



**HERDER-INSTITUT**  
für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung  
INSTITUT DER LEIBNIZ-GEMEINSCHAFT

Philipps



Universität  
Marburg

Zentrum für  
GenderStudies  
& feministische  
Zukunftsforschung

# **Anti-Feminism and Anti-Gender Politics in Authoritarian Regimes**

The Role of the State, Religion, and Feminist Counter-Strategies  
in the Near and Middle East and Eastern Europe

## **International Conference**

### **Program**

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**21-23 June 2023**

Herder-Institut  
für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung  
Gisonenweg 5-7  
Marburg

Fritz Thyssen Stiftung  
für Wissenschaftsförderung

Marburger



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## Synopsis

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The political ascent of authoritarian populist regimes has triggered fears over the erosion of existing and evolving democratic processes in various parts of the world. A particular concern are the anti-feminist and anti-gender policies advocated by authoritarian populist movements as they pose a direct threat to the individual rights of women and LGBTI\*Q persons.

The purpose of this conference is to compare the anti-feminist politics of authoritarian regimes in the Near and Middle East and Eastern Europe. To that end, it brings together two strands of research - the study of anti-feminism and anti-gender politics and the study of authoritarian populism - and focus on two regions that have previously been under-researched from a comparative perspective. This conference builds on an interdisciplinary, comparative and historicising approach. It gathers experienced researchers from both regions and aims to generate new knowledge about the mechanisms of authoritarianism and anti-feminism currently at work in both regional contexts. The conference places particular emphasis on the role of the state and organised religion within these processes. Another thematic priority addressed in this conference is the counter-hegemonic strategies of feminist women's rights movements.

This conference represents a cooperation between the **Centre for Gender Studies and Feminist Futurology (ZGS)** and the **Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS)** at Philipps- Universität Marburg with the **Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe**.

## Funding

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This conference is generously funded by the **Fritz Thyssen Foundation**. Other contributors are Gender Studies and Feminist Futures Research Centre and Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe.

## Registration (external participants)

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If you wish to attend the conference, please **register before 18 June 2023** and send an email to [forum@herder-institut.de](mailto:forum@herder-institut.de). Since there is only a limited number of seats available at the Herder-Institute, we kindly ask you mention the days you wish to attend. You will receive timely confirmation before the conference. Invited speakers have already been registered. Registration is for external participants only!

# Organizers

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In order of surname:

**Dr. Pierre Hecker**, Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS)

**Dr. Heidi Hein-Kircher**, Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe

**Prof. Dr. Annette Henninger**, Centre for Gender Studies and Feminist Futurology (ZGS)

**Dr. Funda Hülagü**, Centre for Gender Studies and Feminist Futurology (ZGS)

## Contact



Funda Hülagü

email: [huelague@staff.uni-marburg.de](mailto:huelague@staff.uni-marburg.de)



Pierre Hecker

email: [pierre.hecker@staff.uni-marburg.de](mailto:pierre.hecker@staff.uni-marburg.de)



Heidi Hein-Kircher

email: [hein-kircher@herder-institut.de](mailto:hein-kircher@herder-institut.de)



email: [annette.henninger@uni-marburg.de](mailto:annette.henninger@uni-marburg.de)

# Program

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**21 June 2023, Wednesday**

**16:00 Guided tour through the Herder Institute (optional)** with Heidi Hein-Kircher

**17:00 Registration**

**17:30 Welcome Speeches**

**18:00 Keynote**

- Nadjé Al-Ali, “Beyond Exceptionalism and Area Studies: Transnational Feminist Perspectives on Anti-gender/feminist Discourses and Politics”

**20:00 Meet and Greet**

**22 June 2023, Thursday**

**09:30 – 11:00 Anti-Gender Politics in times of Multiple Crises: An Outcome or a Cause?**

Chair: Pierre Hecker

- Alev Özkazanç, “Transformations in the Gendered Character of the State under Authoritarian-Populist Regimes: The Case of Turkey”
- Elżbieta Korolczuk, “Anti-gender Campaigns as a Challenge to Liberal Democracy”

**11:00 – 11:15 Coffee Break**

**11:15 – 12:45 Anti-Gender Politics: Instrumentalizing the East-West Divide?**

Chair: Annette Henninger

- Mojca Pajnik, “Anti-gender Mobilization: Defending ‘the Traditional’ from a Post-sexual Imaginary in Central-Eastern Europe”
- Dina Wahba, Salzburg, “The Co-construction of Militarized Masculinities: The Wutbürger and the NAFRI local realities and global connections”

