Since the early 1980s, women* without hijab and other gender minorities were excluded from the government, public offices and many workplaces. Beginning in July 1981, wearing the hijab became mandatory for all women* over nine years old. Since then, many women* have been beaten, lashed and arrested for not wearing a proper hijab by different sections of the police, revolutionary guards and moral and religious guidance institutions. Albeit subject to various changes since the 1980s, the punishment for not wearing the hijab can be up to sixty days of imprisonment, seventy-four lashes, or fines (Vakil 2011, pp. 66–75).

Second, as noted earlier, the main slogan of the revolution, 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadî', is rooted in the transnational feminist Kurdish struggles for the liberation of women* (and other oppressed groups) from the patriarchal regime of the nation-state (Rostampour 2022). The slogan celebrates the multiplicities

and polyphonous voices of the suppressed subjects and calls for the end of the exploitation of nature and life by the regime of nation-states. As a political imaginary of liberation, 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadî' has travelled to Iran and been translated and redefined according to the historical context of the (trans)formation of the national state of Iran.

Third, since the very beginning of the protests, women* have been at the forefront. The pictures and videos that became viral during the past months depict the heroic unveiling performance and the resisting bodies of the protesters. The most striking images of the first month of the revolutionary uprising, in other words, belong to those anonymous feminised figures unveiled, standing on utility boxes, cars or garbage cans, in the streets, waving their scarves, shouting 'Jin Jiyan Azadî' or 'down with the Islamic Republic' and, on some occasions, burning their headscarves. The unfolding 2022 revolution in Iran can be framed, then, as a feminist revolution also because of the specific performative and figurative form of its resistance. This distinguishing feature of the feminist revolution is further detailed by an anonymous feminist writer[4] from Iran who also participated in the protests:

> These protests are not crowd-centered but situation-centered, not slogan-centered but figure-centered. Anybody, and I really mean anybody, 'can' create an unbelievable, radical situation of resistance by themselves, such that it astonishes the viewer. Belief in this 'I can', this ability, has spread very far. Everybody knows that they are creating an unforgettable situation with their figures of resistance. (L. 2022)

Drawing an analogy between the street and the body, L. has argued that the desire of the protestors to create situations of resistance which are 'neither focused nor restricted to any point of the street', resembles woman*'s desire for orgasm, with multiple and scattered points of stimulation. This is clearly distinct from all well-known forms of male-dominated and crowd-focused acts and accounts of fighting and resistance, which are embodied exclusively in the figure of the male guerrilla fighter or the militant protester on the street.

Furthermore, the revolutionary movement has challenged the still dominant frame of the nation-state, and its consequent monopolisation of politics, in the Middle East, a region which has one of the highest rates of gender discrimination and gender-based violence in the world (Abirafeh 2019) and is

often plagued by imperialist interventions, neo-liberal policies and authoritarian regimes, whether secular or Islamist. The pervasion of global governance since the turn of the century and its transnational effects on both local forms of gender activism and the authoritarian states' gender/sexual policies in the global South are undeniable (Kandiyoti, part I; Kandiyoti et al. 2019, pp. 1–2). Yet, it seems that the forms and contents of social movements in the Middle East, including movements against gender-based violence, still have been largely determined and advocated through nation-state-centred politics of elites, such as upper-class feminists (Kandiyoti, part I) – with a few exceptions, notably the transnational Kurdish movement.

By nation-state-centred politics, I refer to demand-based social movements, also known as civil society activism, and crowd-based and leader-centred revolutions. While the former (demand-based politics) achieves its goals regarding the state through pressure from below and bargaining and negotiating from above via political representatives, as in state feminisms, the latter aims to seize state power through popular revolutions as its ultimate goal for achieving radical change. In both forms of politics, by ignoring the fundamental role of the regime of the nation-state in (re)producing various spaces of marginality in the history of the post-colonial Middle East, political elites are still advocating for the so-called unfulfilled (democratic) capacities of a nation-state in constructing an inclusive and equal society for all (Towfigh and Yousefi 2022). In contrast, the situated, body-centred and leaderless politics, as we are currently witnessing them in Iran, reject the illusion and promise of equality and freedom for all within the regime of the nation-state. Rather, the new revolutionary politics is practiced in mundane localities and on streets while politicising everyday life issues such as femicide, compulsory hijab, breathing clean air and accessing free drinking water, sanitation, waste disposal and so on.

