



RINGS Conference 2019

Genders and Feminisms in a Polarised World: Sustainability, Futures and Utopias

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ABSTRACTS

In (no) need of feminism in Romania?

Laura Grünberg, University of Bucharest

The “gender ideology” has lately become one of the main enemies of the neoconservative and illiberal movements in different national contexts. Europe was not at all bypassed by mass protests and initiatives against women reproductive rights, against gay marriage as a way of affecting “traditional family”, against sexual education. Gender became the “ideological glue” (Kovats, Poim, 2015), gathering a multitude of diverse “anti” discourses, more or less connected with gender as such.

Romania lives a paradoxical situation. On one hand the anti-gender ideology is present. Even if we did not have explicit anti-abortion protests we have every year pro-life marches, we had in 2018 a national referendum for redefining marriage and recently an education reform strategy abandoned due to conservative critics regarding the chapter on gender and sexual education; important feminist scholars are publicly accused of brainwashing children and promoting gender ideology and universities criticized as being sexist-marxist. On the other hand, as we speak, at political level, Romania has more women in key power positions as never: Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, Minister of Education, Minister of Health, and Mayor of Bucharest are just some of the women in key political and administrative positions. Although tacitly contested by Romanian feminists the situation is perceived by many as a success of the gender equality movement.

The paper intends to make a critical analysis of this specific national context of the anti-gender discourse combined with an over (meaningless) representation of women in politics in Romania. For this purpose recent experiences as activist in the area of women’ movement, as a writer of children book (under strong attack during the Referendum period) will be combined with data from the recent Gender Barometer (2018) that I coordinated showing a dynamic, diverse and contradictory Romania in terms of population’ perceptions towards gender equality.

An important obstacle in implementing gender sensitive politics is denial of the need of such policies. Romania is confronting with this situation. As Romania is not singular among European countries in this puzzling position-in need for continuing efforts in the area of gender equality but, at perception level, in no need of feminism and women’ movement , the article could offer ingredients for further academic debates and analysis but also for possible solutions.

Unexpected allies and sustainability of gender debate in a polarised Czech context

Iva Šmídová, Masaryk University

The precarious situation of gender studies or anti-gender sentiments towards the use of gender perspective in explaining burning social problems in Czech public debates is unquestionable. However, there is a growing interest coming from – perhaps unexpected – specific organisations and segments of Czech population eager to learn more, explore and even embrace the gender perspective at the same time.

The proposed presentation is based primarily on three personal experiences. Two are framed by recent invitations for lecturing on gender issues in the last year and one is based on a recent cohort of participants of lifelong-learning courses for secondary school teachers of social sciences and humanities organized at my home university. One of these events was a major national Scout conference (a lecture for ca. 250 Czech Boy and Girl Scouts on gender, December 1, 2018), the other was a guest talk and discussion at a seminar organised by catholic university students at a local parish (attended by ca. 40 young adults, April 2, 2019) that finally lasted for 3,5 hours of intense and constructive debate. The third experience is based on enrolment of high number of teachers from religious/church schools in the program. All three events document a demand for knowledge coming from traditional or conservative institutions aiming at broadening their perspective on gender relations, gender studies and topics related to feminism.

Thus, in the times of despair, polarisation and termination of institutions dealing with gender inequality in our region, there is this, perhaps unexpected, pool of audiences and actors forming new bottom-up demand for gender knowledge and informed discussions. Will these subgroups help (us) sustain gender expertise and teaching in the region?

Retraditionalization of social life of Central Asia as a factor of strengthening antigender mood in society

Roza Zharkynbayeva, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

For the years of independence, all central Asian states joined to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and developed national mechanisms for promoting gender equality. Achieving gender equality is extremely relevant problems for the world community as a whole. However, gender problems of Central Asia is very different from similar problems in other regions of the world. Despite the promulgation of policies, in the countries of the region a serious resistance to the ideology of gender equality and the strengthening of anti-gender attitudes in society have formed.

At the present time, general problems for the region is that significant differences in the situation of men and women in political, economic, cultural and social spheres. Gender equality in the sphere of political representation is not reached, gender professional segregation is exists. In a number of regional states (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan), girls observe gender imbalance in the sphere of receiving higher education.

Occurrent events in the post – soviet period in the region may be considered in the context of the so-called “patriarchal rollback”, a phenomenon that is widespread. Retraditionalization, the archaization of the social life of the peoples of the region, contributes to the resuscitation of discriminating women's customs (forced abduction of girls for the purpose of marriage, contractual marriages, bride redemptions, wearing hijab, and polygyny).

The growth of anti-gender attitudes in public life is a deterrent to sustainable socio-economic development in the region.