**12:45 – 14:00 Lunch**

**14:00 – 15:30 Doing Gender Politics in Authoritarian Contexts: Moving with, along or against the state?**

Chair: Heidi Hein-Kircher

- Katie Kraft, “Distilling Diffuse Totalitarianism: Russia, Anti-genderism, and the Strengthening State”
- Helen Rizzo, “Thirty Years of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Activism under Difficult Social and Political Conditions: The Case of Egypt”

**15: 30 – 16:00 Coffee Break**

**16: 00 – 17:30 Keynote**

- Dalia Leinartė, “Women’s Rights in Eastern-Central Europe: from *de jure* to gender backlash”

**19: 00 Conference Dinner**

**23 June 2023, Friday**

**09:30- 11:15 Secular and Religious (Anti)Feminisms and Women's Rights**

Chair: Funda Hülügü

- Ayşe Durakbaşı, "Cracks in Erdoğan's Authoritarian Rule: Women's Agency, Anti-feminist backlash and Feminist Resistance"
- Nadezhda Beliakova, "'Traditional Values' as the (Dis)Connection Between Secular and Religious Antifeminism in Post-Soviet Russia"
- Anna Heller, "Perspectives of Islamic and Secular Feminism on Women's Rights in Iran"

**11:15 – 11:30 Coffee Break**

**11:30 – 13:00 Feminist and Queer Counterstrategies: Challenges and Prospects I**

Chair: Ayşe Durakbaşı

- Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh, "Claiming Visibility and Belonging by the Iranian LGBTQIA+ Movement"
- Jennifer Ramme, "Feminist and LGBTQ\* Solidarities and Counterstrategies in the light of the Right-wing Consolidation of Power in Poland"

**13:00 – 13:45 Lunch**

**13:45 – 15:15 Feminist and Queer Counterstrategies: Challenges and Prospects II**

Chair: Alev Özkazanç

- Magdalena Grabowska, "Towards the New Social Contract? Abortion Protests, Social Reproduction in the time of Polycrisis, and the longer (De)democratization Processes in Poland"
- Selin Çağatay, "Bringing the Counterpublic back in. Reconceptualizing Feminist Politics in times of Anti-gender Mobilizations"

**15:15 – 15:30 Coffee Break**

**15:30 – 17:00 Wrap up and Discussion on Future Research Cooperation**

Moderators: Pierre Hecker, Heidi Hein-Kircher and Funda Hülügü

# Abstracts

## Keynote Speech I

### **Beyond Exceptionalism and Area Studies: Transnational feminist perspectives on anti-gender/feminist discourses and politics**

*Nadje Al Ali, The Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University, USA*

Global developments have increasingly illustrated that gender norms, discourses and policies cannot be delegated anymore to the sidelines of history and the backrooms of political analysis. At the same time, the rise and rhetoric of right-wing movements across regions as well as the polarization of societies have challenged our previously held ways of categorizing the world. In this talk, I will explore how a comparative and transnational feminist perspective allows us to move beyond geographically bounded and epistemologically narrow approaches. I will aim to address the following questions: What are some of the similarities and differences when looking at anti-gender/anti-feminist discourses and policies across Europe and the Middle East? How do our respective positionalities impact on the ways we talk about and analyze right wing anti-feminist propaganda and mobilization? What academic and political strategies might help to shift the mainstreaming of anti-gender discourses and politics? Who are our allies? Is the enemy of my enemy my friend, or do we need to nuance our position further?

## Panel I: Anti-Gender Politics in times of Multiple Crises: An Outcome or a Cause?

### **Transformations in the Gendered Character of the State under Authoritarian-Populist Regimes: The Case of Turkey**

*Alev Özkazanç, Department of Political Science, Ankara University, Turkey*

In my paper, I will argue that some critical transformations have taken place in the gendered character of the state under authoritarian-populist regimes. We are witnessing the historical crisis of patriarchy enter into a new and deeper phase by force of two interrelated global developments: first, we must note the ever-growing radical-democratic demands of women and LGBTI people for equality and freedom which has already shaken gender relations and dislocated even the foundations of binary gender regimes. Secondly, with the coming of global neoliberalism and its devastating impacts on the nature of male-social bonding, we see enormous implications for masculinities and gendered power relations. Therefore, this is a world-historic event that is made manifest in myriad but similar ways across the globe. Turkey is no exception to these trends, with its traditional patriarchal family and society shaken in many ways, owing to the changes in the gendered power relations as well as the neoliberal transmutations of the society.