The current revolution is a radical movement, represented not by politicians, not by men of power and privilege, but by ordinary women, queer people and other religious, national/ethnic and economically marginalised groups, such as Kurds and Baluchis. It is very different from the crowd-centred and leader-based revolution of 1979, or the demand-based Green Movement of 2009, which was embodied by male reformist political figures such as Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi. To understand the complexities and multiplicities of such an uprising against the Islamic Republic, we need to go

beyond the dichotomies, male-dominated forms and nation-state-based frames of politics to which we are accustomed. A new conceptualisation/theorisation, a queer feminist one, is needed to grasp the new forms of politics that are taking place on the streets every day, as well as to account for the emergence of a new political subject, a feminist subject that negates the demand-based and nation-state centred politics of the previous era in favour of an embodied self-governing politics performed and practiced directly on the streets, 'a politics of presence' (Sadeghi 2022).

Indeed, this new form of politics is both the continuation and, at the same time, the rupture of the 'quiet encroachment' resistance and survival strategy that Asef Bayat has defined (2013) as the main characteristic of a 'non-movement' – that is, a common frame of leaderless grassroots politics in the Middle East, including the feminist movement in Iran. Although the current revolutionary movement, similar to non-movements, reclaims life (Bayat 2023) and is based on the widespread informal participation and autonomous actions of ordinary people, it is not a silent and invisible movement of the masses; rather, it is a collective and, at the same time, bodily performance on the streets. The rise of neighbourhood initiatives and urban revolutionary committees in the wake of the revolutionary movement highlights a form of translocal mobilisation and networking. This stands in contrast to the limited scope of action and temporary focus on specific needs or spaces often seen in non-movements relying on quiet encroachment strategies.

Last but not least, the unfolding revolution is a feminist one, I argue, for its affective dimension. In the years preceding the current revolution, fear was the hallmark of the Islamic Republic's affective governance. However, since the beginning of the revolution, the politics of fear has become increasingly dysfunctional. The fear of transgression and disobedience of the father/state/(religious) leader; the fear of brutal suppression; the fear of the outbreak of a civil war in the absence of central power; the fear of uncertain futures in the post-Islamic Republic era; the fear of 'the Others' and the fear of death – all have been replaced by the politics of life, care and solidarity with 'the Others'. Politicised subjects are now commonly engaging in mass disobedience and withdrawing from state-imposed rules and roles (Ganji and Rosales 2022). It is the politics of solidarity and care that connect and empower different peoples and struggles with different histories in the time of the revolution. When

Turks call for solidarity with Kurds and Baluchis, when men call for justice for women and LGBTQ individuals, when non-religious people support the rights of oppressed religious minorities and when oil refinery workers in the southern provinces call for strikes to support the uprising in Kurdistan, we can see the different expressions and expansions of this politics of solidarity and care, deeply rooted in the materialist philosophy and the political perspectives that transnational revolutionary feminism has advocated for a long time.

Conclusion: Politics of Care and the Emergence of the Feminist Subject

> Come along, along, the street is calling you to its song
> Calls you in your first name: freedom
> Say it loud and loud,
> To all those silencing their grudge in their throat
> They are no longer alone.[5]

The current feminist revolution is rooted in years and years of both non-collective resistance and collective struggles of women* against the oppression and gendered violence imposed on them – not only through mandatory hijab regulation and gendered segregation, but also through the exploitation of their (re)productive activities and the extraction of their vital resources by the state to overcome its all-encompassing crisis rooted in the advancement of neo-liberalisation. The Woman, Life, Freedom revolution has brought about a shift in dominant affect-driven politics. It has given rise to a new type of feminist political subjectivity that emphasises care and solidarity as a counter-strategy against authoritarian neo-liberalism. In other words, as neo-liberal governance has been exploiting the informal work and reproductive labour of feminised bodies, they have become indispensable for meeting the needs of social reproduction and have developed counter-strategies for survival and resistance. They have (trans)formed spaces with hope and inspiration for mobilisation against violence. In other words, as much as we are facing the defeminisation of the public realm, we are witnessing the feminisation of emancipatory politics. In Iran, like in many other countries around the world, as Gago and Cavallero (2021, p. 2) have noted, 'we are witnessing the politicisation of issues that were long considered to be marginal or only of interest to a minority, or the exclusive realm of experts'. The compulsory hijab, femicide, marginalisation, the

rights of the marginalised national and religious groups, as well as the reproductive rights of feminised bodies are now at the heart of political debates and imaginations regarding a possible post-Islamic Republic era; these issues have turned into significant sites of struggle for equality and the prospect of a decent life. Thus, interconnecting intersectional spaces of marginality and imagining an alternative out of the logic of the market and capitalism – marked by the care for the 'Others' rather than saving them, advocated particularly by Black feminists (Lorde 1988; Hartmann 2016; Woodly et al. 2022) – has become a daily practice, both in local spaces of social reproduction and in (cyber)spaces of emerging translocal and (trans)national networks. Indeed, these (in)visible spaces are forms of realising feminist solidarity, as Kandiyoti and Savcı have discussed in their contributions to this volume. They are but the autonomous realms of reproducing life and generating resistance in what is known as the common(s) (Federici 2018; Hardt and Negri 2011).