Anti-gender turn and strategies of resistance and survival in Russian feminist movement and gender studies

Olga Shnyrova, Ivanovo Center for Gender Studies

Irina Yulkina, Higher School of Economics, Saint-Petersburg

Patriarchy and traditionalism in Russia now are simply omnipresent. And seemingly inconceivable things happen again – bride abductions, honour killings, female circumcision, restrictions on women's freedom. Yes, it all happens in the Caucasian republics, but they are part of the Russian Federation, too. Moreover, even in Central Russia nowadays, there is a significant upsurge of violence against women, including attempts to ban abortions, persecutions for so-called LGBT propaganda and very recent cases of prosecutions for feminist publications because they allegedly 'incite sex-based hatred'. The state no longer talks about gender equality, while women's and feminist organisations talk solely about women's issues. The state simply has no gender policy. Under these conditions, there is no real leverage in ensuring gender equality in all spheres. The only thing we can do is to draw attention to the most glaring problems in order to defend what is still preserved. Gender studies nearly disappeared from the curricula of universities.

But at the same time we can see the growth of popularity of feminism among young women in large cities: reading groups, feminist channels on youtube, feminist creative projects are spreading and developing. Many of those groups are not always cooperative with one another, and these groups are always quite sure that their way is the only right one. Feminism is forced to defend itself, which strengthens radical movements within it. In Academia gender studies continue to exist in research works of scholars, in students' facultative seminars and courses, as an integral part of the broader courses in social sciences and humanities. It became the matter of the personal strategies and commitments of university teachers and students and rather often connected with public position and relations with feminist and women's movements. The paper will analyze how feminism and gender studies confront the anti-gender movements and sentiments in different regions and republics of Russia, what kind of intersectional alliances can be formed in order to resist the anti gender turn and what kinds of activisms are relevant to the present situation.

PANEL: Tensions between building up feminist academic infrastructure and feminist visions for the future: an interactive panel

Irma Erlingsdóttir, University of Iceland

Jeff Hearn, Örebro University, Hanken School of Economics

Tamara Shefer, University of the Western Cape

In this panel, we want to discuss the relations and tensions between: the everyday work of building up feminist infrastructure within academia, and feminist visions for the future. These questions are something that affects us all, as we balance the multiple demands of being (pro)feminist scholars with visions for social justice and larger planetary good, in contemporary globalised and local institutionalised frameworks of higher education. They also connect with the dilemmas around critiquing neoliberal governance and yet recognising the opportunities sometimes presented. We seek initiate a discussion in relation to both our own local/national bases and transnational cooperations, and those of other conference participants.

Gender polarisation, reproductive servitude and ecological catastrophe in literary and cinematic dystopias and today's reality: *The Handmaid's Tale*

Julia Kuznetski, Tallinn University

When recent anti-abortion laws were adopted in Alabama and Louisiana in 2019 and many other American states earlier on, women went to protest wearing the iconic *Handmaid's Tale* costumes addressing the issue of controlled reproduction as one of the many manifestations of totalitarianism as seen by Canadian writer Margaret Atwood in her then dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1988.

In my paper, I aim at analysing today's processes such as gender polarisation, domestic violence, controlled reproduction, ecological catastrophe and the rise of the alt-right in North America and some European countries, including Estonia, through the lens of culture, focussing in particular on Hulu's TV series *The Handmaid's Tale*, currently into its third season, which is based on Atwood's novel of the same title. We may say that what Atwood saw as dystopia in the late 20th century, is screaming reality now, with abortion bans in the US, Ireland, Poland and the slowly encroaching deep state in Estonia, one of the targets being gender, another ecology, with an eerie connection between bigotry and climate change denial. As literature, art and film increasingly serve as sites for social and intellectual debate and enlightenment, the series may serve the function of creating awareness about these processes. The examples from the film I will look at represent extreme social stratification, licenced domestic violence, sanctioned rape, controlled reproduction, outlawed and capitally punished LGBT, banned literacy for women, and a GULAG-like system in which "transgressed" women manually clear chemical and radioactive pollution. I will analyse them alongside real-life instances and social processes, such as EKRE's anti-abortion and misogynist rhetoric; Jordan Peterson's championing of "enforced monogamy" as cure for rape; alarming figures for domestic violence and rape in Estonia; anti-LGBT moves on the governmental level, and some other examples that might occur, as the process is alarmingly ongoing and itself resembles dystopia.

Addressing the Body, Gender and Social Justice Issues in Artistic Research

Lenka Vesela, Brno University of Technology

In the paper I would like to propose an emerging field of artistic research as an important ally of gender studies. Artistic Research understood as research through art (rather than research about art or research for art) is not exactly new, but its institutionalization is. The transformation of artistic research into a fully acknowledged academic discipline and the establishment of the research-based art practice category have helped to promote efforts of individual artists and art collectives working as researchers rather than artefact producers. A growing number of research-based artists and artistic research scholars, out of which many concern themselves specifically with gender and social justice issues, the paper would argue, can contribute to and expand the discussions of gender matters.