### **Anti-gender campaigns as a challenge to liberal democracy**

*Elżbieta Korolczuk, American Studies Center, Södertörn University in Stockholm and Department of Sociology, Warsaw University, Poland*

In my presentation I will examine the goals, ideologies and activities of the anti-gender movement with the aim to answer the question whether the activities and growing influence of ultraconservative organizations should be seen as a sign of ideological diversification of civil society or as a threat to liberal democracy. The movement forms a complex web of organizations and networks connected ideologically, organizationally and financially, which promotes socially conservative discourse and fights for legal changes such as a ban on abortion or limiting the rights of LGBT+ people, and many of its members position themselves as champions of popular democracy, defenders of the people and promoters of the freedom of speech. However, a closer analysis of the discourses this movement employs and the effects of the legislative changes it fights for shows

that the activities of the anti-gender actors present a threat to democratic values and practices. In the presentation, I will identify key discursive strategies employed by the anti-gender movement, which facilitate political violence: the vilification of opponents, victim-perpetrator reversal, constructing moral panics and normalising extreme ideas as “defence of the family”. I will argue that while the activities of the anti-gender movement are generally non-violent, its discursive strategies and campaigns should be further analysed as possible conveyor belt to engagement in violent extremism.

## **Panel II: Anti-Gender Politics: Instrumentalizing the East-West Divide?**

### **Anti-gender Mobilization: Defending “the Traditional” from a Post-sexual Imaginary in Central-Eastern Europe**

*Mojca Pajnik, Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies, Slovenia*

The growth of the anti-gender movement corresponds with the “illiberalization” of societies and the rising contradictions with current democratic regimes. In Central-Eastern Europe (CEE), the anti-gender movement develops in strong association with trends of re-nationalizing citizenship, perpetuating the image of good and “deserving” citizens against the outsiders, echoing larger democracy backlash trends in the region. In this talk we analyse strategies of anti-gender mobilization showing how “gender ideology” has become synonymous with the attack on traditional values of the family, femininity and masculinity. We analyse how “gender ideology” is perpetuated as a project of the decadent West imposing the delusion of a society in which gender and sexual roles no longer exist. The East is seen as the last resort from the final dominance of a post-sexual ideology.

### **The co-construction of Militarized Masculinities: The Wutbürger and the NAFRI local realities and global connections**

*Dina Wahba, Department of Communication Studies, University of Salzburg, Austria*

In the last few years both Egypt and Germany went through drastic events that are affecting the construction or rather what I propose in this paper as the co-construction of militarized masculinities. We are witnessing a backlash and a re-negotiation of the gender order on a global scale. Thus, examining how discourses, narratives and affects circulate and reinforce each other in a global economy of fear (Ahmed, 2004) is central to better understand local realities and global connections in the co-construction of militarized masculinities. Between 2015-2016 around a million people applied for asylum in Germany. While Merkel announced to the German people that “We can do this”, many criticized her decisions with the media coining the influx of refugees as a “crisis”. Amid the so-called “refugee crisis” one incident took place on New Year’s Eve 2015 in Cologne that shaped in many ways the discourse around immigrant men in Germany and led to the invention of the NAFRI (Young men of North African origin). Almost one and a half year later, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi gave an interview to the German radio (Deutschlandfunk). In this interview he talks about the war on terror in Egypt and reiterates his main message to European leaders since he came to power. Al-Sisi warns of more refugee influx in case Egypt goes through another upheaval. This paper examines the co-construction of militarized masculinities in Egypt and Germany in the years between 2016-2020 looking at the figures of the NAFRI, the angry Arab man and the *Wutbürger*. As important discursive figures circulating in the media and popular culture, shaping our imaginations of the other. Theoretically, the paper follows Edward Said’s (1978) argument of the Orient as a European invention to examine the construction and the function of the NAFRI and the Angry Arab Man. Moreover, it builds on gender, affect and emotions literature to follow the circulation of these figures in a global security regime. The *Wutbürger* (the angry citizen) needs a compelling subject for their anger, the NAFRI at a specific moment in European history seems to be the ideal candidate. Meanwhile, this fear and anger are instrumentalized by authoritarian regimes to justify their existence through reinforcing colonial mechanisms of affective governance locally and globally.