These commons, such as extended family networks, neighbourhood initiatives and networks of financial support for strikers or political prisoners, build 'on reciprocity, respect, mutuality and responsibility' (Ticktin 2021, p. 920); they are both formed by and provide the affective conditions of the performance and visibility of feminist subjectivity, which recently (re)emerged on the streets of Iran. The revolutionary feminist subject, born out of authoritarian neo-liberal governance and its specific gender/sexual agendas, regenerates and multiplies itself continuously in various geographies of neo-liberal governmentality. Nonetheless, the revolutionary feminist subject will frame itself differently, adopt different rhetorics and raise different claims according to the hegemonic moral and religious discourses specific to any context.

The compulsory hijab is the cornerstone of the Islamic Republic in Iran. Thus, women* were the first to experience the vicious and systematic oppression of the regime in post-revolutionary Iran, followed by the Kurds and other marginalised peoples. Unsurprisingly, they were also the first to revolt against the oppression and atrocities of the Islamic regime. Forty-three years later, the murder of a young Kurdish woman by the hijab police, a manifestation of intersectional marginalisation and oppression, sparked the revolutionary movement in Iran. Nevertheless, it remains necessary to explain why and how the revolutionary movement took the whole country by surprise in this particular moment and not at any other point in the history of the compulsory hijab

under the Islamic Republic. Similarly, the struggles against the compulsory hijab alone do not suffice to explain how the revolutionary wave crossed the boundaries of marginalities, such as class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship and generation. Neither do they explain how, despite the growing efforts and actions of existing established political oppositions to claim leadership and advocacy, the revolution moved beyond the demand-based state-centred politics of the previous periods. The historical contextualisation which I propose here, however, may account, even if only partially, for the significant transformation of gender/sexual politics as part of a (trans)national shift to neo-liberal state governance and shed light on its social and political implications, while attending to the extraordinary and timeless experience of the current revolutionary moment. In line with this edited volume's point of departure against exceptionalisation, as well as its objective to encourage dialogue and comparative perspectives (see the Introduction), this contribution particularly evades both exceptionalising and generalising the gender/sexual politics in Iran. Building on the discussion of the contributors to Part I about the conditions of the possibility of feminist solidarity, this account elaborates on the affective politics of care and solidarity in the ongoing revolutionary movement, as a counter-strategy against neo-liberal and authoritarian gender/sexual politics more broadly.

At the time of writing this contribution, it is neither clear where this revolutionary movement will land, nor possible to anticipate its success or failure to exert its political rationality and transform established social relations. What is certain, however, is that the Woman, Life, Freedom revolution has redrawn the contours of political imaginations, radically changing the strategic fields of feminist struggles in Iran and beyond forever. Likewise, out of decades of transnational feminist struggles, particularly in the Middle East, it suggests the emergence of a new feminist subject on the streets of Iran. Indeed, the 'Jin Jiyan Azadî' revolution demands to 'leave no one behind' and '*ni una menos*' (not only less).

Notes

1. I use the asterisk (*) in this chapter to emphasise a more inclusive subjective category of women that includes trans and queer persons and their agency. However, on some occasions I use 'women' without * when I refer to statistics or specific historical contexts that address only a certain group of women. Likewise, I use 'feminised' to refer to a form of subalternity and subjugated social position,

one created by the imposition of heteronormative gender/sexual categorisation through inflicting violence on bodies, rather than as a specific gender/sexual identity. Thus, one can be in a feminised position without identifying themselves as a woman*. By contrast, a feminist subject in this context is used to characterise the resistive and liberative performances and subjectivities of feminised bodies against the gendered violence imposed on them, which are not necessarily articulated through feminist discourses.

2. During the first five months alone, more than 525 protesters were killed, mostly in the marginalised poor areas of the country, such as Kurdistan and Baluchistan. Around seventy of the victims were children under the age of eighteen (HRANA 2023). Despite (inter)national campaigns to stop executions in Iran, so far four young protesters have been executed while many others are on death row. Moreover, according to HRANA (2023), more than 19,500 people were arrested during this period, many of whom have suffered torture, were sexually assaulted, raped and/or are in danger of long-term imprisonment, or face execution. Many of those still in custody are feminists and women* protesters.
3. Neo-liberal familialism refers to a neo-liberal gendered governance that establishes its agenda by valorising and/or redefining heteronormative family values.
4. Under the conditions of the oppressive political environment imposed by the IRI, many scholars, activists and narrators in Iran have turned to anonymous individual and/or collective knowledge production.
5. Parts of a new revolutionary song that became famous after being performed by music students in Tehran in 2022. See Rastyad Collective (2022).

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