The paper would introduce the field of artistic research using examples of artists and art spaces in the Czech Republic exploring gender-related agenda. Six selected projects would be considered in order to illustrate the diversity of research objectives and methodologies that research-based artists use to address the issue of gender. In addition, two physical and two media spaces facilitating art research would be introduced — a project space bringing together artists with voices from outside of the field of art to join in discussions about gender-related issues such as care work, otherness or technologies of the body, an art initiative with a long-term ongoing project seeking to define criteria of how a feminist (art) institution could look like, a website for art in the expanded field of theory and activism and an online platform hosting and producing artistic research video content.

Girls, violence and the polarisation of femininities

Deevia Bhana, University of KwaZulu-Natal

When violence is bound to binary constructions of gender, race and class, as is often the case in South Africa, black African girls in working class contexts become extraordinarily visible as unassertive in relation to a violent African masculinity. Such binary constructions leave little room for understanding the heterosexualised and gendered dimensions of girls' ambiguous experiences in negotiating violence beyond an unassertive femininity. Recognising the dehumanising accounts of African girls femininities, policy and programming now 'turn to girls' in the Global South exalting celebratory femininity where girls are active or potentially able to ward off the challenges of structure, poverty and male violence. Whilst the recognition of agency has destabilized gender binary models in pivotal ways, there is danger that femininity has now shifted from docility to celebratory framings without addressing the complex processes through which femininities are produced.

Drawing from an interview-based study of black and coloured girls in a South African working class context, this paper gives attention to the production of femininities as girls negotiate gender and violence in relation to other girls. Against the idealised version of the 'girly girl', the paper draws attention to 'raw girl' femininity who are contradictorily positioned as both desirable and transgressive. Unlike 'girly girls', 'raw girls' are constructed as physically violent, assertive, and express heterosexuality in the fight for boys. By focusing on femininities that go beyond celebratory and docility, the paper complicates the polarised interpretations of femininity and argues for an understanding of young femininities that is far more fluid than current propositions suggest. When girls are given the opportunity to reflect on their relations with other girls, counter hegemonic narratives are produced as they open up the site of femininity to instability and reproduction. An exclusive focus on girls as docile or actively challenging boys and men, functions as a site of erasure and fails to consider the complex negotiations of gender, sexuality, race and class as girls both bolster and challenge polarised constructions of femininities. Implications for addressing young femininities conclude the paper.

Using South-North collaborations to explore the role of gender within immigrant integration projects

Shelley Kotze (presenter), Chalmers University of Technology

Mirek Dymitrow, University of Gothenburg

Lilian Omondi, Maseno University

Ana Balzheva, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Skopje

The current predicament is that Sweden is a highly multicultural society in a European context that is facing crisis visible through vulnerability and anxieties, particularly relating to the increasing immigration populations also being closely related to the increasing polarisation. In polarised society gender risks of becoming again the invisible “third” face of the policies trying to facilitate migration overwhelmed by the complexity and risks of integration and disintegration, homogeneity and diversity, equality and inequality, inclusion and exclusion.

Sweden has developed lauded policy, most particularly within the formal opportunities offered to immigrants when accessing the labour-market (MIPEX). However, the index does not measure the outcomes of such policy. The OECD data (2013) is placing Sweden at the bottom of its ranking, as it has the largest gap, in levels of employment between native-born Swedes and those born outside of Sweden.

Possible reasoning for the gap is the relatively high proportion of native-born women in employment. When immigrant employment numbers are explored along gendered lines immigrant women’s levels of employment are consistently 10% lower than immigrant men’s. This not only creates a gender gap between immigrant men and women, but also a gap between native-born and immigrant women. As such, immigrant women are experiencing a double-jeopardy in labour-market integration, both as women and as immigrants. Therefore we ask if intersectional actors are taken into account in designing policies; how they reflect the differences of immigrant women trying to integrate; and how can immigrant women change Swedish society and its labour force?

This presentation explores how the hypothesis of double-jeopardy plays out in practice. The aim of our research is to understand the ways in which different approaches to labour-market integration apply the concept of gender, and how this affects the tangible and sustainable outcomes for the women involved. This will be undertaken through a South–North collaboration, using a Swedish-Kenyan collaboration programme within Mistra Urban Futures – SKILLs, aiming towards sustainable urban development.

Drawing upon experiences and reflections from works of academics, researchers and NGOs, our research applies a gender analysis of local case studies from impoverished areas of Gothenburg. The discussion is informed by challenges (and solutions) identified in Kisumu, and provides a set of co-produced recommendations.

Initial findings suggest that gender as a concept is experienced differently by immigrant women and Swedish women. In questioning how women from the global South experience integration projects in the context of the global North we attempt to initiate discussion how labour-market integration can produce more tangible, sustainable and equitable outcomes for immigrant women.