## Panel III: Doing Gender Politics in Authoritarian Contexts: Moving with, along or against the state?

### **Distilling Diffuse Totalitarianism: Russia, Anti-genderism, and the Strengthening State**

*Erin Katherine Krafft, Criminal and Justice Studies, University of Massachusetts, USA*

This paper will examine the strengthening of transnational formations of ‘diffuse totalitarianism’: a model of authoritarian and centralized control that attempts to conceal that control via the conscription of multiple forces and the creation of a widespread and hybridized mélange of state institutions, private actors, domestic and transnational partnerships, and sometimes feminist movement itself. Drawing from conceptions of neoliberal authoritarianism (Bruff, 2014), localized enactments of ‘particular patriarchy’ (Rich, 1986), and an exploration of both formal and informal networks established amongst the global far-right, the examination will center contemporary Russia, exploring the ways that anti-genderism, state and civil violence against LGBTQI\* communities, and isolationist rhetoric precisely laid the groundwork for the establishment of distilled totalitarianism and the violence of expansion. Ultimately, the study will produce a model for deep mapping of both local and global interplays of anti-genderist state mechanisms and will point to crucial pressure points of resistance.

### **Thirty Years of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Activism under Difficult Social and Political Conditions: The Case of Egypt**

*Hellen Rizzo, Department of Sociology, American University of Cairo, Egypt*

This research traces activism over the last 30 years against sexual and gender-based violence under difficult social and political conditions. However, several focusing events in Egypt, and the support of transnational advocacy networks over the last decades have galvanized the efforts of activists and citizens of good will to mobilize around these issues. This research demonstrates that there have been waves of social movement activism and high levels of mobilization against SGBV in the last 30 years, despite continuous authoritarianism, and explains the conditions under which these waves have emerged.

## Keynote Speech II

### **Women’s rights in Eastern-Central Europe: from *de jure* to gender backlash**

*Dalia Leinarte, Vytautas Magnus, University, Andrei Sakharov Research Centre for Democratic Development, Lithuania*

Based on data from 2015, there were 165 constitutions, i.e., 85 percent of all the constitutions globally guaranteed equality between men and women. Thus, formally gender equality regimes have been recognized in the most diverse political, religious, and cultural environments. However, in practice politicians and civil society remained as divided as ever over the important issues of sexual and reproductive rights, exploitation of prostitution, equality in family life and gender identity. As a result, CEDAW Convention was not fully implemented *de facto* in any country nor any part of the world. What is more, today most of 187 State parties to CEDAW Convention are confronted by serious gender backlash, and Eastern and Central European countries are not exception here. Democratization processes after the break of communist regimes have not become precursors for gender equality and women’s rights and Governments justify a range of sexist policies and put restriction on women’s reproductive rights. Misogynistic discourse has become increasingly present and never disappeared in the region. As a result, feminism remains a contested term and many women are not comfortable identifying as feminists and gender equality supporters in Eastern and Central Europe. What are main reasons why gender equality and women’s rights have not been deeply rooted in Eastern and Central Europe despite the liberalization of communist regimes? What are major obstacles in implementing CEDAW recommendations in the region?



## **Panel IV: Secular and Religious (Anti)Feminisms and Women's Rights**

### **Cracks in Erdoğan's Authoritarian Rule: Women's Agency, Anti-feminist backlash and Feminist Resistance**

*Ayşe Durakbaşa, Department of Sociology, Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey*

