

Global Perspectives on Anti-Feminism: Far-Right and Religious Attacks on Equality And Diversity

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In the last decade, we have seen a regression in gender equality across the globe: from the overturning of the landmark *Roe v. Wade* abortion legalisation in the United States and the potential reversal of the ban on female genital mutilation in the Gambia to the declaration of the „LGBQ movement“ as extremist in Putin’s Russia. As a result, scholars have attempted to analyse the transnational nature of campaigns targeting diversity and equality, focusing on their “varieties” and country-specific expressions (e.g., Kuhar/Paternotte 2017; Verloo 2018 for Europe). In this vein, „Global Perspectives on Anti-Feminism,“ edited by Judith Goetz and Stefanie Mayer, is a timely exploration of the rise of anti-feminist and anti-gender movements worldwide, spanning five continents and a dozen under-researched environments. This comprehensive volume, with contributions from diverse scholars, delves into the complex intersections between far-right ideologies, religious conservatism, and populist politics, offering valuable insights into a global anti-feminist phenomenon.

In their introduction to the volume, Goetz and Mayer clearly conceptualise the phenomenon of anti-feminism as “a political ideology or position and its corresponding movements and discourse consciously developed by anti-feminist actors” (p. 7). They distinguish it from closely related but separate concepts such as sexism, which they explain has to do with societal structures and corresponding practices, and misogyny, which belongs to the category of individuals’ attitudes. Although contributors to this anthology also engage other strands of literature to comprehend the transnational complexity of anti-feminism (see, for example, Chapter 3 and Laru-

elle 2020 for theorising on illiberalism and gender in the post-Soviet space), clearly distinguishing the levels of analysis is crucial for framing this valuable contribution to the field. Additionally, editors outline interconnected features that make anti-feminist discourses especially attractive for right-wing politics: their “intersectionality” that attaches nicely to other ideologies of oppression and inequality (p. 16) and extreme compatibility with (right-wing) populism that allows these actors to establish themselves in the public discourse as “defenders of real women (as opposed to feminists), of families (as opposed to LGBTIQ+) and of normal simple people (as opposed to elites) (p. 4)”.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first part examines transnational trends and the global discourse on anti-feminism, with four chapters on Latin America, Africa, post-Soviet space, and Europe. This section makes a crucial finding countering the popular narrative that feminism is an imported Western ideology, with “gender” being referred to as „Ebola from Brussels“ in the European context (Korolczuk/Graff 2018). Wiedlack and Zabolotny state that the specific local conditions of the three post-Soviet countries they examined allowed for the erupting of anti-feminism, with “its rhetorical foci and goals rooted in the local context and not imported from elsewhere” (p. 86). Further highlighting that adaptability and flexibility are key reasons behind the success of global anti-feminism, Simon Copland examines three manifestations of the so-called “manosphere”, a modern men’s rights movement. This movement’s fundamental argument is that “feminism has taken over the world to the detriment of both indi-

vidual men and society in general” (p. 118) and that feminised society is weaker and more vulnerable to external threats, such as immigration. Such scholarship is essential for our understanding of the close ties between far-right and men’s rights communities, as Futrelle (2017) argues that for the alt- and far-right political actors, men’s rights activism is “a gateway drug”.

The second part is dedicated to local peculiarities, or “articulations,” of a global phenomenon. Goetz and Mayer stress that anti-feminist manifestations are “attuned to regional, national and local circumstances, rely on different religious convictions and focus on different topics” (p. 6). Thus, chapters six to ten provide case studies from Ecuador, India, Japan, Germany, and South Africa, illustrating how global anti-feminist narratives are adapted to local contexts. In this part, Naaz (Chapter 7) and Beeson (Chapter 10) echo Copland’s examination of men’s rights reactionary movements in India and South Africa, respectively, contributing to our understanding of the danger of “aggrieved entitlement” (Kimmel 2018): when individuals, having not received what they expected, develop feelings of anger and resentment toward the changing world and the drivers of this change.

One of the book’s many strengths is its extensive coverage of diverse geographical regions, providing a truly global perspective. The editors have successfully compiled a series of case studies highlighting the commonalities and specificities of anti-feminist movements across different contexts. What is more, this volume contributes to a more nuanced view of the connection between religious fundamentalism and anti-gender campaigns. In this vein, Goetz and Mayer examine “political Christianity” in the context of the EU as a supranational formation and highlight the secularisation of religious discourse, its adoption of the human rights language, aimed at “reordering politics and society according to conservative religious doctrine” (p. 97). This is nicely complemented by case studies on religious politicisation in Ecuador by Vega (Chapter 6) and on Latin America by Arguedas-Ramírez (Chapter 1), where a “twenty-first-century crusade” against equality, human rights and liberal democracy is led by the Catholic and neo-Pentecostal fundamentalists hoping to “restore legitimacy to a traditional patriarchal gender hierarchy” (pp. 27–28).

In conclusion, „Global Perspectives on Anti-Feminism“ is a timely contribution to understanding the global backlash against “excesses” of feminism in all its details, peculiarities and ties with other ideologies and movements from across the globe. Future work in this field could benefit immensely from even more geographical and political regime coverage, including undemocratic and illiberal countries as case studies. Recent scholarship shows the profound effects of authoritarianism on feminist movements (see Bias 2024

for insights on Russia and Serbia), and more research is needed on how such ideologies reflect on opposing, anti-gender campaigns and movements in such political environments.

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