Super-Diverse Societies and the Concept of Identity

Ulrike Auga, Humboldt University of Berlin

Vertovec referred to the progressive diversification of migrants with the term “super-diversity” (2007). One can notice that in the beginning of diversity research race, class and gender were the central categories. Today race, gender and religion are in the focus. In terms of religious belonging, it has been often neglected that national migrant groups have strong internal differentiations.

Attached to the concept of diversity are the notions of identity and identity politics. Even at the beginning of the 21st century, identity exists as a central concept. In response to the uncertainties of post-structuralism, feminism, migration and globalization, individual and collective identities re-emerge also in the form of nationalisms. The contemporary discourses on identity are partly the result of the critical discussion in gender and postcolonial studies. The scientific notion of identity often does not refer to stable “entities”, but describes processes of identifying and producing affiliations that are permeable and heterogeneous.

Brubaker and Cooper argue “that the prevailing constructivist stance on identity – the attempt to “soften” the term, to acquit it of the charge of ‘essentialism’ by stipulating that identities are constructed, fluid, and multiple – leaves us without a rationale for talking about ‘identities’ at all and ill-equipped to examine the ‘hard’ dynamics and essentialist claims of contemporary identity politics. ‘Soft’ constructivism allows putative ‘identities’ to proliferate. But as they proliferate, the term loses its analytical purchase” (2001, 1).

I detect a confusion between individual, embodied experience and a proclamation of identity in some societal and scientific discourses. This phenomenon of essentializing, proclaiming and demanding identity bears the danger of epistemic violence. What happens in super-diverse context to the understanding of this concept? Muñoz proposes a strategy of “disidentification” for minority subjects in their subject formation (1999). Mahmood shows that marginalised female Muslim subjects gain agency and “human flourishing” also beyond Western concepts of resistance and emancipation (2012 [2005]). New migration research discourses take a multi-dimensional perspective and suggest concepts such as cosmopolitanism or transnation. It is observed how collective belongings are redesigned. This paper contains a theoretical outline of the inter- and transdisciplinary research and introduces an empirical project.

'Magic Cleaning' in a Disorganized World: Trying to Solve World Problems at an Individual Level

Annette von Alemann, Paderborn University, University of Duisburg-Essen

In affluent Western societies, a rising interest in tidiness at the home as well as in minimalist and natural lifestyles can be observed. Self-help literature about how to declutter your home, simplify your life, and reduce waste is booming. Blogs and online discussion groups about those topics are abundant. Home care consultants such as the author of "Magic Cleaning" are world-wide celebrities. At the same time, political instability increases at world level and populist movements arise, often associated with neoconservative orientations. Cultural conflicts contribute to the instability of entire regions and challenge existing norms, values and policies. Climate change and severe waste problems threaten the wellbeing of the planet.

My hypothesis is that the decluttering, minimalist and anti-waste movements are reactions to the insecurity caused by these destructive processes at world level. Thus, the term "Magic Cleaning" can be understood as a metaphor for the message: "If you are able to deal with your disorganized home, you will be able to deal with your disorganized world." All movements share the neoliberal notion of looking for solutions at the individual level. The movements are associated with neoliberal discourse elements such as the notion of competition and challenges, the appeal to overcome one's weaker self, and the promise that one can do anything if one really wants to. Consistent with this perspective, discourse elements such as demands on policy and calls for global solidarity are missing.

Inspired by a perspective coming from gender studies and discourse analysis, I want to stimulate a discussion about this social phenomenon, its occurrence and regional variations, and possible explanations. The RINGS conference is a good opportunity to do this, as the phenomenon has an essential gendered component: Not only are the movements dominated by women, but also has the domestic sphere always been defined as the "female" sphere. Thus, we have to ask what does it mean that the protagonists of these movements are women and that their focus is on household, consumption, and nature: Can these movements be understood as a feminist alternative to solve political conflicts, global waste and consumer society, as a caring attitude towards oneself and the environment? Or should these movements be interpreted as a gendered reaction to social problems inspired by neoconservative tendencies in society?

To discuss these questions, various formats are possible: a panel discussion, a plenary discussion following a keynote speech, or a panel with several short presentations from different perspectives.