The ruling party AKP in Turkey, faces outright opposition from the female constituencies, including its own supporters in pro-government women's organizations and even women MPs of the Party itself, who are deeply affected by the failure of the state institutions to combat with increasing numbers of femicide and violence against women in the country. A recent and still burning site of struggle with the organized anti-feminism is the area of legislation against domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention and the national legislation realized in accordance with it, namely the 6284 Code for the Protection of Family and the Prevention of Violence towards Women. I want to study the case of Istanbul Convention and different responses from women's groups, NGO's, associations, platforms, different actors from the secular and Islamist feminist sectors to the ban of the Convention by a presidential decree in 2021, after ten years since it was ratified by the Turkish Parliament. The campaign against the Convention was mainly carried out by men's rights groups, religious communities (such as İsmailağa Cemaati), extremist right-wing youth clubs (such as Osmanlı Ocakları-Ottoman Hearths). The campaigns for the Convention to be put back into operation are mainly run by feminist groups, especially supporters of "Kadın Cinayetlerini Durdurun" (Stop Murder of Women!) Platform Association backed by LGBTI and queer activist groups. The discursive practices can be studied in the public sentences of the pro-Convention activist groups, of the anti-Convention homophobic men's rights and conservative women's groups as well as in the statements and declarations of public authority figures, such as President Erdoğan, the President of Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs), the chair of the Ministry of Women, Family and Social Policy, etc. The position of the pro-government women's organization KADEM (Women and Democracy Association) is an interesting case in point, as they somehow exhibit a more moderate perspective than that of the government and not a direct anti-Convention position in the public debate except for stressing family values in their women's rights' perspective. It is also interesting to note that both Istanbul Convention and the related 6284 Code is part of the public debate in the formation of pacts and alliances in the coming presidential and parliamentary elections.

### **'Traditional Values' as the (Dis)Connection Between Secular and Religious Antifeminism in Post-Soviet Russia**

*Nadezhda Beliakova, University of Bielefeld, Germany*

The growing anti-feminism on Russia's public agenda in recent decades shows, at first glance, a close connection between state ideology and the official position of church /religious/ leaders in anti-feminist declarations. Liberal feminist movements in Russia have accused the "Russian Orthodox Church" of violating women's rights. These accusations were made publicly in a petition against abortion restrictions launched in Russia in early 2023. The paper will show the historical evolution of the displacement of women's rights from the public space in post-Soviet Russia and the transition to an aggressive state reproductive agenda. This conflict is often interpreted as a conflict between radical (Western) feminism and a "(neo)patriarchal" state, with the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church as the key ideologues. From a historical perspective, we do not find it convincing to give the ROC an independent agency in shaping "traditional values". Meanwhile, this interpretation of the conflict excludes most Russian women in general. First of all, the conflict is not perceived by most secular women in Russia as a conflict about their rights. It is important to bear in mind that women in post-Soviet Russia have, as a result of the 'soviet gender project', a wide range of rights for which they did not fight and which they perceive as "natural". Thus, anti-Feminism in Russia, whether secular or religious (and even more so the combination), is not perceived by women as a real threat. Second, it leaves out of the discussion the huge number of religious women with high agency who perceive their religious beliefs as their choice. These women make up the majority of ROC membership and initiate and implement all of its social initiatives. The role of Islam and 'tradition' in the Islamic regions of Russia and the very complex correlation between the institutions of Islam and the Russian secular state are also usually overlooked. The paper will show the conflict between women's rights and 'traditional values' in contemporary Russia as exemplified by groups of religious women.

## **Perspectives of Islamic and Secular Feminism on Women's Rights in Iran**

*Anna Heller, Department of Iranian Studies, Phillips University Marburg, Germany*

The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) defines the state as Islamic and just. The legal status of women, however, is subjected to an interpretation based on the leading clerics' gender ideology. Thus, the state is characterized by a discrepancy between the constitutional depiction of its gender policies and the realities of women's lives. With the implementation of discriminatory laws immediately after the 1979 revolution, all aspects of women's lives became permeated with an anti-feminist mindset, allowing the state as well as individuals to discriminate against and sanction women in both the private and public sphere. Ever since, secular and religious women are advocating for the implementation of women's rights, either according to international standards or within the given Islamist framework of the IRI. In this sense, Iran's women's rights movements are divided into categories of secular and Islamic feminism. This paper discusses the differences between these orientations and addresses the question to what extent Iranian feminism can be considered sharply divided into distinct groups. Since, although they differ in their goals and approaches, both challenge the conservative interpretation of Islam on which the governing establishment is founded.

### **Panel V: Feminist and Queer Counterstrategies: Challenges and Prospects I**

#### **Claiming Visibility and Belonging by the Iranian LGBTQIA+ Movement**

*Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh, University of Huddersfield, UK*

Since the revolution of 1979, Iran has been one of the main countries where LGBTQ asylum seekers flee from a conservative-authoritarian state. In such a context, based on interviews with Iranian LGBTQ asylum seekers and activists in Turkey and analysis of Persian Twitter debates, I demonstrate how the asylum processes, as well as the English-speaking media and social media contents, shape the dominant binary Persian narratives of sexual orientation. By referring to Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) theory of the "norm life cycle" and Symons and Altman's (2015) concept of the "international norm polarisation" process, I discuss how the Iranian LGBTQ movement has been growing inspired by the global LGBTQ movement in online and offline spaces and among resident and diasporic communities. I mention how, similar to the LGBTQ movements in other countries, this LGBTQ movement is part of a more general sexual revolution and is inspired by the feminist movement. Finally, I discuss how Iranian activists and LGBTQ individuals claim to belong to national, ethnic and religious identities by claiming space in offline spaces in Iranian resident and diasporic communities and online spaces.

#### **Feminist and LGBTQ\* solidarities and counterstrategies in the light of the right-wing consolidation of power in Poland.**

*Jennifer Ramme, Europa Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt, Germany*

This presentation discusses how feminist and LGBTQ\* movements counter right-wing gender and sexual politics in Poland. In addition to brief insights into the history of activist strategies since the late 1980s including both liberal and also more radical, movement sectors, the main focus will be on the period between 2016 and 2022, which witnessed a densification of protests directed against the dismantling of gender equality, but also against right-wing forces' targeted attacks on LGBTQ\* citizenship. This presentation will compare the types of feminist and LGBTQ\* protests and movements and their strategies against increasing authoritarianism and dismantling of democracy. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative research (e.g., interviews, participant observation, discourse analysis), practices of gender and sexual citizenship and forms of social dissent will be examined for their effectiveness and the reasons why some fail and others prove successful. Secondly, the intersectional dimensions of feminist and LGBTQ\* solidarities are considered in the context of local and global political dynamics.

## Panel VI: Feminist and Queer Counterstrategies: Challenges and Prospects II

### **Towards a new social contract? Abortion protests, social reproduction in a time of crisis, and long-term (re-)democratization processes in Poland.**

*Magdalena Grabowska, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, The Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland*

In this presentation, I will argue that the 2020 pro-abortion protests in Poland can be examined not only in terms of generational or anti-systemic resistance, but also as crucial moments of political subjectivity. Political issues such as social reproduction, equality, and the rights of marginalized groups should be seen as central components of re-democratization. At the social and political level, an intensification of the struggle for reproductive justice is linked to new activist strategies (e.g. connective action), new values (care, solidarity) and the mobilization of groups from the outside of the political centers (understood as big cities, but also a major debates that take place in public sphere), mobilizations that are orientated at solving everyday practical problems within the paradigm of “feminism for 99%” (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser 2019, Rawłuszko and Grabowska 2021). To comprehend and critically assess the transformative potential of these mobilizations in Poland, I will rely on the theoretical concepts of “reproductive justice” (Ross, Solinger 2017; Dzwonkowska-Godula 2020), which examines how existing social hierarchies, relations of micro and macro power (Ross, Solinger 2017) shape and restrict reproductive agency and subjectivity, and “social reproduction”, which helps locating contemporary strategies and reproductive activism, as a part of the debate on labor related to „making and maintaining life” in late capitalism (Bhattacharya 2017). My analysis will be rooted in quantitative and qualitative research conducted on feminist and queer activists by the Feminist Fund between 2019 and 2021 (analysis of 628 grant applications and 6 focus groups). The outcome of this research suggests that connective activism and reproductive work are the key factors of social mobilization after 2020, particularly in the context of a series crises as related to public health (Covid), reproductive rights, migration and, most recently, war.

### **“Bringing the counterpublic back in. Reconceptualizing feminist politics in times of anti-gender mobilizations”**

*Selin Çağatay, Department of Gender Studies and Department of History, Central European University, Vienna, Austria*

This presentation offers perspectives on gender politics in contemporary feminist counterpublics as differentiated from hegemonic feminisms that operate within a state-civil society-global governance nexus. Based on recent research (2017-2020) on feminist activism in Turkey, I discuss that counterpublic feminisms tend to take more autonomous, informal, horizontal, or small-scale structures, and have an intersectional approach to gender politics. At the same time, the demarcation line between hegemonic and counterpublic feminisms is contingent as a.) the feminist counterpublic temporally expands and shrinks based on the specific agenda at hand, and b.) counterpublic feminisms often seek alternative ways of institutionalization which might lead to coopted relationships with institutions, local state structures, and social movements. In the context of anti-gender mobilizations, reconceptualizing feminist activism beyond the co-optation vs. resistance dichotomy may help researchers to better grasp the complex relationship between feminist politics and the historically specific contexts in which it operates.