PANEL: Reproducing Feminist (dystopic) Futures

Amrita Pande, University of Cape Town

Rufaro Moyo, University of Cape Town

Meghna Mukherjee, University of California Berkeley

With the growth in assisted reproductive technologies, the assumption that conception is always about one man, one woman and sexual intercourse, has been disrupted. The task of reproducing a baby is divided into neat stages, and when required outsourced to various service providers. It is likely that the egg provider comes from one part of the world and the embryo transferred into the womb of a surrogate mother from yet another part of the world, and finally the baby is transported back to its intended home and intended parents. Much of this "fertility industry" is built upon the dreams and bodies of women, fertile women, infertile women, women who dream of having a baby, others who use their bodies, their body parts, and body fluids to make this dream come true. What do we make of this startling new market and global connections, built primarily on the fertile bodies of women, often from the global south? Feminist scholars have previously highlighted the fundamental paradox of such reproductive labour. While on the one hand, by using their reproductive capacities for earning money, women challenge the age-old dichotomy between production and reproduction (Pande 2014). On the other hand, their engagements in these markets, further reifies the gendered nature of such embodied reproductive labour. Second, is the critical issue of "stratified reproflows" (Inhorn 2010) These reproflows are gendered, and enacted primarily on women's bodies, with all risks taken by women. But these repro flows are stratified as critically by race, nation and sexuality. This panel will ask the following critical questions: what does the industry of reproduction reproduce (apart from babies) (Nahman 2013)? How does it challenge and reaffirm old structures of inequalities based on race, gender, sexuality and nationality? How does the fertility industry, and the reproductive labourers involved in it, shape feminist (utopic/dystopic) futures?

Paper 1: Transnational reproduction of White Desirability

Amrita Pande

Transnational assisted reproduction, or reproductive travel (repro-travel) involves clients traveling across the world to fulfill their dreams of having a genetic baby or a baby tailor-made to their expectations. The factors that shape the cross-border flow of people, technology and resources include high costs, non-availability of technology and procedures at home (such as the ban on surrogacy, egg provision, preimplantation genetic diagnosis), legal restrictions on a certain demography (such as single parents, and gay couples) from accessing the services, and long waiting list for procedures at home. Preference for anonymous egg provision, or desired traits in egg providers also fuel such cross-border travel (Pande Pande 2018, Bergmann 2011, Deveaux 2016). In this paper, I focus on the search for desired traits in egg providers, and argue that although clients and clinics often employ narratives of "racial matching" and "racial passing" to legitimize the choice of certain egg providers over others (Anderson 2012; Speier 2016), these narratives are fundamentally ingrained in and reproduce the hegemonic notions of white desirability. By following a chain of clients, gamete (egg) providers and gametes across borders and continents, I demonstrate that the clients' search for the perfect reproductive laborers and gametes reproduces the desirability of whiteness. Further, I argue that this reaffirmation of

the desirability of whiteness is manifested in two interconnected ways, the first is what I call “raced desire as resemblance talk”, wherein the desire for racial matching is made natural and universal for white clients. The second is the desire for “strategic hybridization” or mixed-race babies, mostly amongst Asian clients, wherein the desire for racial matching is often subverted by the desire for whitening the future generations. Using an intersection of reprogenetics studies, and mixed-race studies, I argue that while, on the one hand, these desires reaffirm racial hierarchies, they also bring attention to the critical need to understand raced desires as affective, embodied, and traversing a fluid local-global narrative of what constitutes “whiteness”.

Paper 2: Reproducing eugenic and racial dystopias? The persistence of a bio-centric conception of race through arts

Rufaro Moyo

Since the 1980s, Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) have been expanding at a fast pace, providing alternative choices to the production of children for those who struggled with fertility. Since this time, the subject of racial disparities in ARTs started when feminists spoke of dystopias in which white women's reproduction was of a higher value in perception than that of women of colour. Marsha Darling discusses this stratified reproduction stating that these biotechnologies provide a population control for low income women of colour, whilst creating a rubric of 'choice' reserved for "economically and racially privileged women" (Darling, 2004b in Roberts, 2009: 784). Race therefore, has been a marker of identity that stratifies access to these treatments. Yet the reach of race is far beyond the dystopia of access feminists imagined in the '80s. A naturalized bio-centric conception of race continues to be reproduced by these technologies, particularly in the process of selecting an egg donor. Egg donation is a part of the growing industry of Assisted Reproductive Technologies, which clinics employ in the treatment of infertility. Donor agents and clinics often classify their egg donors using racial categories. This presentation will consist of findings from a Master's project, which sought to answer the question, what role does race play in the egg donation process in Cape Town, South Africa? Using racial matching and neo-eugenics as its theoretical frameworks, the study discovered that the role race plays in the egg donation process is central. Both recipients and donor agents employ racial categories in order to find an egg donor that racially matches the patient, which is the phenomenon of racial-matching. This study makes the argument that this phenomenon of race-matching facilitates a resurgence of eugenics. Whilst many think of 'better birth' at the mention of the term eugenics, this study makes the argument that racial matching mimics eugenic practices of maintaining racial purity. Donor agents speak of an 'obviousness' of the use of racial categories, naturalizing race as biological and seemingly legitimizing the family. Yet despite the prevalent use of race, donor agents display discomfort in discussing race and employ emotional narratives that speak to the fairy tale of a traditional ideological family being made as a means of deflecting possible problematic views of egg donation. The presentation will end by reflecting on what these findings indicate about the fertility industry and how they are relevant to us in imagining feminist futures.

Paper 3: How Do You Want Your Eggs? Kin-Making in the Clinic and the Medical Management of Social Reproduction in the Bay Area and Kolkata
Meghna Mukherjee

Studying donor matching as it is negotiated between doctors, clinicians, and intended parents in two of the fastest growing egg donation industries – Kolkata, India and the Bay Area of the United States – this paper harnesses participant observations and in-depth interviews to examine the socially constructed boundaries of kinship (BCC Research, 2018; Research and Markets, 2017; Shaikh and Sumant, 2018). It unpacks the criteria that are considered medically imbued in the egg and therefore reproducible through donor selection. Specifically, I undertake the following research questions: How does the medical choreography around donor-patient matching reconstitute the egg’s heritage, and how does this vary across cultures? What aspects of donor eggs do intended parents prioritize, and which do the fertility clinic reinforce? And, finally, to what extent does the reimagining of the egg’s social and biological categories reproduce or question dominant cultural values of social desirability, femininity, and family building?

Gendering Political Emotions: The Melodrama of Nationalism

Karen Gabriel, University of Delhi

In this paper I will argue that most narrations of the nation and mainstream nationalisms, have a melodramatic structure and are therefore heavily reliant on – and themselves articulate – specific gender-sexual regimes. The paper will critically analyse these regimes, the melodramatic mode itself, and the ways in which melodrama operationalises paradigmatic gender-sexual politics. It will also critically analyse the reliance of narrations of the nation on the melodramatic, on tropes of kinship, blood, the family and male homosociality, all of which reveal the affective and the politico-ideological arrangements underlying mainstream discourses of the nation. While doing so it will examine the specific and substantial dangers of nationalism as a political emotion, critically engaging with Martha Nussbaum's arguments about the necessity for political emotions and her hesitation with patriotism. It will demonstrate that nationalism is fundamentally melodramatic and therefore deeply affective, gendered, heteronormative and exclusive. It will illustrate that the familial trope, given the homosocial patriarchal basis of the family, controls the imagination of the nation, besides designating, privileging and preserving modes of masculinity and femininity that accommodate hegemonic notions of the nation itself. The disruptions caused by heterodoxical notions of gender, community or social organization and complex heterogeneities are often sought to be contained by acts of violence and by mainstream discourses of nationalism which, like mainstream and hegemonic imaginations of the family, function to delimit the nation and its communities, and bind them emotionally, territorially and otherwise. Through the above, the paper will explore both the obstacles to national and international gender solidarities arising out of the melodramatic architecture of nationalism, as well as possible strategies for overcoming these.

Conservative women and right-wing populism – articulations of gender, belonging and the strength of emotional attachments

Pille Ubakivi-Hadachi, Tallinn University

Recent years have brought about a wave of right-wing populism all around the world, Europe being no exception. Following the elections of spring 2019, Conservative People's Party of Estonia more than doubled its seats in parliament and became part of the coalition government, thus thoroughly legitimizing its agenda. Previous research has mainly focused on how populist right-wing parties have been able to reach such levels of recognition and popularity through certain discursive practices, but much less attention has been paid to understanding what exactly drives the people in these parties, both as public figures and private individuals. My wish is to intersect the category of gender with conservative ideology and explore how the members of Estonian conservative party's women's association articulate their belonging and standing in politics. In which ways do these different women support specific conservative values and what motivates them on their journey through public praise on one hand and resentment on the other? It is argued that any ideological bent is often accompanied by an emotional attachment that is not only somehow acquired via party's guidance, but developed through personal reflexions and experiences, becoming the powerful glue that joins women with this cause. A narrative approach is used to analyse how personal stories mould more or less public figures. The results of this study attempt to challenge the homogeneity of "right-wing populism" and to offer potential ways to bridge the gap between two increasingly polarized political camps.

Government's attitude to gender equality: discourse analysis of gender-based prevention policies and initiatives

Pilar Milagros, Bogazici University

This presentation addresses how anti-gender sentiments operate in local contexts and how they threaten sustainability on local levels by analyzing governmental policies on gender-based violence prevention and on promoting gender equality. This presentation is part of a one-year project internally funded by BAP at my institution that combines two methodologies: critical discourse analysis of gender-based violence prevention and on gender equality policies, and a set of semi-structured interviews with women who work at a selected number of women's organizations in Istanbul. For the purposes of this presentation, only results from the policies analysis will be reported.

‘I want you to panic’: metabolic rift and combat breathing in the Capitalocene”

Sophie Silverstein, Utrecht University

Destructive climate change regularly has embodied effects, such as making lives lethally unbreathable (World Health Organization, 2019), robbing people’s loved ones, homes, and possessions (Levitt & Kommenda, 2018), or, closer to home, shaking the ground beneath their feet (Provincie Groningen, 2019). Based on a Marxist interpretation of these processes that remains relevant today, this climactic disruption and its negative effects on human existence has its roots in capitalism (Moore, 2016; McBrien, 2016; Foster, 2000; Marx [1939] 1973). Even stronger, the Marxist theory of “metabolic rift” maintains that the capitalist destruction of the Earth also destroys humans, as humans and nature take part in a continuous, life-sustaining metabolic exchange (Foster, 2000, p. 92). This embodiment of capitalist destruction rings a bell with Magdalena Górska’s understanding of the body as a site where oppressive social structures manifest (2016). These interfere in the undisturbed functioning of the body’s metabolic processes through anxiety and panic attacks. Simultaneously, however, this disruption creates potential for political resistance through “combat breathing” (Górska, 2016, p. 282; Fanon, 1965, p. 65). Breathing differently in this way is both a response to oppressive social conditions and “enact[s] changes in and resistance to dynamics and forces that make life suffocating, immobilizing, traumatizing, unbearable” (Górska, 2016, p. 284).

If capitalism and its attendant exploitation of the planet disrupts the environmental metabolism that keeps humans, nonhuman organisms, and the Earth alive, then what lessons can be drawn from the embodied resistance strategies outlined by Górska? Political mobilization in response to bodily breakdown is relevant to individual bodies and the planetary metabolism. Further, it creates vital opportunities to challenge *business-as-usual* that has led to current environmental degradation. This project takes Greta Thunberg’s appeal to world leaders at the World Economic Forum in January of this year seriously: “I want you to panic” (2019, 2:25).

Vegan men: towards more sustainable and egalitarian masculinities?

Kadri Aavik, Tallinn University, University of Helsinki

In the past few decades, many scholars and international organisations have increasingly stressed the need for human societies to move towards more sustainable ways of living. This includes developing a more viable relationship to ecosystems and to other species, at a time of imminent threat to ecological and social sustainability.

This paper seeks to gain new insights into the practices and identities of men in the context of sustainability in the Nordic region. I focus on men based in Estonia and Finland who have embraced veganism – the practice of refraining from the use of all animal products. Vegan men could be thought of as active participants in transition to more sustainable ways of eating. From the point of view of gender and gendered power relations, the practice of veganism offers potential for doing masculinity differently.

Ecofeminist scholars have highlighted similarities between patterns of domination over women and animals, arguing that patriarchy endorses the objectification and exploitation of both women and animals. By refraining from consuming animals and going vegan, men disrupt the link between hegemonic masculinity and meat eating (Adams 1990), recognised as a powerful element in dominant constructions of masculinity. By becoming vegan, men open up avenues for “the negotiation of new, nonnormative masculinities that challenge our traditional understandings of what it means to be manly” (Wright 2015: 26).

This paper seeks to understand whether and in what ways veganism opens up more sustainable and egalitarian ways of doing masculinity for men. The analysis draws on qualitative interviews with over 50 vegan men based in Estonia and Finland. The findings help to understand the role of men in social change and ecological sustainability, by linking gender with the “challenge of sustainable dietary change” (Twine 2016: 243).

The Unsustainable Institutions of Men

Jeff Hearn, Örebro University, Hanken School of Economics

Questions of social, economic, institutional and environmental sustainability have often been addressed without giving strong attention to intersectional gender power relations. And even when they have been addressed in relation to intersectional gender power relations, critical interrogations of men and masculinities have not so often been highlighted. In this session, I reflect critically on the long-term development of the work of a transnational group of researchers from across 15+ countries, originally based within the GEXcel (Linköping-Örebro) centre of excellence, Sweden. Following the earlier collection, *Rethinking Transnational Men: Beyond, Between and Within Nations* (Hearn, Blagojević and Harrison, 2013), this collective, at times dispersed, work has led onto the new collection, *The Unsustainable Institutions of Men: Transnational Dispersed Centres, Gender Power, Contradictions* (Hearn, Vasquez del Aquila and Hughson [Blagojević], 2019). This comprises detailed studies in such arenas as global finance, corporate law, global IT hubs, FIFA, nationalism, “sustainable” development, environmental degradation, automobility, global music industry, pornography, migration, and military intelligence. Some of the themes and challenges of the book include:

- *a focus on key institutions* as material and ideological power centres and sites, which design and control transnational change in a manner performed mostly by men and closely related to their masculinities.
- the dynamics of global institutions in their fluid and evolving gendered forms, specifically various forms of *transnational dispersed centres*, and their (un)sustainability, in terms of how men and masculinities are configured and reconnected, and how they produce and conflict with each other.
- the *multiple contradictions* of transnational dispersed institutional centres, their forms, and men’s place within and across them, between: the nation and the transnational; centres and dispersals; spatiality and sociality; materiality and ideology/discourse; the physical and the virtual; institutional structures and events.
- whether those institutions are *sustainable* – economically, socially, environmentally – in the long term, and what limits the sustainability of these unsustainable institutions.
- *the ideology of the sustainability paradigm itself*, highlighting certain agendas (as in recent UN goals) and neglecting other agendas.
- *methodological contributions* to critical studies of men and masculinities through innovative, multi-method approaches.

The implications of the relations of men, masculinities, and unsustainable institutions are explored.

What feminism has to offer – including to its “antagonists”

Anika Thym, University of Basel

Several aspects of feminist self-critique can help us to sharpen our position in current times of multiple crisis and to broaden feminist coalition politics. Taking such moments of self-critique as starting point, this paper expounds on the question: What political and communication strategies can feminist politics follow in order to confront the threats from the right and neoliberalism and the challenges concerning the ecological crisis?

I argue that it is crucial for feminist politics to understand well what troubles its ‘antagonists’: supporters of the right, antifeminists, antigenderists, actors in financial institutions who help increase economic inequalities and further the financialization of nature. We could expand feminist standpoint theory, which shows how a feminist standpoint can help to understand relations of domination. I argue that we should understand the dominant and the antagonists to feminism and emancipation even better. Not in the way the media and many politicians are concerned about the worries of people supporting the right (like with the AfD in Germany), who consequently shift their political agendas to the right. Rather, the goal can be to invite even the ‘antagonists’ to an all-encompassing domination-critical emancipatory project in order to generalise it. Unlike strategies of left-wing populism, I suggest to abstain from creating alliances by creating and confronting a common antagonist, like Trump and his supporters or the 1%. This just contributes to the existing tendencies of polarisation and social disruption. Instead of naming a certain group of people as problem, I suggest shifting the perspective to questioning the system that has negative effects for all. Such a strategy may allow to hegemonize a struggle for positive freedom for all and sustainable and respectful ecological relations, without falling into the traps of self-assertion, defensive reactions, reductionist positionalisms, simply blaming the ‘other’ or a reversal of emancipation to domination.

Transcultural Gender Studies and the Global Circulation of Gender Knowledges

Sarah Farag, University of Zurich

This paper presents new approaches in the field of transcultural gender studies and discusses innovative research perspectives evolving from processes and structures of joint knowledge production between the Global North and the Global South. Firstly, the presentation focuses on the current research and cooperation network PRO GED (Promoting Gender Equality and Diversity through Shared Knowledge Production), based at the University of Zurich with partners from Switzerland and the MENA region (North Africa and the Middle East). The paper discusses this ongoing project as a vivid example of feminist scholarly and activist praxis, which suggests new ways of imagining and creating the production of gender knowledge(s) from a global perspective. Some specific examples of PRO GED's overall aims and their concrete translation into dialogues and activities will be presented to clarify the relevance of this approach. Secondly, as PRO GED seeks for innovative, interdisciplinary approaches to understand the global circulation of feminist theories from a transcultural angle, more general research questions resulting from this project will be raised. The paper discusses therefore the theoretical and methodological implications for studying the global circulation of feminist scholarship and gender knowledges if we seek for approaches beyond area studies and essentialist/universalist binds, and instead aim for processes of joint knowledge production with a strong focus on decolonising gender knowledges, especially so with respect to the MENA region, but also beyond. What happens with our understanding of gender knowledges if we highlight the global circulation of gender theories, and look for both entanglements, translations and contradictions between different productions of feminist scholarship, without ignoring their specific, historically and geographically situated genealogies and epistemologies? This paper discusses possible scapes and scopes of such a self-reflexive, critical and multilingual approach in studying gender, and therefore imagines a feminist utopia allowing to create decolonised, transcultural gender knowledges produced beyond the North-South-divide.

Solidarity and Alliance in Feminist Politics around Gender Based Violence in South Africa

Amanda Gouws, Stellenbosch University

The 2016 #EndRapeCulture campaign on university campuses in South Africa created a new feminist energy when young, mainly African, students embraced the identities of radical, intersectional, African feminism. They emphasised their intersectional identities in protest marches that reclaimed African women's bodies and expressed anger at their male comrades for not uniting with them in solidarity against violence when many of them campaigned alongside men in the Fallist campaigns (#RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall etc). Many of them accused white students of being disengaged and disinterested, while white students claimed that they felt excluded from these campaigns.

In this paper I want to investigate understandings of solidarity and alliance in what is often considered "identity politics", eg students' reference to "black pain" and experience of exclusion on the grounds of race. Drawing on the work of Sarah Ahmed, Linda Alcoff and Jodi Dean I will explore notions of feminist identity, solidarity and alliance in the context of gender based violence in South Africa.

There needs to be a closer reading of activism and the shapes that activism takes on in educational spaces of university campuses in the age of digital media and whether it unites or divides users. The paper will also grapple with dimensions of activism. In conclusion I want to engage the importance of feminist teaching for the creation of solidarity.